



# *The Glass Harmonica*

*a sensualist's tale*

DOROTHEE E KOCKS

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*For Sherry Wood  
and, always, for Mark*



*Be a lamp unto yourself. Work out your liberation with diligence.*

—Buddha

*Wilhelm, what would the world mean to our hearts without love! What is a magic lantern without its lamp! As soon as you insert the little lamp, then the most colorful pictures are thrown on your white wall. And even though they are nothing but fleeting phantoms, they make us happy as we stand before them like little boys, delighted at the miraculous visions.*

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

## *Part I*

### *Chapter One*

On the morning Chjara Vallé quickened in her mother's womb, the sun reached its red fingers over the Mediterranean Sea, onto the shore of Bastia, Corsica. Light rose up the cathedral's bell tower, which recently had been painted apricot. Chjara's mother swept the courtyard — feet swollen, breasts like anchors. Inside the cathedral, five men stood with shoulders together and eyes closed, rehearsing the chant for the dead, their voices resonating against the stone walls.

The great doors hung open to a breeze carrying salt and sage, and the early light failed to hide that a woman was leaving the priest's private quarters. She hesitated. She was tall and narrow, with simple shoes and hair a flourish of dark curls. Her hand tarried on the priest's doorknob and she looked so solitary, there against the blooming vine and the black sea wall. She was the priest's concubine, the mother of his son, and the secret of their affair was known to everyone in the village including the five men watching through the open doors. Usually the lovers were more discreet. Here she was, daring to leave in the light of day, as the gossips would soon report.

For a long moment she stood, summoning strength. She was doubly grieved today: her father was the one for whom the singers practiced the funeral chant. Her father was dead and she'd taken comfort in the arms of the man who could never be her husband. Now she had to walk across the broad swath of the cathedral courtyard in front of the world that judged her. Her shoulders caved toward her chest, her neck bowed. She was long-legged as the red deer, and when she turned, her face brave and grief-stricken, the men sang to her. They sang, led by the bassist who was Chjara's father, their voices reaching deep to where notes roll over themselves like stones rolling in the wash of the sea. They assured her that

life was so sad as to be worth living, and the blooms in the courtyard wilted with their feeling.

Pregnant for the seventh time, Chjara's mother scoffed at the men's sentimentality. Marie-Fiore Vallé leaned against the thin support of her broom and felt the child flutter for the first time. So many women sloughed off new souls when they were still angels and not yet human, but she, every single time, had to give birth. Breathless, exhausted, frustrated by her fertility, Marie-Fiore watched the harlot cross the courtyard. She heard the men's dolorous music turn into something more swinging, more luscious, and she began to sweep behind the footsteps of the harlot. She swung her broom like a military baton, stiff needles of straw flying out from the broom's loose clasp, and she knew, suddenly, that she made a comical figure. She was fat. Ludicrous. And this made her more bitter. Furious. If she were a woman of words, she might have been able to tell herself the truth of her feeling, that it was wrong for the man who was God's representative to pick *one* of them. To love one especially. Instead, she who washed the priest's clothes, who was his servant, his household help, she who went to the confessional booth as if to her lover's pillow and said there what she could say nowhere else... she stood there, consumed with a pang of sexual jealousy, of intimacy betrayed, that shivered through her like a knife and drove into her womb.

The bud of Chjara's spirit woke, awash in her mother's strong vinegars. Then her tiny violet-petal ears perceived a humming, a thrumming. It was her father's voice, reaching toward her as waves reach into a sea cave. A tall man, so tall he was called Paulo u Longo, Paulo the Long, her father could sing in the lowest possible register of the human voice, and he sang not only to the priest's bereft lover but to his own, fierce *cupulatta* wife, his tortoise-shelled wife whose tenderness he caressed with his sound. In this way, emotions more suited to adults flooded Chjara's infant sensibilities. How is one to know if these passions explain the life that Chjara would lead?

Chjara first began to show her character when she was six years old, on a wet night when much of the town was gathered in the Rue du Dragon tavern for a harvest meal. The village buildings glowed in shades of almond and orange. Rain pricked the gray sea. Inside the tavern, the stink of wet wool mingled with a stew of cuttlefish, garlic and sea juices. Chjara sat fidgeting in the small space on the bench between her mother, who was

pregnant again, and her eldest brother. She was small-shouldered, with bright, mischievous eyes and her hair in a long braid because she liked the way it felt when it swung side to side. People slurped their soup, shouted to each other, clanged spoons against the crockery — and all of this distracted attention from her father and the other men, singing *'Barbara Furtuna'*, 'Barbarous Destiny', in a corner at the front. The chant circled the inconsolable grief of a Corsican unable to return home to the island.

People weren't listening. They didn't even seem to notice when the primo began to cough. They were at the part — *'chi tristu ghjornu'*, 'what a sad day' — that led to the song's heart. The primo still struggled. Chjara slipped out of her mother's grasp and ran to the front. She hesitated at the dividing line between the rows of tables and the space reserved for the men. Through the slit of his half-closed eyes, her father observed her from his great height. He shook his head — no. She stepped forward anyway. With her shoulder reaching only to her father's hip, she pressed in, joining the connected line of the men. She took the melody, helping the primo. Her voice was timid, and she heard them laughing and clucking. She didn't want to be cute. She didn't want to be a silly girl. She could sing it as it was meant to be sung, so she did, throwing the sound from her throat as loudly as a muezzin: *'Addieu Corsica mamma tanta amata, Nel separa di te senza ritornu.'* The notes and the words blended and rattled the cage of her throat, just as her father had taught her. The laughter stopped and she could sense people staring and listening.

At the end, no one seemed to breathe. Then there was a crash of applause and her father lifted her to his shoulders. She laughed, the primo bowed extravagantly to her, and even her mother smiled from out of her face of misery. Chjara's scalp tingled with happiness and she looked down at everyone from her father's shoulders. From that night, she fell into the habit of believing that the world was a good and warm place, and that transgressions would be rewarded, as long as they were committed with a full heart.

She became the darling of the village and also of the priest, who sang her name, *Chée-yah-ra*, and taught her to read to him in her lively little voice. Decades later, when news came from America of Chjara's infamy there, men in taverns as far away from Bastia as Calvi or Bonifacio would tell the story of her first public performance as if they, too, had



been at the Rue du Dragon. The men added the kind of embellishments that come naturally to a people who cannot sing a simple tune without twirling the melody on their tongues like a Frenchman tasting wine. Their exaggerations flew into the air on the basis of a torn faded newspaper clipping from New York City, stating that Chjara had been arrested in that new country on a charge of ‘indecent entertainments’. This was the kind of news that left much to the imagination.

When Chjara’s hips began to curve into a handsome vase, when her neck seemed to lengthen, and her breasts began to show like little chestnuts under her chemise, the men stopped asking her to sing with them. Custom forbade women to sing in public places. The injustice made her hands hang at her sides. She could see by her mother’s example that life would be a series of chores from now to eternity.

The priest, Curé Tumasgiu, took pity on the crestfallen girl and made an error. He met with her father, his coachman and confidant, and the men together arranged for Chjara to assist the newly arrived organ maker. The organ maker despised her. Afflicted with psoriasis and increasingly hard of hearing, he shooed her away with fountains of brown spit smelling like rotted seaweed. Chjara took refuge in the choir section, under seats carved of mountain oak. She watched everything. The organ maker’s itchy skin distracted him and he began to forget about her. Then one day, when he had left his post, a love song in three-part harmony, including a particularly resounding bass, erupted from the organ pipes. The priest climbed the stairs to the organ loft, followed by two guests from Rome, the cook, and the girl’s father. They saw the fifteen-year-old Chjara at the organ with her legs stretched to the pedals and her arms reaching for the higher registers. The heavy walls of the stone church rang with the full sound that was air turned to music through the magic of enormous pipes. Chjara was a moth, flying toward the song, winging her way into it. She seemed barely able to stick to the stool. The priest, the guests, the cook and her father listened in astonishment. They waited until the last note settled before they scolded her for her indiscretion. The scolding was mixed ambiguously with smiles.

Someone else heard the bawdy love song fill the cathedral. It was Jude, the priest’s illegitimate son. Jude lay hidden, stretched out on a pew with his hands clasped behind his head, gazing at the pink cherubs painted on the fresco above. When Chjara descended the chairs, her cheeks flushed, Jude

sat up to watch her every step as she passed by.

Curé Tumasgiu did not see his son in the pews. Tumasgiu had begun life in Ireland as Thomas Haeslin and followed his beliefs to Rome, after which the Holy Church had sent him to this island across from the knee of Italy. The Corsican assignment was meant as punishment for his outspoken indifference to dogma. On the night he'd landed, songs flowed from all the taverns that he passed on his long walk up from the dock. They were like the sea shanties he'd heard as a young boy and he felt welcomed by the spirit of his Gaelic ancestors. Tumasgiu knew he should ban Chjara from the organ because she was a woman and because he, especially, had to be careful of public opinion and not tempt judgment. The fact was, no one else could play the instrument; the organ maker was leaving, his job completed; Chjara promised upon the Virgin Mary's breast to restrict herself to sacred music. And so it happened that, following the priest's example, the village pretended not to know that she was the one who provided Sunday's exalted organ music that seemed to push air into their bones.

When she was eighteen, Chjara escaped her older and younger siblings on a day when the air trembled with heat from the deserts across the sea in Africa. She waited for Jude in his secret place, an abandoned stone hut with only half a roof. Lizards skittered up the walls. A mirage drew together the sliver of moon with the quartz in the stone so that sky and earth blended on the same plane. She tasted the sweat pearling above her lip, but when she wiped her mouth, found that her moisture had already evaporated.

His footsteps ambled toward the hut like a distracted goat's, stopping, pushing forward, abruptly finding another path. When he stood in the doorway, his hand on the broken frame, she saw from his face that the day had finally come.

She rose and moved around him on the threshold, the cicadas seeming louder for that moment when she brushed against him. Her chemise held to her back and she walked through the tar air down to the sea. He stayed so close behind her, she could hear his breath break free, after being held; hold, break free. Of course he was afraid and urgent. She ran. She knew from music the secret that men wanted to be led. He chased her, he was behind her, and then she ducked into the black shadow hard against the cliff. She tossed her clothes to the ground among the sand crabs. She dived in. The water fit like a cool skin over the heat inside her.

He stood on shore.

He was like the curé. His undershirt was the same as those she'd hung on the laundry line all her life. The shock of the resemblance only made her flush more as he pulled off the undergarment and walked toward her. The dark hair on his chest and arms shone with drips of seawater and sweat. When he pressed himself against her, she had to guide him, his uncertainty having the happy effect that she set the pace, which was long and slow and as rhythmic as the small stones rubbing together beneath the waves.

Afterward, Jude knelt on the shore, his shoulders shaking. He begged God to have mercy upon them. Chjara composed herself. She pulled on a somber mask, which she didn't realize she'd learned from her father. Her expression conveyed deep humility and fear before God's judgment, but her heart contradicted her. She felt happy and light, as if she were as open and full as the sea.

It was at this point that the letter arrived.

The letter was addressed to Curé Tumasgiu. As it happened, the priest stopped at the cathedral on the way from the post, and Jude was there. According to public agreement, Jude did not know that he was the priest's son. It was one of the secrets, like Chjara's position at the organ, that the people of Bastia pretended not to know. Jude sat with his head clasped in his hands, and admitted what he and Chjara had done. He described the slippery softness of Chjara's skin in the sea. He spoke about her breasts. If they were figs, it would have been one thing. He debated, his hands gesticulating, whether they were peaches. He spoke of the infinite fineness of her hair. The lair of the curve of her neck. Curé Tumasgiu stopped him at several points — enough! — but the boy was stubborn, insisting on ways to resume. He blamed her beauty for their sin. She was a *Bocca di Rosa*. The priest recognized 'Rose Mouth' as the crude name of a ballad about a woman whose profane love nearly overturns a village.

That night, the priest had occasion to reflect on the ways in which sons punish their fathers. The boy had taunted him for his own illicit love, daring the father to condemn the son. When the boy walked away from the confessional, he'd swaggered like a man who'd won a fight. Curé Tumasgiu felt a blossom of sadness open in his chest. Everyone sinned and God's mercy was routine. It was human compassion that was in short supply and

he regretted not being able to hold his son to him, and teach him to soften his anger at human desire.

Unaware of these events, Chjara sat the next day in the priest's library, reading. The window overlooked the clementine orchard. A wool shawl covered her hair and shoulders, and she pulled her knees up under her long black skirt to read more comfortably, curled in the priest's chair. Herodotus's words dissolved. She imagined the stone hut as it would be with a bread oven to the north, the lemon trees trimmed to produce for their families, and the abandoned grapevines staked for wine.

Curé Tumasgiu paused in the doorway. She felt him looking at her and reached to the desk for her dust cloth, moving it mechanically without taking her eyes from the book. Jude would have told him of their intention to marry. She disguised her excitement with a look of scholarly concentration.

'I've been too indulgent of you.'

Chjara smiled, put her finger into the book and, expecting to see the wink of understanding, saw instead a frown.

'Read this for me.' He handed her the letter and turned to the shelves. He was standing in front of the Persian authors.

Chjara turned the packet over and found the seal broken. 'But you've already read it.'

'Oblige me, daughter.'

'Who is it from?'

'He is a merchant in Paris. Victor Ravenaugh.'

Chjara waited for more. The priest wasn't normally taciturn.

'What does he say?' He wasn't looking at her but stared into the bookshelves as if he had something to hide.

Chjara studied the crabbed and unsteady handwriting with foreboding. It was in French, not Corse: 'I seek a servant to nurse me in my dying.'

The room was still.

'You will not send me,' she whispered.

'Read on,' he said.

'The women of Corsica are docile and modest. I will pay a—'

'Are you docile and modest?'

'No. I have learned freedom.' She was quoting him. He was the one who had read her the 1755 democratic constitution of Corsica, which

had considerably predated the French call for *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Their own Pasquale Paoli had written the words that inspired the American Declaration of Independence, the priest had told her.

‘But you should be modest, child.’ He looked at her as if she’d misunderstood everything from the beginning. ‘I’ve spoken with your parents.’

In a flash, she crossed the room to him. She meant to kneel and beg but then she saw where he stood. She lifted the book by Al-Ghazali from the shelf and opened it to the page that had been his first instruction to her in Persian. She read, ‘*Ecstasy means the state that comes from listening to music.*’ She said, ‘You’ll miss me. You’ll regret this.’

‘You think only about yourself,’ he said.

‘And you?’ Desperate, she dared confront him.

‘I’m not thinking of myself.’

‘Then who?’ she demanded.

He did not meet her eyes.

‘I love him,’ she said. ‘We will marry. I’ll be docile then. I will be modest.’  
‘Jude will be a priest.’

She stared at him. She laughed, her breath charred. She knew, in one instant, the obvious truth that had escaped her before. He planned to claim his son at last — through the robes of the church. She and Jude had never imagined this possibility. In her pride, she’d even thought the priest would be delighted to claim her as family.

‘I’ve been like a daughter to you.’ She returned to the chair, snatched the letter. ‘You’ll send me away from heaven for this and for...’ she read, ‘*a significant contribution to the church.*’

‘There are other heavens on this earth.’

‘But Father, how modest is that? To ask God for another miracle? You’re the one who said... you said it’s a miracle every day the sun rises with Genoa still across the sea, and we on Corsica are left alone to ripen like fruit in God’s sun. That’s what you said.’

The priest winced. ‘The world that God has made will welcome you everywhere. It is greater than we can understand.’

‘Stop. Tumasgiu. You understand it will be barbarous for me.’ She had used his name and the familiar *tu*. Her face was white.

‘Chjara,’ he said gently.

The priest looked at her with pity. Chjara spun away to hide the furious tears that arose. She walked to the door. He followed. He put his hand on her shoulder and she shuddered with feeling.

‘Chjara, I left my home once too.’

She shook her head, no. ‘You chose to go. I am being sent away.’ She waited for him to relent.

But he did not and she knew he would not.



On the day she was to depart, Chjara hovered by the window. Night’s horizon gave way and she stared at the line of sea and sky as if she could will it to reveal its secrets, as if she could summon Jude from wherever he’d been sent by the priest. Her siblings woke and clustered around her like ducks. She cooked. As she stood frigid by the stove with its smells of fried bologna and bitter tea, her father walked by without meeting her eyes. ‘Take me to Pozzo,’ she said. It was the village where he let her sing sometimes in the tavern, in secret from her mother. Her father didn’t even turn, his shoulders resigned.

Truth’s cold drove into her chest. No one would stop this from happening.

‘Out. Wait in the courtyard.’ Her mother pushed the children away from around Chjara’s skirts.

On his way past, her youngest brother pulled at her finger. He yanked it as if he would pull a piece of her with him. She bent down. ‘Piero, I’ll be back.’

‘I don’t believe you.’ His expression was fierce.

‘No one believes me,’ she agreed. She took his face in her hands. ‘I vow it.’ Her mother moved behind her. Piero squirmed. He stuck out his tongue, his eyes showing hurt. He ran away.

Chjara faced her mother. ‘Who will sweep after them? Who’ll do the laundry for you? How will you manage?’

Her mother shrugged.

Chjara had thought herself crucial. She was not.

‘Some day you’ll marry,’ her mother said. She held up a turquoise shawl from Chjara’s dowry chest. ‘You will need to learn to obey your husband.’

‘I’ll return to marry,’ Chjara insisted.

Marie-Fiore clucked. This child still believed that the world existed to give her what she wanted. Marie-Fiore lifted her daughter’s hair. ‘We must accept what comes. Children come. You don’t know how many until there is another one, and another. A woman has a destiny, just like a man.’

‘My destiny is here,’ Chjara said.

‘Your destiny is not yours to decide.’

‘Who decides then?’

‘Don’t be impertinent.’ Marie-Fiore brushed her daughter’s hair gently while rebuking her.

Chjara observed her own face and her mother’s, their reflections like gauze in the glass of the window, beyond which the day continued to brighten. Her mother had a round face, made rounder by the black scarf wound about her head. Chjara’s face was round as well, but glossy as polished stone to her mother’s rough and grated skin. Where Marie-Fiore’s dark eyes seemed buried in pockets brown as the bruise on an apple, her own caught the lantern light like stars. Her mother looked as if her destiny had been handed to her like a burlap sack filled with wet sand.

‘You’ll have to learn to obey your husband,’ Marie-Fiore repeated. She plunged a hairpin into Chjara’s bun, once, twice, three times.

Chjara realized with a start that her mother was attempting to broach the subject of the relations between men and women. This was why she had sent the children out. Her mother spoke round and round, touching vaguely on the changes in a woman’s life, and Chjara understood suddenly that her mother accepted that they would never see each other again. Not once. Chjara saw the words come out of her mother’s mouth, not hearing them, as if they were words written to her and she could safely take her eyes off them and go back to read them later. She thought, This change comes like a predator. I am being taken alive. I’m being ripped open, and my mother is doing my hair.

Marie-Fiore patted her only daughter awkwardly. ‘A position with a wealthy merchant is something to hope for.’

Chjara rose, anger and disgust mixing with an overwhelming desire to cling to her mother — to hold on and not be torn away, no matter who came. She bent to her, and whispered in her ear, ‘I already know all about *la jouissance*.’

‘How?’

Chjara didn’t answer, because the priest had taught her about the sexual act with anatomical images of Michelangelo, and the priest’s common-law wife had taught her the herbs to prevent pregnancy. Chjara kissed her mother’s cheek.

‘I’m ready,’ she said.

Outside, night’s shadows had lifted from the harbor and she could see the ship that was her destiny, with the men crabbing about on its mast, the yellowed sails like cloth washed too often and wearing thin. All her life she had seen people go from the port to find work. No one ever came back; only a similar person, the same type of body or vaguely analogous face appeared in the place or station that another had occupied. We are as interchangeable as organ pipes, she thought, dumbfounded.

‘Wait.’ Her mother went to the cupboard. She reached into the bin of chestnut flour; her arm emerged dusted with a fine grayish glove. She took Chjara’s hand. She pressed into it a gold coin.

‘Where did you get this?’ Chjara whispered.

‘The curé. The merchant paid him three gold coins already.’

Chjara swallowed. This was her worth?

‘Don’t tarnish your family’s good name.’

Chjara flushed.

Marie-Fiore’s eyes seeped tears. ‘Chjara,’ she pleaded. ‘Come back before you die. Return so we can be together in death.’

Her mother lifted the long loop shawl — black silk on one side, turquoise silk on the other. She placed it on Chjara’s head, and pressed it to her shoulders. She shook out the sides, and drew the bottom of the loop down to hang open at Chjara’s waist. In all these acts, she left a tiny trail of chestnut flour.



Like a bride, Chjara would never be able to remember the actual hours that were so important, the last glimpses of everyone’s faces in the crowd that waved her goodbye. She boarded the ship with a small bag of personal items and one filched book: *The Heptameron* by Marguerite de Navarre. This



book was like a friend; she had slipped it from the priest's shelves though it was a crime against his trust. A queen during the mid-sixteenth century, Marguerite de Navarre had taken a break from the affairs of state and religion to pen, like Scheherazade, a series of love stories. Chjara imagined it would contain useful information for her in Paris.

As they left the harbor, she released the fist of her fingers hidden in the folds of her cloak. The cathedral's slate roof faded against the gray sky, the organ awaiting some idiot who would abuse the bellows. Her hands seemed to scold her, aching like an old woman's. The wind thrust the ship west without even the courtesy of a moment's pause. Nothing would ever be the same. No father, no mother, no stone hut by the sea, no one to ask for help or instruction, not the sound of the bells. She would never be able to call any of them back, only some false version, grown stale in memory. She felt everything she loved extinguished. Like an animal, she looked for a place to retreat but all around her were eyes: eyes of men, eyes of the seagulls that pursued the ship, eyes of the captain who licked his crumb-flecked mustache when she approached. She strode past him on the deck, straight-backed, like a noblewoman entitled to a journey. She stayed near the stern after Corsica vanished on the horizon, the wind whipping her hair. Her mind was a blank. She refused to believe where she was, surrounded by sea with the thin line of France appearing and disappearing to the north. They could sink and she would feel equally disbelieving: this was it? This was the end of all she had known?

At night, swinging in a filthy hammock in the ship's hold amidst a chorus of snores, she curled in on herself and wondered how she was to survive. She curled tighter. Who would love her? The skeins of the hammock bit into her cheek and shoulder. In the dim light, she saw the smudges of chestnut flour on her shawl. Everyone had let her go. She had been fooled by affection. Nothing lay beneath it. Why did no one love her? She had never slept alone before and she missed the bodies of her brothers, warm beside her. She hardly breathed. Below her, she could hear the silence of the ship's hold while the timbers and masts above groaned and ached against the power of the sea. Her tears gathered until they swam over her lids.

Each night was worse than the next; she couldn't sleep but neither was she awake. If she let herself sleep, she might never wake up. In the sepulchral damp, the sailors crept close to her, their backs bowed, and she

was frightened, her mind dulled as if she had the grippe. How many weeks more? Finally, she began to sleep above decks, tucked beside a discarded sail in a storage bin. She watched the rats; she trained her eyes on any movement. At some point she knew the journey must end. Weary, wanting a bath, wanting bread, she waited with dread and impatience. They landed at Le Havre on a gray day, rain like tiny lashes from a thousand whips. She glimpsed long buildings stretching for blocks. The captain escorted her from one dock to another until she boarded a river barge headed inland. In a fog cocoon, time passed while she listened to birds and frogs chattering like old women with nothing to do. She would never be able to find her way home.



In Paris on St Celestine's day in May, an elderly coachman sat on the dock of the Seine, waiting for a barge to pull closer. The coachman was hunched over because his back hurt, and he scraped at the back of his head, because he again had the lice in the hair, but in fact Giorgio Mauro felt the settling of his meal in his stomach, and the new socks that his daughter had knitted him warmed his feet. His meal had been a slab of toast slathered with anchovies. He burped. He smelled the burp with satisfaction.

The barge docking at that moment was laden with barrels filled with unctuous colors for the painting of the new ceiling of the Palais de Justice. No one but the barge captain knew the contents of the barrels, which were as valuable as gold. Sitting on the top of one, her knees drawn under her skirt like a child, was a young woman of about Giorgio's daughter's age. She had the bright and worried expression of a fox. He watched the barge approach. He burped again. When it landed, he extended his hand to help Chjara Vallé to solid ground. He looked in vain for a husband or an escort.

'I am the daughter of Paulo Vallé, also called Paulo u Longu, of Bastia,' she said. Her eyes were green inside a dark rim of brown. 'My father is a coachman. Would you tell me where I can find the coachmen of these docks?'

'I am a coachman,' he said while two others wormed in beside him, crowding the dock.

'This daughter of a Corsican coachman asks *my* assistance,' Giorgio insisted.

‘I may not need your help,’ she began. ‘I would walk, if —’  
‘Are you related to Jacques-Pierre Abbattucci, who is a coachman in Calvi?’ asked one.

‘No,’ she began. ‘I am —’

‘You will allow me to take you in the carriage of the house of Monsieur Phillipe de—’ began the other.

Giorgio interrupted. ‘No. I will take you. Where shall I take you?’

‘I am sent to be a servant to this man,’ she said, holding out a paper with Victor Ravenaugh’s address. ‘He is a cloth merchant. I would like to walk, if—’

‘I will walk her to the merchant’s house,’ said the youngest of the coachmen.

‘Don’t be absurd,’ Giorgio said. ‘A woman can’t walk so far after being so long on the boat.’

‘I am a servant without money for a carriage.’

‘But of course we will make arrangements for the daughter of the coachman of Bastia,’ Giorgio said.

As they vied over who in the guild would have the honor of helping her, Chjara found herself smiling. The feeling was sharp, as if the muscles had forgotten how. On the boats, the water’s constant press had boxed her ears. Now she took in the clear sounds of the urban dock: the men arguing close by, and a cook disputing the price of a split-open, orange squash. The cook stood on a barge heaped high with kale and aubergines. At his knee, black eels squirmed in a wheelbarrow, and not two steps from the cook, a sailor’s monkey cawed, its mouth wide open and its teeth yellow. In Bastia, Chjara had been accustomed to the constant melange of Corse, French, and Italian. Here it was all French. She squinted, listening, and smelled the eels in their slippery river sauce; the sagging mounds of horse manure; the dank river; the men sweating beside her. She took in a deep breath, and realized she was hungry.

‘If I could eat first, I could walk alone to the Rue Briand,’ she said.

Instead, she was made to sit. She was made to wait, and while the world turned and tilted, the effect of the weeks on water, she understood with the reluctance of a person not wanting to leave a dream that a new life was beginning. She would not be able to find her way back today, in any case. Frankly, she was as well rested as she had ever been in her life and she hoped

never to see the inside of a hammock again. The small brown monkey moved its tail with the pleasure of a cat. It opened its mouth, showing its black and dirty throat, wagging its pointy tongue. *Ca-ca-ca-ca*, it said.

Chjara stood. A carriage pulled up to the docks. It was painted pink, with filigree of gold. The youngest coachman piloted it, and with hurried gestures, beckoned her to sit beside him on the driver's seat. Inside the carriage, a dowager who suffered the fierce pinches of dyspepsia cried out as if wounded: what was the delay? What was the meaning of stopping precisely here, where the air reeked of offal? she scolded. Chjara leapt up beside the driver and then the carriage was off.

It was midday. It was spring. At this time, the European powers enjoyed a brief and rare moment of peace. No war depleted the treasuries or ransacked the bastions of youth. Many of those in the marketplace were ignorant of the Treaty of Amiens, signed by Napoleon on March 25, 1802, declaring a truce between France and England. They were not, though, ignorant of the fact that their sons and husbands were at home for once, or that the market was full of produce. Their city, an organism of half a million inhabitants, pulsed with self-importance. Paris felt itself to be grander than anything that had ever come before and only slightly less grand than anything that might come after. The people did not know that Paris was half the size of Beijing at the time, half the size of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan 300 years before — though they did suffer when they compared themselves to London, which was much larger. But dirty. And uncouth. Like all great cities, Paris looked unashamedly at itself in the mirror.

On the day Chjara rode on the expensive coach through the streets, this peace and hint of well-being wafted in the air like a faint perfume. Perfume itself was also in the air, since Napoleon had made it fashionable. The perfume of that morning was more a sense that flowers ought to bloom; the soil was right. The temperature was warming. The street teemed with people, vendors calling out their wares. The branches of a huge magnolia brushed against the carriage, leaving petals in Chjara's lap. They were the color of the flushed faces all around. Above, the sun warmed the roofs, and pigeons battled for choice gargoyle heads to perch upon. Chjara looked up, looked down, looked beside her at the young man guiding the horses through the crowds. He handed her bread. He pointed

to a building with a grand portico. ‘Next week,’ he said confidently, ‘we will attend a masquerade there.’

‘We?’ she said. She met his eyes, her own brows arched with amusement. He had the decency to blush.

‘My friends and I,’ he clarified. ‘We have monks’ robes. We are going as monks.’

‘Who invites coachmen to a ball?’

‘They don’t know. No one knows who is who. Women dress as men. Servants wear their masters’ clothes.’

‘By the smell alone,’ she countered, ‘the rich are different from the poor.’

He shrugged. ‘This is Paris, the city of liberty.’

*La liberté*, Chjara thought. That is what I’m feeling: freedom. For as long as she was between the river and Victor Ravenaugh’s house, she was alone to make her own decisions. It occurred to her that since no one knew who was who, she could take the coin from her mother and abandon the merchant’s service into which she had been sold.

She could vanish into this crowd. Even thinking it her face felt hot.

Inside the carriage, the dowager belched with enough vigor to disturb the horses. But where would she go? What kind of liberty would she have? She had spoken hardly a word during the voyage and that period of solitude lodged in her now like a cold stone. She thought that freedom and the despair of abandonment fit closely together, like birds in a nest.

Now she was here, traveling unescorted in the sun. She owned a coin. She could escape.

*Daughter*, she heard her father say, *as a father loves his child, so God loves His people. Do as He says. Do as I say. It is the same. Be obedient, child.* Her father had taken her on dozens of journeys like this one, seating her beside him on coach rides into the world. They had sung together, their voices blending for hours in places where only God and sheep could hear. He had loved that. Why had he let her be sent away? If she fled now, the price would be that she could never return home.

It was in this state of confusion — with her freedom in one hand and her loneliness in the other — that Chjara disembarked from the slowing carriage.

‘I can’t stop completely,’ the boy driver apologized.

She caught her small bag which he tossed down to her. Glancing up, she saw a mottled-gray house behind the courtyard wall: slate roof, gargoyles, a

crack running down one side and moss erupting from the crack.

‘It’s the door there,’ he said, pointing to a small entrance, where even she would have to duck to go in. ‘Are you all right?’ he called, already a few yards away.

She must have looked shaken. She teetered a little. She waved with false cheerfulness.

When she turned around, she found the small door open, and in its gap was a sturdy, brown woman with red slashes of anger on her cheeks.

‘Are you the servant from Corsica?’ she demanded.

‘Yes.’

‘Gracias a Dios.’



Victor Ravenaugh believed in retribution. For this reason, he did not want to die. God would not be merciful. God should not be merciful. If He was, no law existed, here or hereafter, to deny the sodomite, the fornicator, or the murderer.

Not that these in particular — sodomy, fornication, and murder — were his sins. Victor Ravenaugh was uncertain about the true nature of his depravity. But he had felt it like a skin covering him as long as he could remember. God did not approve of him.

He had tormented himself with the reasons, berated himself, and worked himself near to death to gain the approval of His Majesty, the King of Kings, the God of Gods.

Still.

He was shit. *Merde*. A louse among men.

Finally, Victor Ravenaugh escaped condemnation with a simple tool, the hookah, and a simple substance, the nectar of opium. He was well gone on the path to ecstasy when the brown woman whose name he couldn’t remember pushed her serpent face into his field of vision.

‘May you live well in hell,’ she said.

Probably, he thought indifferently, I will be consumed there by flames. Or devoured by spiders. Much worse, he thought, imagining them — the spiders, crawling.

Behind the woman whose name he hadn't mastered, there was a glimpse of turquoise. A lace-trimmed chemise. It triggered in him a memory, which escaped before he could name that, either.

The woman slung open the curtain. White light skewered his head, pushing his brain back into the settee. He felt himself knifed, and his bowels gave.

'There. He's all yours.' The voice of the unnameable shouted in triumph.

Silence fell. The light closed. The stench from his loosed bowels rose. He heard breathing. He opened one eye. The turquoise shawl. His mother. He lifted himself onto an elbow. 'Mama,' he said. He reached for her. She stepped back.

'I am Chjara Vallé,' she said.

He forced his eyes open.

'Curé Tumasgiu sent me.'

She swam in and out of his vision. Her face was pale and young as a gentian blooming in a field. 'Clean me,' he said. He opened his legs.

She did not move.

'I am incapable of cleaning myself.'

She did not respond, and he suspected she would deny him. His head fell back. The dream of hell resumed, only he was cold, cold where he was exposed. He smelled sulfur and flames, he heard something boiling on the stove, but he shivered far beyond reach of any warmth.

'*Sleep, Piero, sleep.*'

His mother was singing a lullaby in the kitchen for his brother, only Piero was long dead. He, Victor, was here. *Come Mama and sing to me.*

The woman came and lifted both legs at the knees. She ripped something from him that he didn't know was a scrap of pants from six months ago, adhered to his legs by filth. A brush with hard spines slapped the soft flesh of his bottom. He whimpered. 'No.' Was he a dead animal's hide, being prepared for leather? He cried louder: 'No.'

The brush clattered in the bucket. 'Fine, no,' she said.

He was alone again. There was air on his private preserve, there, where his own serpent lay. He slept. He heard the women of his village weeping. He was dying at last. They prepared his body with a hot cloth, and they wept over him, especially Maria of his youth. She touched him. She washed his manhood. A soft cloth with steaming warmth caressed and cleansed

between his folds.

He opened his eyes and saw the new face. What was her name? His mind first delivered the name in its French version: Claire. Then in Corse: Chjara. He saw her face red as if she were angry, but streaked with holy tears. The rag steamed in her hand.

‘You’ll tell Curé Tumasgiu how well I served you. You will write to him.’

He looked at the curve of her breasts. His member stood up.

The bucket tipped over.

‘You are an angel,’ he said, ‘capable of miracles.’ His member had not been hard in fifteen years, not since he’d begun his travels with the Flower of the Orient.

‘Come back,’ he said, motioning to her. He looked down at the miracle of his cock. ‘Come here now. Be my servant.’ But she didn’t and the miracle wilted. The room was silent.

Some time later, which he did not know was two days, he saw her again: his angel. He needed his smoke. He pointed, he shouted. At last she understood and prepared it for him. He felt her watching him. After a while she approached him and touched his arm. His face. She poked him for signs of life as she would a wounded animal. He gave none. He waited. She crossed the room and swung open the armoire doors. He nearly gave himself away — but she didn’t empty the second drawer on the left, where he kept his opium. No. He relaxed. His body collapsed into the sleep of mountains. He heard her sing. With his eyes closed, he listened. She sang like a bird: an outburst of a few notes, and then nothing. The rustle of leaves. Some more — a little melody. He knew the song. If only she would sing the whole of it. He opened his eyes and then he saw her: dressed in his own clothes. Dressed in his pantaloons. Stuffing his boots. She turned away from him when she tucked a rolled cloth between her legs, a cloth he couldn’t see hid a single hard gold coin. He would have spoken to her sharply but he had no energy for rebuking her at that moment; her arms were raised, her neck tilted back, and her long hair swept to the middle of her back. She was braiding it.

Victor Ravenaugh had not seen a woman braid her hair for a hundred years. She pulled on his wig from the days of Louis XVI, then she wrapped herself in his ivory silk shirt with the matching ivory waistcoat. The waistcoat had been stitched all over by those Asian devils with silk-thread



blooms and pink butterflies and his favorite ornament, the bright red tomato or *pomme d'amour*, that exotic discovery of the Americas. She did not look at him as she left, and he imagined he saw his better self. Going. At last, gone.

## *Chapter Two*

On the morning of the day when Henry Garland would meet Chjara Vallé, Henry went on an errand of his mother's to a hospital that was also a gaol. His mother was at home in New Hampshire but she had written, asking him to investigate Napoleon's prisons. Did the new French have any ideas that he could bring back? She reported that York County's gaol was still full of poor men, crammed into quarters with no air and the most pathetic of fires to warm them, despite all her efforts to the contrary.

Henry wore a boutonnière on his plain brown waistcoat: lilac and magnolia blossoms that he'd labored over with his host Marguerite's three house servants. The servants didn't understand why he was trying to knit stems together with his fumbling hands. He explained, grinning with embarrassment, that his mother taught him always to bring something bright and decent to assuage the prisoners' misery, even if only for a glimpse. He didn't tell them that it was also a talisman for himself, to ward off the horror.

At the age of twenty-two, Henry was a man of healthy proportions. Tall as a church door, he had eaten well his whole life and spent much time outdoors. His skin was rosy, his flesh full. He could lift a table with one hand, and his disposition was empathetic and curious. He was unlike his father, who was savvy in business and relentless in his pursuit of righteousness. Henry had come to France to sell an invention of his own which had proved unpopular. Now he'd run out of his father's money and was due to sail home in a week.

Rain fell that day from first light. Because it had been hot the afternoon before and into the night, the rain rose off the still-warm cobblestones in a fog gritty with pollen. Henry had forgotten an umbrella. Leaping along the sidewalk from one overhang to the next did nothing to ease the weight hidden in his heart. He approached the marble doors of the formidable hospital that housed the insane, the prostitutes, and also some special criminals — he'd heard — in pits in the basement.

The administrator waited for him with the impatience of one ready to

discuss his cherished achievements. ‘Henry the American?’ Henry’s host Marguerite had given him this pet name.

Henry followed the man who whose graying hair was tied back with a slip of aubergine silk. They entered a ward as long as a ship’s dock. The stink of bedpans met them; noise clattered through the cavernous hall. The administrator talked in long paragraphs, gesturing with open arms. He recounted the story of his life: for a decade under the ancien régime, he’d languished, medical degree in hand. He had edited an insignificant journal. He had wasted his time in cafés. No one wanted him. They wanted their cousins, their relatives. Everything was fixed, rigid. Then the commoners overthrew the Bastille; the great prison came apart, stone by stone, and what was left?

‘What was left?’ The administrator repeated the question, peering at Henry, demanding an answer.

Henry shrugged, an invitation for the man to continue. The administrator’s fierce pupils contracted; he poked Henry in the ribs.

‘We must rebuild the world. You and I.’

A madwoman, standing behind the administrator, blew a raspberry, her face contorted with disgust. He turned around, thanked her for her remark, and received a brilliant smile in return. ‘Kindness,’ he said, ‘is a powerful weapon. That has been my singular philosophy.’ He led Henry to the end of the ward of inmates — whose shackles the administrator had ordered removed — past the infirmary where the inmates received sugar water instead of opium, and — except in the most extreme cases — warm towels instead of bloodletting. ‘We will eradicate superstition and create a science of insanity,’ he said.

Henry felt the envy of a man who did not know what to do with his own life. ‘And the dungeons?’ he asked.

Dismay showed on the administrator’s face. ‘I’m late, I’m afraid, for a hearing at the Palais du Justice.’

‘I was promised I could see them.’ Henry wished he hadn’t spoken. He could still avoid this horror, but he didn’t like to disappoint his mother or fail to show courage where she did.

‘All right, I’ll have Jacques show you downstairs.’

Jacques was a big man, bearded, and covered from shoulders to shoes in a uniform of pink crepe. ‘We are experimenting,’ the administrator

explained, ‘with colored fashions. We will see if they affect our recalcitrant behaviors.’

The stairs to the basement curved around a pole that was sticky and pocked by mold. Henry withdrew his gloved hand from its support and prepared himself. The cacophony of the wards above disappeared with each descending step. Silence like darkness pooled at the bottom, and an unhealthy damp sweated from the walls.

Jacques rattled his keys. ‘The master wants the prison closed. Emptied.’ He turned the lock. He looked at Henry. ‘Every sin can be forgiven.’ The man seemed to be quoting. He could barely keep the sneer out of his voice. ‘Every heart can be remade.’

The prisoners sat in a room shaped like a wine barrel: narrow at the top and bottom, slightly swollen at the middle. No window interrupted the stone masonry and only a shiny drip like saliva on the far wall alerted Henry to the one vent. The stench was like that of prisons everywhere, the foul buckets uncovered and leaking slime. The men hunched forward against the cold — forty of them at least in this narrow space. One torch burned and three men huddled beneath it for the flame’s warmth. Henry pictured the night time with no light at all. He imagined them all, sleeping, not sleeping, with no notion of morning until the guard returned to light the torch. How many years of this? He refused to ask. He refused to know.

They spoke with him. One had killed his master. Why? No answer. Another said, ‘His wife took up with the master, didn’t she?’ A brawl ensued. ‘The master raped the wife,’ another whispered to him. Several men were debtors, most were thieves. He could not imagine what crime warranted an endless sentence in such a hold. Death would be more merciful.

He had to get out. He reminded himself to breathe the air these men had to breathe; he composed his face because they did not need to see him revolted by their circumstances. He turned in time to see Jacques, the guard in pink, leaning over the rail, poised over them all with his club at his side. The man’s face twitched as if he were controlling a secret erotic taste. Henry fled with as much propriety as he could summon.

Outside, with the rain on his face, Henry wanted to tell his mother what he believed, that people cannot give up their tyranny over the weak. The guard had made him feel hopeless. Why did his mother think that human beings could forsake the delicious pleasure of triumphing over one

another? She loved a man — her husband, his father — who pictured for most souls the most brutal fate for eternity. Every sermon laced its message of salvation with the liquor of hell: the thousand ways that they would be punished. Of course the guard enjoyed his position. Creating hell for others made men into gods.

Henry returned to Marguerite's mansion. A widow, Marguerite was thirty, only eight years older than he was. She treated him like the son whom she had lost, a son born when she was thirteen. Entering, he painted a bright expression on his face. She looked through it. She offered silent sympathy. She rose from her chair and patted him on the shoulder.

'There is a masquerade tonight,' she said. 'Should we go?'

Henry wanted nothing so much as to curl into his bed, and hide the fact of his cowardice.

'The count requires that I accompany him.' She was referring to the government minister from Batavia whom Napoleon wanted her to marry. 'Will you join us?' She looked exhausted by the prospect.

'Of course.' Henry bent and kissed her on the cheek.

'You can wear Charon's clothes.' Charon was her husband, dead since the revolution.

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.' She turned to go. 'We leave at midnight.'

Henry found the clothes laid out on the settee: silk stockings soft as milkweed puffs against his skin, taut breeches, gold buttons to close the shirt cuffs, and a waistcoat stitched all over with designs including a shiny red tomato.



At Victor Ravenaugh's three-storied house, Chjara crept out into the courtyard. The street door refused to close behind her. Chjara pictured the sour vapor coiling from Victor Ravenaugh's mouth, traveling toward the door's gap, finding her. She pulled harder, turned and ran. She gasped for breath. After two weeks in that house, she was starved for air. The city smelled of piss. It smelled of garlic. It smelled of the rotting magnolia blossoms at her feet on the Seine's promenade. Because of the fog, the dark hung in curtains which she passed through, one after another, the mist

touching her like a benediction. She'd escaped. She should go back, she *would* go back, she promised herself, it was impossible not to, but please God, let the man be dead by the time she returned. Please let him die. Let him suck the last of his life out of that pipe and then fall forward with no one to roll him over again. She shut her eyes, shame charging hot inside her. She was wishing a man dead with all her being. She unclasped her supplicating hands. She kept walking, and tried not to think about the crust between the merchant's legs, the stink still clinging to her fingers like a shadow, and she tried not to think about the fact that no one in the world knew where she was, or cared.

Drums sounded in the distance, their rhythm like the patter of hail on the sea. The masquerade must be in that direction. At the corner, someone had chiseled the word 'Sainte' out of the street name, Rue Soufriere, and at the next corner, the same: Rue Sainte Marie was now Rue Marie. The work of the revolutionaries. Chjara's heart flared with loneliness and fury because she couldn't tell Curé Tumasgiu about what she saw or understood. She missed the curé more than Jude, which was absurd and foolish since Tumasgiu was the one who'd banished her from paradise. She'd written and torn up five letters to the priest so far. She understood that she'd been excluded from the brotherhood of men, and that she was a fool ever to have felt herself an equal.

Now she was in the open air; for a moment she was not trapped. As she drew closer, the drums rat-ta-tatted like castanets; Chjara didn't know that they were Turkish drums and that the players were military men idled by Napoleon's ruse of a springtime peace. The drummers were more accustomed to summoning soldiers than masqueraders after midnight but the effect was the same. When Chjara turned the last corner, there were not dozens but hundreds of people, a crowd greater than at the Festival of Dreams in Bastia, a crowd that expanded into the great hall where she went and stood under a chandelier with hundreds upon hundreds of candles in perfect silver cups. A small band of pipers squalled in the corner, the music almost unintelligible in the crowd's noise.

There were bearded men in whore's dresses, Romans in togas, pirates with their chests bare, three girls slinging unsheathed swords, a giant on stilts. A woman strode by with fig leaves plastered on her breasts and sex. Nothing else but slippers. Four boys in monks' robes passed by her and

Chjara saw the young coachman. She signaled but he didn't recognize her, his attention on the fig leaves. Or maybe her own disguise changed her enough. The wig weighed warmly on her, the long powdered curls moving when she tilted her head.

A servant offered champagne, and as she held the hard stem of the glass, the merchant came back to her. She had never seen a grown man's sex so close, not even Jude's because their one time together had been in the sea. She certainly never pictured that a man's part could be as yellow and as undistinguished as that. Her younger brothers' had changed from snails to new carrots and back again at the slightest alteration in temperature. Her eyes fluttered at the recollection of the merchant's nest of filth. It looked like a butcher's hide, hair sticking out of the blood-brown mess. One day, she had left him lying wet in his filth for hours until her situation became clear: if he died because of her ill treatment, yes, she could go home, but how could she ever be at peace again? He had to die naturally. From his own habits and disease. She imagined telling Tumasgiu the details of her service. Was this modest and obedient enough? She vowed, petulant, never to speak to Jude again. She did not admit to herself what she already knew, that she would never see any of them again. What if the merchant lived for years?

All around her, she heard French spoken differently, as if it were being sieved through the nose: no rumble of the r, no lingering, sing-song sentences, like the Italian-infused French she'd learned from the curé. If she abandoned the merchant tonight for a free, independent life of her own choosing, it would be like this: always among strangers. Estranged.

While Chjara Vallé twisted her champagne glass in her fingers, a striking figure parted the waters of the crowd. He wore a cloak covered all over with shiny bits of glass, and he carried a soapbox, which he set down with a clatter directly under the center of the chandelier. Stepping up onto the box, he stared up at the candles. The little mirrors were adhered to his cloak by tiny stitches. White stones decorated his shoulders like epaulets. He became so quiet, he was a statue.

A threesome glided up underneath him, and Chjara was drawn out of her reverie by a nobleman in a vest with a shiny tomato embroidered among flowers and insects. Looking down at her own vest, she saw they were similar. He accompanied a woman in a full-length cape made entirely of swan

feathers. They made an extraordinary couple, who towered over their third, a chimney sweep with two perfunctory streaks of soot on his cheeks.

The man on the pedestal still stared upward.

‘What’s he looking at?’ The man in the vest spoke with a flat accent.

‘I don’t see anything but the ghosts from the flames,’ the woman in white said.

‘He’s clearly trying to get our attention,’ the chimney sweep said.

‘He’s a showman.’ The woman in white explained the obvious with an air of patience tried.

‘I’m a scientist,’ the showman corrected her.

‘Are you?’ the nobleman said, and then he noticed Chjara. He grinned at their matching clothes and bowed as if he were play-acting. She nodded haughtily in return — a woman’s response. She should have bowed like a man. She didn’t know what to do. At the curé’s table, she’d grown accustomed to listening while the high-born guests took no notice of her, a servant.

The group pressed aside to allow room for the woman in fig leaves. As they made their introductions, Chjara overheard that the woman in white feathers had been a duchess of France; they were instructed to leave off the title in these Republican times.

‘Napoleon will restore your title soon enough, Marguerite.’ Fig leaves looked with saucy interest over at Chjara. ‘And you are? Who is the silent young man in the waistcoat like Charon’s?’

Chjara’s tongue dried. The woman’s fingers reached for a touch of the silk. Just before the hand could discover breast, Chjara bowed, her heart thudding.

‘I am Amadour.’ She named a Castilian in *The Heptameron*. ‘If in any matter you need a gentleman’s life, mine shall be with the heartiest goodwill at your service.’

The Evite giggled.

The duchess smiled. ‘As Amadour was to Florida?’ She referred to the inaccessible woman whom Amadour courted all his days.

They knew the book. They knew the name she’d chosen for herself, and they were amused. Her eyes felt alive for the first time since arriving at the merchant’s. She felt the nobleman watching her, and her pulse thickened.

At that moment, the showman-scientist began to spin. Everyone drew back to avoid the rim of his heavy, bangled cloak, which rose until he stood



revealed underneath it. He was clad in a black stocking knitted row upon row and stretching down his broad ribs over his sex tautly down to his boots. As he spun, the glass pieces reflected the candlelight like stars. The band struck up a lively tune. Men stomped to the rhythm and women clapped. When it seemed the showman could spin no faster, he turned one beat more and then, in a flash, raised his arms through the neck of his cloak. He lifted and released it into the air with a snap of his wrists. It seemed to fly toward the chandelier. Just in time it began its fall, twisting upside down. The showman ducked beneath it, aiming his head through the neck so that — *voilà!* — he stood erect in his inside-out cloak whose lining was a most splendid red.

The crowd hurrahed. ‘What do you sell us?’ shouted a man.

‘Whatever it is, I’ll have some,’ sang a girlish voice, to a round of laughter. The speaker was a man dressed in a woman’s fluff trilling his voice so high it cracked.

‘I sell you no potions,’ he said. ‘No instant cures.’

‘What then?’

‘No salve to ease your aching bones. No coca, no opium.’

‘Tell us, man!’

Everyone waited.

‘I offer you ghosts.’

‘Oh, ghosts.’ The Evite sighed.

‘The risen dead?’ scoffed another. ‘Let them in peace. My mother especially, please.’

‘I am a man of science,’ the showman said to Henry, ‘and I bring you ghosts. Scientific ghosts, no less.’

The American nodded, conspiring with the showman. ‘Let’s have one.’

A woman called out, ‘I need a dance partner.’ The crowd laughed.

‘You will dance with a ghost if you dare on June the second at the Place Vendôme. Should I ask a particular gentleman...’ he flourished his hands for the crowd, ‘to appear?’ He bent and turned his attention to the woman in white feathers, Marguerite Charon.

The duchess moved sharply away, colliding with Chjara.

‘Amadour,’ the duchess said, her voice inflected with anguish.

The showman felt his misstep. ‘Allow me to amuse you with a demonstration.’ He opened his cloak and selected a stone from his extraordinary epaulets. He slipped it from its fastening and held it up.

The chimney sweep, who was the Batavian Ludwig van der Lande, thrust out his hand and received the piece. ‘But that is just a common shell,’ he scoffed.

‘Is it?’ The showman bowed to the American. ‘Do you know the work of the Scotsman Hutton?’

Henry took the piece and his face lit up. ‘Oh, it’s a fossil. It was once a shell.’ Henry showed it again to Ludwig van der Lande. ‘Look sir, it is concave. The shell itself is gone. Only the shadow of it remains.’

‘The shadow,’ pronounced the showman. ‘The shadow of a once-living creature.’ He addressed everyone, his voice booming. ‘Can the shadows cast by my phantasmagoria reveal the concave remains of a once-living soul? Does the air retain the shape of a man once ascended?’

‘Imbecile.’

The duchess’s angry whisper seemed for Chjara’s ears alone but clearly the showman heard. He continued regardless.

The duchess leaned closer to Chjara. ‘Tell me, Amadour, what do you think...’ Her lips trembled. ‘When this man reveals the dead to us, will my husband have his head back on his shoulders?’

The showman spoke to the crowd. The duchess’s breath was sweet. Her eyes met Chjara’s and stayed. This duchess thought she was a man. Chjara hardly breathed.

‘What about my son? Will my son have his head restored in the afterlife? Or will I gaze upon his bloody stump?’ The duchess’s eyes blazed with grief and rage inside the feathered mask.

‘God is merciful.’ Chjara spoke like the curé: the truth was simple and could be trusted.

‘Perhaps.’ The duchess looked anxious.

‘The days of Terror are behind us,’ the showman called out, ‘but do we live again? Or do we move like bitter ghosts. Not daring to be bold. Not willing to forgive.’

The duchess stiffened.

‘Do you see there?’ The showman pointed at a face. ‘Or there?’ He pointed at another. ‘An enemy in a baker’s dress? A murderer in a servant’s eyes?’

The crowd stilled. Chjara, a servant, stared at the showman, not looking at the duchess, the woman abused by the revolutionaries. The call for freedom had meant the execution of her son, her husband.

The showman stepped down from his podium and took the fossil from Henry's hand. He bowed to Marguerite, and presented her with the rock. 'I promise that my phantasmagoria will make you feel alive.' He put his hand boldly onto her breast. 'You will feel the chariot of your heart. You will be relieved of this half-life of sorrow.' With extended hand, he offered himself as a dance partner.

The duchess's smile was brittle. 'Naturally, life must be full and rich.' Marguerite spoke clearly so that the crowd could hear. 'But for this, do we require *your* assistance?'

People laughed, including Ludwig van der Lande, who made a sound like a goose honking.

'I prefer to dance with...' Marguerite hesitated. Ludwig stepped forward as if it were his due, but she pointed into the crowd, moving her finger like the wheel of a roulette that almost halts first on one and then another. And then she turned back to Chjara. 'Amadour, will you lighten the chariot of my heart?'

Chjara felt as if the floor was not quite firm beneath her.

'We will dance the waltz?' The duchess passed the feathered cape to Ludwig and stood in a dress of pale blue satin.

'Pardon, esteemed madam, it causes me grief to disappoint you. I do not know this dance called the waltz.' Out of Chjara's mouth came the stilted, archaic French of *The Heptameron*. She held herself with the poise of a knight and protector, her pulse trilling.

'Good sir,' the duchess answered, mimicking the formal discourse. 'I will teach it to you. It is but a few years old, this dance. Have you been abroad?'

'I come from the south.' 'A mysterious young prince of the south,' Marguerite Charon said, continuing the game. The showman called aloud to the band, 'A waltz, gentlemen, please.' Seeing what other men did, Chjara placed her hand on the duchess's back. She felt the curve of the waist; the thin, hard ribs. They were about the same height. The duchess trembled beneath Chjara's hand but presented a brave expression behind her swan mask.

Chjara launched them out. She heard the beat in the music; she saw the couples move around them. The onetwo-three rhythm taught her all she needed to know and, as a prince from the south, she released herself and the woman in her arms to the quickening pace. She spun and made

the lady spin with her. The brave expression vanished, in its place the concentration of turning, turning without falling, and they waltzed faster. They passed all the others, who were sedate and careful. The duchess's waist moved with the breath of exertion. Chjara didn't think, in the same way she didn't think when she played the organ. The crowd blurred. Still, Chjara turned them faster still. The duchess laughed. Chjara smiled, throwing her head back and catching a glimpse of cherubs and nymphs prancing on the frescoed ceiling. Life was full and rich without anyone's assistance; it needed only this music, this light, this candle scent of beeswax. The gold coin burned between her legs, announcing its presence as she moved right and left, and right again. Chjara looked directly into the woman's eyes with admiration and interest.



Marguerite Charon felt the embrace of her dancing partner and scoffed inwardly at the youth's adoring expression. What did he know of who deserved respect? She felt alone, embittered. Two men, Henry and this boy, wore clothes like Charon's and neither had an ounce of his gravitas. Neither had his sense of history. Her dance partner fawned at her and Marguerite wondered what respect she was owed, when she was a frequenter of dance parties, a laugher, a mocker, an unnatural mother who could pretend she cared nothing for that showman's promise. At a masquerade, she could ridicule the invitation to see her son again. She could chirp and be gay, but let there be shadow... Would that the showman could restore even the shell of what had been so she could look once more upon Yann's shape. He had grown in front of her eyes! He had once been a mere cloth bundle in her arms. His neck — soft, smelling of undergarments and rain, skin and cleanliness both — had strengthened day by day. Then he had held his head up. The infant Yann had looked for himself on the world — and she, Marguerite his mother, had been there. She had witnessed the first look he took on the universe. What right had she now to look still upon this universe — with its flagons of light, and the rich dark smell of the cook's stew, boiling three stone walls away and yet palpable in the air to her still-alert, still-acute senses. What right did she have still to hunger and thirst,

what right to the admiring look from *this* soft-cheeked, small-shouldered boy? They danced fast enough to fly.

‘Boy, you dare too much.’ Marguerite scolded.

‘Never enough,’ Chjara said, forgetting to lower her voice. A couple of pirates loomed. She executed a swivel to avoid a collision. A burst of applause made her understand that they were being watched. Admired.

‘You remind me of my son.’

‘Yes?’

‘You’re fourteen?’ the duchess said.

‘Eighteen.’

‘But so slight.’

And unbearded, Chjara thought, realizing her mistake. She was revealed. The duchess’s expression conveyed that the truth had dawned. Chjara’s arms began to droop as the waltz neared its end, but the duchess pressed their hands together.

‘I want to see their ghosts,’ she whispered fiercely, ‘but I’m afraid.’ They slowed. ‘You have a strong heart. Will you take me? Will you be my escort to the Place Vendôme on June the second?’ The duchess raised an eyebrow. ‘As Amadour?’

Chjara thought of the merchant. He might expire on his own before June the second, in two weeks’ time. It was plausible, and then she could go home. The merchant might be dead already; perhaps she would find him dead tonight.

The duchess noticed her hesitation. Again the face became a brave mask.

‘I’ll meet you there, unless...’ Chjara said, ‘unless I’m required elsewhere.’

‘All right, mysterious prince of the south.’ The duchess seemed tired, amused, disappointed. She turned away, turned back: ‘What are you called?’

The truth or a lie? ‘Chjara Vallé,’ she said.

‘An odd name.’

‘It’s Corse.’

‘Ah, you are a relation of Napoleon?’

‘All Corsicans now claim relation to the First Consul of France.’ She was quoting Curé Tumasgiu.

It was not an answer. The duchess waited a beat. ‘I hope to see you again, my friend Chjara Vallé.’

‘I hope to see you, Marguerite Charon.’ She made her exit with a flourish, wondering how it could be that barbarous destiny now assigned her, a banished servant, a duchess whom she could address by name. She was reluctant to be pulled toward this new future, to give up the past. Feeling hope mixed with the pain of abandonment, she headed back toward the gloom of Victor Ravenaugh’s home.



Henry watched the boy depart and knew he hadn’t been the one to spin Marguerite around and make her laugh. He looked at the revelers with the eyes of his father, and argued: What good can come of bacchanalia? He answered fiercely: Isn’t joy a thing to be prized? In all the months he’d been a guest in Marguerite’s house, he had not once seen her relinquish what she called her ‘malaise’. Now this beautiful boy, young but assertive, had taken Marguerite in his arms and danced.

‘He was extraordinary,’ Henry said to Marguerite. ‘Did you get his name?’

‘He was a she.’

‘No, really?’ Henry’s gut cooled with the force of his ignorance. He often felt the fool, here in Paris.

‘See where she lives will you, Henry? Follow her. Be discreet.’

Henry hurried after the disappearing boy — girl — and knew Marguerite wanted mostly to know the girl’s class. Marguerite despised her fear of commoners and fought to abandon it. Henry tucked himself against the shadow of buildings. The girl walked slowly in the center of the street. When she paused and looked back, he leaned in a doorway. The thrill of happiness pressed like a vise against his heart. He would never again do anything like this when he was home. He would take his place among the striving men of America and produce something worthwhile.

The girl almost made a convincing man, striding along the river abutment, or maybe it was only that an aristocrat’s fine clothes distracted people from the ordinary flesh and bone underneath. His own skin relished the duke’s ruffled shirt, the silk leggings and secretly, he would have liked to be an aristocrat. If they wished it, dukes and lords might produce nothing.

They might explore and discover and observe, and then return to a house staffed by dozens. He recited to himself, ‘Good works, not good birth, make a man.’ He wished he didn’t believe it. He wished that in the deepest part of himself he didn’t believe his father.

He almost lost the girl when she ducked down a stairway from the promenade to the docks. She disappeared under a bridge. She did not come out on one side or the other. He was about to follow her when she began to sing. The sound came up through his feet. The song rose up and echoed between the four-storied buildings that leaned toward each other across the river. A window lit by a single candle cast a reflection onto the water and the reflection undulated in time to the aching vibrato of her voice. It was beautiful, and he felt desire flow through him. He wanted to see her. He wanted to see this girl who could be a boy — to see her mouth move. He bent over the bridge. Darkness. He closed his eyes. He did not understand the words, though he thought he heard the syllables ‘Bar-bar-a’ repeated. The tune was haunted, nothing like the hymns with which he’d grown up. The notes hardly separated one from one another; they bled together. Perhaps it was Arabic.

Henry stood on the gentle arch of the bridge, the water dark on both sides of him. Stars flecked the surface. Smelling the ancient river, he didn’t want to go home. He would do what his father asked if only he could believe that all the striving and productive labor created better lives. In America, disappointment in the failures of humanity inspired a frenzy of hard work with no time for the reflection and sorrow that this song expressed. Henry remembered the prison guard’s expression. There was no greater lust than one man’s tyranny over another. By comparison, music and dancing seemed benign, salutary. Productive even. His father had taught him a thousand reasons to despise frivolity but then Henry had read Jefferson on the clockwork universe. With a relief like cold water on hot summer skin he’d realized that of course the world would continue turning in its orderly, marvelous way whether or not a human being enjoyed the pleasures of this life.

The song ended. Others who’d stopped to listen applauded. The clapping ricocheted between the buildings. From the bridge, Henry watched the small audience wait for the singer to emerge. She didn’t come out and one by one they left.

He wouldn't go back to America. Even though he had no coin left, he would stay.

The girl slipped silently up the opposite stairs. She appeared just a few feet away, but was oblivious to him. He wanted to touch her on the shoulder, to remove the wig of powdered curls and see what lay beneath. She wandered through the streets, slow, slower. Then she circled a block. She retraced her steps yet again. Surely she would notice him following her. She stopped at a door she'd passed twice already. The house was a mansion; no doubt she was the cooped-up daughter of one of the noblemen still hiding behind closed doors from the rabble. Henry approached too near her to pause. As he passed her by, walking purposefully, he saw her cheeks raked by tears: a small forlorn face in the oversized wig.



## *Chapter Three*

Days passed and the merchant was not dead. He wanted to go to the park. He couldn't walk; she heaved him into a wheelchair. Outside, the bright light made them blink like creatures yanked from hibernation. Chjara rolled her neck from side to side and felt the sun's heat pour along the channels of her bones. Victor's pale hand covered his weeping eyes. She fetched him a hat with a broader brim. She adjusted his body in the chair, which she saw was scabrous with dust. Even fresh-laundered, he gave off the odor of decay. Small hairs bristled from his cheek, his nose, his ears.

At the park, he demanded she lift him out of his chair. 'You will help me to walk again.' He smiled like an ogre. 'My miracle worker.'

'I'm no saint.' She observed him, sunk into the shape of a withered fruit.

'No, you're not.'

'What do you expect me to do?' she said, exasperated.

'Lift.' He raised his arms.

Many people streamed around them. They seemed to be gathering for something. A market perhaps. A few glanced at Victor Ravenaugh as they passed and she saw them notice the decrepit chair, the cobweb on his sleeve, the signs of neglect. She hoisted him under the armpits.

'Good girl.'

She grunted. His face had fallen onto her shoulder. His legs hung dead. His awkward position made him weigh more than was possible for such a shrunken man.

'Move,' he said.

'Where?'

'Back up.'

She began to release him.

'No,' he shouted. 'So I can put my feet down, idiot!'

His disgusting lips were against her ear. She wriggled. He held fast, his arms draped over her, his chest against her breasts.

'Lucky man.' Another leered, passing by.

Victor's feet found purchase. She felt him take some of his own weight,

but when she let go he crumpled, his face white. She caught him when he was all crooked, almost at the ground, one of her hands under his neck, the other through his crotch to his buttocks. She lifted him like a baby and threw him into the chair; it rolled. She stopped it with her face inches from his.

He trembled around the mouth, eyes wide with shock. He didn't speak for a moment, and he seemed almost human, this ogre, in the terror of his effort. Chjara draped his lap with a blanket. He recovered his breath.

'Again,' he said.

'You are too weak, old man.'

'One step.'

She rolled her eyes.

'One step, and then you can join the exhibition.'

She turned and looked. 'What exhibition?' At the center of the park, people circled around a fountain.

'You cannot read the sign,' he explained.

'I can read.'

'You are literate?' His gaze was intrigued, and she immediately regretted revealing any part of her true self.

She found the sign — a notice plastered on the base of the gas lamp. 'An Exhibition of Electricity for the People of Paris by the Honorable Scientist Bernhard Thomas.'

'Another exhibition of science?' she blurted.

'Another?'

He waited for an explanation. She gave none. The people around the fountain were removing their gloves. She heard laughter of an embarrassed, excited sort. Their hands were bare. She did not notice the Batavian minister observing her, recognizing her.

'Two steps,' Victor demanded.

She balanced him on his feet. He breathed as if he were climbing mountains.

'Step back,' he grunted.

She spread her legs to set a firm foundation. Surprisingly, his knob of a knee lifted. His calf and foot dangled. His cheeks were waxy. He set the foot down and would have crumpled again if she hadn't quickly grasped his hips. Again he was draped around her neck — sticky, odorous, febrile, and pressing his chest to her breasts. She pushed him erect. 'You will write

Curé Tumasgiu,' she said, holding him up. 'You'll tell him I'm an obedient, modest servant. Sing my praises, old man,' she said. 'Now another step.' She braced him upright.

'Tomorrow,' he whined. 'Put me down.'

She did it gently and carefully. And then she ran to join the group at the fountain, flinging her gloves to the ground.

From inside the body that had betrayed him, Victor Ravenaugh watched her, his Corsican beauty. He observed the grace of her movement, he saw the way her fine hair sluiced to her waist in a loose braid. He would not be an invalid. He had stood. He had walked. He could do it again.

Now he was tired and slumped in his chair. He heard a man cry out — the scientist — repeating, 'Hold on, hold on now.' At the far end of the exhibition, a jar of some alchemical material glowed the color of daylight magnified. He wasn't sure if he was awake or dreaming when he heard a crack like the sound of lightning, and saw the crowd around the fountain leap all at once into the air. The body of the crowd, linked by bare hands, writhed like a snake — up off the ground — with air between their shoes and the earth.

They were up in the air for seconds before they fell back down, laughing and giggling like children.



Across town, on the day he did not depart for Le Havre and the ship home, Henry awoke with a feeling like Christmas. The departure deadline no longer loomed. The future was a mystery. He ate a breakfast of quince marmalade on crisp bread with a boiled egg and strawberries also. In less than two weeks he would see the girl who lived in the mansion again. He thought how he would introduce himself to her nobleman father: I am an inventor. But his invention was unsuccessful and he didn't like to boast in any case. *I am an honest man.* But if he were honest, he'd admit he hoped to marry well. I will take you away from whatever is grieving you, he imagined saying to the girl.

With the day before him, Henry decided to seek out the showman who claimed science could raise ghosts. He left the manor, pulling on his gloves.

The sun warmed his shoulders. He strode to the Place Vendôme. At the intersection was a milliner's, a baker's and a stationer's shop, some homes, and a ruin he guessed had been burned during the Revolutionary riots. On the side of the ruin was a mosaic of the sacred heart. Nothing suggested a theater.

On a hunch that a scientist-showman might have encountered difficulties with the police, he asked at a tavern where some gendarmes were eating their lunch if anyone had heard of such a spectrographic demonstration. One clucked like a hen. 'It is not possible! Msr. Tourneau is returned to Paris?'

In this way, Henry learned the showman's name and soon unearthed his history. Some years ago, the man in the glass robe had offended the revolutionary guard by presuming to raise the specter of Louis XVI for a mourning loyalist. Etienne-Gaspard Tourneau had been required to decamp to Bordeaux. Rumor circulated that he was returned and receiving the aid of a mysterious nun.

Henry asked at Notre Dame, going into the unfamiliar confession booth. Did the priest behind the screen know anything about this mysterious nun who might be helping Tourneau? The screen slid open; the priest confronted him.

'Are you Catholic?' the priest said.

'Unitarian,' Henry confessed.

The priest hesitated. The priest had not yet heard of this new Unitarian sect, so popular in America. 'Your family?' he ventured.

'My father holds to the Puritanical or Congregational faith. My mother answers to the Methodists.'

'In any case, you do not have rights to confession.' The screen slid shut, and Henry spent the evening in the good humor that came from provoking ecclesiastics. He wanted to tell Marguerite about his adventures but she had left him a note excusing herself with a migraine.

She suffered in fact from anticipation of the ghost show. She felt that if she saw her son headless in the afterlife, she would lose her will to live.

While Henry was awakening the next morning, the thought came to him that the sacred heart on the burned ruin might somehow connect with the rumor of the mysterious nun. Late in the day, he went again to the Place Vendôme. He clambered over the outer wall and found himself in a churchyard. Forsythia bloomed. The birds, sensing dusk fall, twittered

in the dense brush as he passed. The chapel's brick archway had fallen into disrepair with gaps like missing teeth. He heard voices. Henry ducked under the crumbling doorway with some trepidation, not regarding the supernatural but toward the very physical prospect of being stunned by a falling stone.

Inside, he found a puzzling scene. Four men, two on ladders, held up a sheet of gauze the length and breadth of the nave. Larger than a bed sheet, whiter than narcissus, it formed a kind of skin against the wall. In front, the showman charged at his workers. 'Down! Take it down! Imbeciles! Is there complete darkness in this room, ever?' One of the men on ladders dropped his corner, plaster from the wall falling with the screen which draped nearly to the dirty floor. 'Careful!'

'Where do you want it then?' one whined.

'Where indeed? Where might there be total darkness in a place built over catacombs? Is that so difficult a question?'

The sun struck Tourneau from behind, and from Henry's vantage point, the showman's shadow danced a moment against the white screen. It will be a puppet show, thought Henry, disappointed. Marionettes. He looked around for wood figurines and dolls.

Instead he saw a box mounted on wooden legs with wheels on the feet. From the front of the box sprouted two rectangular tubes like bulging eyes. On top, glass lanterns protruded from holes in the lid. Henry thought of the showman's coat of glass shards. Curious, he walked over to the mechanism, but before he could look inside, Tourneau was upon him.

'My friend,' Tourneau said, interposing himself between the box and Henry. 'Accompany me immediately to the garden, yes?' A smile barely covered the irritation on his face.

'Pardon the intrusion,' Henry said.

'No! No apology needed,' said Tourneau. 'We're men of science. It's our nature to intrude.' He placed a hand on the small of Henry's back, guiding him out the door.

As Henry was being led away, he looked down on curly hair with flecks of plaster nested in the locks: pastel bits of red, orange, gold and powdery white. Henry glanced back and saw pocks in the fresco where the gauze screen had hung.

'They have been attempting to nail your cloth to the wall,' Henry

guessed out loud. 'I have something better than nails. I have invented a glue made from rubber. Reversible glue. You can hang something up with it and take it down again without damaging the wall. It would be useful to you below in the catacombs perhaps?'

'Thank you, but no.'

'You don't want me to see what your mechanism is,' Henry conceded.

'Come to the show. Next week.'

'Is it a magic lantern? I've heard of them but I haven't ever seen one.'

'They're primitive.'

'Ah! So it is an optical instrument.'

'You'll spoil the effect for yourself.'

'But I can keep your secret,' Henry assured him.

'Not from yourself. The best trick is the one that catches us and exposes us to ourselves.'

Henry wasn't sure what Tourneau meant. The two men stood beside the forsythia noisy with hidden birds. The North Star hung like a single firework in the indigo of new night.

'But why would I want to trick myself? How is that a method of scientists?'

'Ah,' Tourneau became friendly. 'The greatest science is the discovery of the soul's nature, its climate — which we can only uncover when we trick ourselves, and see the trick.'

'Of course you're only making me more curious by hiding what you don't want me to see.'

'Exactly.'

Henry grinned, exasperated. 'I believe that science is sharing knowledge.'

'No, science is tricking knowledge into being.' The showman began walking toward the road. Henry didn't follow. 'Exposing the current of electricity,' Tourneau continued, 'by tricking it to appear — with a string and a kite... We're all in the habit of false observation. We inherit ideas about what's true and what's false. Our charge in life is to undo those assumptions, which come from our untutored parents, our—'

'True. I agree.' Henry was excited, and followed toward the road. 'My father fought for freedom from the English. But is he free? He's a slave to the Puritan ideas of his ancestors. He can't think for himself. I am constantly undoing what I've learned from him.'

'Would you attend a lecture with me this evening?' Tourneau said abruptly.

‘I’d be pleased,’ Henry said.

‘It begins shortly.’

Then they were in a carriage — Tourneau rubbing his hands together and listening to Henry, who seized on the topic of false assumptions with gusto — while the carriage took them to the street of whores.

Tourneau called a halt.

‘The lecture is here?’ Henry said, discomforted.

‘In the cabaret.’ Tourneau pointed.

The door was narrow and low. Entering, Henry glimpsed a shabby parlor with a woman in veils. He followed Tourneau down steep stairs and found to his surprise a well-appointed cellar with crystal chandeliers and fine linens on the tables. The floor was swept clean, the stone walls painted a pattern of chartreuse and black, and all those in the room seemed to be men of standing, judging by their clothes. He felt he’d fallen through a trap door. This was a secret society.

‘Msr. Menard!’ Tourneau hailed a man with a mustache twisted into two wax spirals. ‘Meet my friend Henry. He is a Puritan American.’

‘Actually,’ Henry said with a flash of annoyance, ‘I’m not a Puritan, myself.’

Tourneau tsked, disbelieving. ‘You’ve undone everything your father and your father’s fathers have passed on to you?’

‘Well, of course not. I’m not *tabula rasa* but—’ ‘Etienne!’ Someone hailed Tourneau.

Henry stood there, abandoned in the middle of the argument.

Menard pulled at his whiskers and smiled. ‘Like many Libertines, our friend takes pleasure in provoking the innocents.’

‘I’m not an innocent.’

‘Your face — you have roses blooming, here and here.’ Menard touched each cheek.

Henry felt fresh blood rise to his face.

‘Come sit with me,’ Menard said. ‘I’ll tell you some stories about our friend. He was not always a master of men.’

‘Thank you,’ Henry said, bowing politely. ‘Perhaps later.’ Instead, he followed Tourneau. The group around the showman stopped their conversation when Henry approached, though not before he had understood that they were speaking of the ghost show. Tourneau was trying

to palm him off. Tourneau wanted to keep him from pursuing the question of the box with the protruding mechanical eyes. No one in America had this box.

‘I’ve interrupted.’ Henry smiled apologetically. The silence persisted. ‘Would you introduce me?’ Henry looked down from his height on Tourneau and waited, surprising even himself with his determination.

‘He has the manners of a farm animal, my American friend.’ Tourneau still failed to announce him.

‘My name is Henry Garland.’ Henry felt Tourneau look through him, appraising, before he conceded.

‘The ghost show,’ Tourneau began, ‘requires...’ He shrugged in the French way indicating all the words that wouldn’t suffice.

‘You’ll find I can be most discreet,’ Henry said.

‘Does the farm animal carry a large purse?’ asked a man in a brown vest. ‘That might solve our problems.’

At that moment, a voice announced the start of the lecture, saving Henry the embarrassment of having to confess to no purse, though he cursed himself inwardly. What opportunity had he lost by not saving and always spending? His father’s admonishments echoed back at him now with bitter irony.

But then he was no longer thinking of his father or Tourneau’s ghost show or thinking at all exactly because the whores from upstairs in the street appeared and all the men turned.

The women wore togas. The fabric was thin and their nipples showed brown and erect. Behind them, two boys in Roman dress with grapevine crowns followed, lips rosy and legs bare to the tops of their thighs.

The group promenaded to the front of the room where a man with an elegant narrow face stood quietly, pince-nez perched academically on his nose. He beckoned the women and boys to stand on crosses chalked on the floor to his left. On his right was a couch in rouge fabric.

The audience fell to their seats at the tables, where the cloths covered their laps. Henry found himself at a table with Tourneau and Menard. The lecturer removed his pince-nez, nodded at Tourneau and then began.

‘Some of you have heard of the ruins of the great city of Pompeii. Domenic Fontana, who was digging a new course for the river Sarno in 1599, may have been the first to see what we will demonstrate for you today.’



‘Fresco number one, please,’ the lecturer said to the whores and the boys.

To Henry’s astonishment, the woman on the far left slipped the toga off one shoulder to reveal a breast in its entirety. She also began to lift the skirt of the garment. Henry held his breath. His head swam with feeling, and he glanced behind him to see a room full of men, eyes riveted. A man moved quickly and stealthily down the steep stairs. It was the coachman — a servant observing his masters in this state.

One of the boys was kneeling before the woman with his face positioned directly before her skirt.

‘Further.’ The lecturer flicked his wrist at the hem. Henry saw the fork of her legs, with its light blond pelt. He saw the boy lean forward and press his lips to the open rose of the girl’s sex.

Someone in the back began the applause. One clap, then all at once. In the noise of it, Henry allowed himself a quick pinch under the table.

‘Observe,’ the lecturer said, ‘the phallus.’ He nodded at the boy, who twisted slightly so that the audience could see him. He was engorged.

‘Exactly like this.’ The lecturer, drew a frame with his hands around the tableau. ‘I saw this fresco myself, and it was only one of the walls. Gentlemen, dozens of such frescos are coming at last to light.’ He gestured now to the other couple. Henry’s ears roared with blood. The lecturer directed the woman to disrobe. She lay on the couch, completely nude. For long seconds, there was only silence. Observation. The lecturer — what was his name? — asked them to imagine the couch as a large, open, lustrous shell. This is how it was on the fresco: Venus on the half shell. The lecturer changed the model’s position by touching her lightly at the waist and then running his hand up to her shoulder, up the neck, until she reached with her arms up, hanging her wrists over the end of the couch, stretched out for all of them to see.

The show became a blur. It was going too fast. At one point, the lecturer positioned a woman on her knees on the couch and the boy approached her from behind. His hand shielded himself, but one could understand that he held his phallus directly to the woman’s sex. Then they held the pose, perfectly still. The opposite couple also mock-copulated, only on that side of the stage the woman positioned herself astride the man.

‘In the age of ecclesiastical domination, men reburied these frescos. They plastered them over to hide them from sight. Now, with help from your

society's generous contribution, we've been able to begin — only begin — a true excavation. Many suggest that we should let the city remain buried. However, while women and children and the base nature of the lower classes should be protected from our findings, we propose to create a secret museum...' he bowed, 'with your support.'

Applause thundered. Henry glanced again to the back. The coachman was gone.

The lecturer began to circulate among the tables, as did the women and boys, dressed again in their togas. Servants came down the stairs bearing trays of food. Henry's heart would not beat properly. He was served roast beef in a purple *jus*. The lecturer came to their table and Menard produced a velvet purse bulging with coins, giving the man several pieces of silver. Henry's skin went cold. He did not have anything to give. The arousal in his groin vanished, leaving a vicious ache.

'I will contribute also for our American guest.' Menard must have sensed Henry's panic and hesitation.

The lecturer gestured to an assistant. 'In thanks,' the lecturer said, 'some small mementos.' The assistant opened a sack and offered a handful of light, slim objects. Henry peered closer. Menard said, 'Give them to our friend.'

Tourneau nodded. 'He can be trusted.'

They were buttons. Ivory buttons about the size of coins. Carved on them were scenes from the frescos: lascivious, unchaste, depraved images of sexual congress that burned in Henry's hand later in his rooms at Marguerite Charon's. He held them, he looked at them, he relieved himself, and then he spent a long time lying awake, feeling the dark all around him. He understood that studying these frescos under the guise of science was a fine bit of sophistry. And yet he felt a sense of relief which was different from the physical release. The tension had been between his brows. He had used those muscles to keep his eyes focused and serious. Observing. He must have done so all evening long and now he lay with his eyes closed and his forehead smooth.

He'd lain with whores in harbor dens of Boston while a student. He realized now that he'd always kept his eyes firmly shut. What had he been afraid of seeing? He saw himself back in those nights, moving furtively. He recalled the instantaneous, nearly painful eruptions. He thought of

Tourneau's theory; so this was sexual knowledge, which he'd been tricked into seeing. This is what it looked like. For a few minutes, he committed what he'd seen to memory, giving each sexual position a letter and mentally filling the little boxes of a printer's tray, each letter in its own compartment — C, P. This too, was sophistry; as if he would ever forget! He was only allowing himself to look again: Cunt, Prick. At least he kept his mind focused on the whores and did not involve the girl in the gentleman's wig.

And yet, even in history, men had imagined such scenes as he did. There was a secret world where men admitted these acts.

Henry felt torn between guilt and curiosity. If he could only talk with William about it — William Channing, who'd been two years ahead of him at Harvard, had seemed a thousand years ahead in how to reason. How to think something through. William never hesitated in defense of knowledge. William was a victim of fits. He had epilepsy. He always said. *If you only knew how precious reason is. Lose it. Feel it vanish from you as your body convulses and you'll never again doubt that God's greatest gift is the peace of true knowledge. Of observation and reason.*

Sex was a kind of convulsion. How good, then, to see it at last with clarity. Henry got up from the bed and stood at the window, looking out. It was a relief to understand it. If he'd gone home on the *Victorious*, he'd never have entered this world. He would have been a child, with his childish ways, for all his life. He would have crept around in the dark of ignorance, not knowing even what a woman looked like. Thank God for Tourneau. His father's voice in him cast Tourneau as a demon — but Henry would be free. He would think freely. He would go back to Tourneau and learn all he could.



On the morning of the ghost show, Chjara washed all the heavy drapes in Victor Ravenaugh's house. The naked windows let spring's green light pour in through the grime. She washed the glass. Too bright! — the merchant complained, and she wrapped his eyes in a lavender-scented scarf. She sang, in varying order, all the songs she knew of betrayed lovers — an extensive repertoire in any language — but her anger at Jude had gone stale and kept forgetting to insinuate itself into the notes. She looked forward to the ghost

show with more enthusiasm than she'd felt in a long time. Curé Tumasgiu had taught her that the Greeks felt *enthousiasmos* to be a form of possession, or *enthous*, 'having the god within'. Which god possessed a person in *enthousiasmos*, the priest warned, was not immediately obvious. Was it Pan? Jupiter? Athena? Was it foolish or wise? Enthusiasm could lead to sin as readily as to virtue.

Chjara took a carpet outside to beat it. With each thwack of the broom, the carpet released its fibres, its dandruff, its years of dust. *Jude was a coward.* Thwack. *Tumasgiu, too.* Thwack. *Which of those gods was modest?* Thwack. *Obedient?* Thwack, thwack, twack. She knew her sin was arrogance. *To be admired in childhood*, one of the books in the priest's library announced, *addicts a man to the nectar of attention. Forever is he a slave to others.* The book told the story of one of the Roman emperors. Caligula, was it?

She wanted to wear the excellent pink shirt that the Madam Marguerite Charon had sent by carriage. The package with a note in flourishing hand included pantaloons, and jackboots of good leather that fit snugly up her calves to her knees.

When she'd beaten the carpet so much that its original color was restored, the dust conveyed to the bushes and flowers, she found Victor Ravenaugh curled on the cold stone floor, his mouth gaping in silent terror. He had heard cannon fire; had she heard it? With his yellow fingernails biting into the flesh of her arm, he whimpered like a child. She relented in her fury toward him and comforted him with the lullaby for Piero, a song she knew the merchant liked and which she generally withheld from him. Then she cut his nails.

At night, when it was time for her to leave and for him to go to bed, he refused his opium.

'You will not sleep,' she said, alarmed. 'You cannot sleep without it.'

'I will wean myself.'

'But not tonight,' she said. She prepared his pipe.

'Tonight is not a good night?' He wanted to agree; he wanted his pipe.

'We'll begin tomorrow, after a quieter day. No carpet beating, no cannon fire.'

He refused. Why this night of all nights? She paced.

'Read to me,' he said.

'I can't.'

‘You’re literate,’ he reminded her. ‘Read to me so I can sleep, and you can go.’

She started. He knew she planned to go?

His eyes were crafty. ‘You’ll find I’m not a fool.’ He handed her the Bible. He did not tell her that her whorishness aroused him, that his stupor diminished at the sight of her. He looked forward to being strong enough to discipline her. ‘Read to me,’ he repeated. ‘Your soul is in peril.’

‘And yours?’ Chjara sneered, watching him scratching at his hen’s eggs, pulling there.

She opened the book. She read him the names of the sons of Israel: *Jacob and his son, who went to Egypt: Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn. And the sons of Reuben: Honoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi...*

‘A good soporific.’ He winked, conspiring with her.

She wanted to run from the house. She wanted no part of any understanding with him.

*And the sons of Simeon: Jenuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman.*

Pages later, he wasn’t falling asleep. He was becoming agitated. His skin twitched. She knew he would need his pipe. She kept reading. He moaned. His pain was real. He sweated with the effort of resisting temptation. Her heart was moved and yet she resisted it.

*Every soul, no matter how low, deserves a loving hand.* Her father had said these words to her, long ago, her hand in his, on a coach ride in the country. He had pointed to a suckling lamb and ewe with their good shepherd alongside. Order was God’s will, and peace reigned in the obedient breast.

Chjara wheeled the old man into the bed chamber, where the light was already gone behind the shades. A candle burned. She sat beside him. She read more. When at last he begged for his drug, he wanted twice his normal dose. She gave it to him. She stuffed the pipe to overflowing.



A new sign pointed through the repaired gate of the former Capucin convent. People arrived from all directions. Out of sight, deep in the catacombs, the scientist and showman Etienne-Gaspard Tourneau finished

his preparations. He opened the side panel of his phantascope, and checked the level of whale oil in the lamps. Their Argand design concentrated the light to as much as ten candles in strength, and allowed the wicks to burn steadily and with little attention. Then he rolled the phantascope into position behind the screen. Everything was in place. Even his idiot assistant, Fitz-James, would have a hard time fouling up the phantasmagoria, or so Tourneau fervently hoped.

Chjara hurried. The Batavian Ludwig van der Lande, the unwelcome suitor of Marguerite, hurried from another direction. He trailed a cloud of indigestion invisibly in his wake. And a dog which would later surprise them all came along another path. On four feet, one so sore it required frequent licking, the petite terrier made her way under bushes and around benches to arrive at the convent.

It was impenetrably dark. A drunk laughed. Chjara stopped in the middle of a street, almost there, and decided to return to the merchant. What if she'd given him too much and he died at her hand? She turned back, and then turned forward. Back. It was not too much. He'd taken many times more in a day.

But not all at once, her conscience advised her.

Henry paced in the Salle de Philosophie Naturelle on the main floor of the old convent, where exhibits demonstrated various scientific theories and arts. Tourneau had assigned him the task of explaining the new geology to the audience while they gathered. In front of him, one Parisian after another pressed a leaf into modeling clay. Then they compared it to the row of leaf fossils. *Voilà*. At one point, Henry's hand happened in his pocket on one of the ivory buttons. Surreptitiously, he pressed the button into the clay. The carving of the copulating couple stared back at him. Fitz-James approached, and Henry wiped over the mud with the back of his hand. Fitz-James passed by.

Henry didn't see the girl though he stood taller than everyone. He knew the masculine clothes that Marguerite had sent to the house. He watched for the pink shirt.

The crowd grew restless. They should not have to wait so long. The assistant, Fitz-James, urged them toward a painting by Caravaggio. The bowl of apples in the painting looked so real, one could imagine tasting them, one could imagine that the insect — there, on the stem — did the

insect move? The panel beneath the painting said: *trompe l'oeil*, tricks the eye. Caravaggio's was an art of deception, Tourneau had written in a note. Did they agree? Then Madame Marguerite Charon arrived. Immediately the showman emerged from wherever he'd been hiding. The air livened. Everyone looked to see the beautiful widow who wore a pale silk cloak flecked with indigo. Henry started toward them.

Inside the cloak, Marguerite felt as cold as if she stood disrobed. Where was her young suitor, the girl who would protect her as Amadour had Florida? Marguerite had not slept for nights in a row. She had dreamt of her son's gaping neck. She had not witnessed his death — she had been in the Bastille pleading with the terrorists for their lives — but in her dreams she saw the blade's fall. It was as if he still cried for her from the afterlife. Where had she been and why not beside him?

'Mama!' he cried from the gaping wound.

It was barely possible to live on. It was not possible to forget.

She would see him again in a figure of light — even headless. She would have the courage to see him as he was, in death, so he could also see her. So he could be comforted.

Henry didn't see the girl anywhere. He kissed Marguerite on her cheeks. 'I will be your companion.'

She smiled, wan.

Tourneau led them to the next room, which was actually a hallway wide enough to allow a procession of Capuchin nuns, and long as a ship's deck. At the far end, a fat wooden door with black hinges tempted them with the sign: Salle de la Phantasmagoria. Hieroglyphics covered the door.

With trepidation, they descended the winding stairs to the catacombs, the place of the dead. There were sarcophagi and marble statues on pedestals. Pews from the original chapel upstairs had been set among the coffins. Along the walls, only two torches burned, but they burned brightly.

The air tasted of lime. As they settled into place, Fitz-James took the first torch and plunged it into a bucket of water. Sulfur rose, and steam. Henry thought the girl wouldn't come. Feeling disappointment like a burden, he noticed Marguerite's expression. It was as if she sat on needles.

Marguerite had taken a middle pew, Ludwig van der Lande elbowing Henry aside. Tourneau ascended his soap box in front of a black curtain. He did not notice that Henry found a place, not on a pew, not where

assigned, but on a low stone crypt directly beside the muslin curtain. While Tourneau was distracted, Henry tried to peer around it, only to see what looked like another gauzy curtain beyond — the white screen he'd seen earlier. Where was the machine? He looked in vain.

Chjara arrived at last on the main floor, but she found no one else and heard nothing because of the thick stone separating her from the crowd below. It was cold and only a single guttering candle remained in the exhibit of natural philosophy. She took the candle and walked around. A dummy in the corner gave her a start but she poked at the labels pinned over the location of the organs. She had read Aristotle and recognized the four humors of melancholic and phlegmatic, choleric and sanguine. She looked around and sighed. Where was everyone? She'd missed out, clearly. Her indecision had cost her both the show and the virtue of staying by Ravenaugh. 'You try my patience,' she said frankly to God. Was she in charge of leading Victor Ravenaugh out of his misery? Should she have refused Ravenaugh the dose he requested? She didn't believe she should blindly do what men told her to do — men with their various humors hardly seemed a reliable source of wisdom in this new world of choice. Where was the duchess? Chjara started to leave. Then she saw the door at the end of the hall.



Tourneau's assistant doused the remaining torch. The flame hissed as it hit the water. The dark was a sudden presence that took the audience into a too-close embrace. It was much darker than night — with not a star, not a glimmer of light.

'Imagine,' Tourneau whispered, 'an Egyptian maiden, practicing the ancient art of necromancy. She summons...' he gave his s's extra sibilance, 'the ghost of her dead lover. Imagine her sentiments, as she beckons to the dead in the dark.'

Chjara appeared with her upheld candle, descending the stairs behind the showman — Chjara in pantaloons and a fine silk shirt that glowed pink.

'He is no ghost,' Ludwig objected for all to hear.

'Ah my friend... Amadour.' Marguerite rose, her slender shape just visible in the gloom of the theater.



Chjara made her way between the pews and tombs, excusing herself as she stepped around knees.

Henry watched her, riveted. Her face held none of her secret sorrow. He could see that she liked to be watched. His throat swelled; he was confused by her boyish beauty.

Tourneau resumed, furious at the interruption. From now on he would lock the door from the inside after the last guest had entered.

‘Imagine,’ he hissed, ‘a room without even a single candle light.’ He gestured to Chjara who gazed at this strange man. Had he colored his lips? They were very red. Or perhaps it was just the pallor of his skin.

Tourneau — who in fact wore white make-up, and dark wax on his lips — mimed the extinguishing of the candle.

And then it was dark again. Tourneau paused. The silence settled around them like water in a marsh.

Chjara heard the breath of others in the dark. She felt her existence among strangers. The duchess placed her hand on Chjara’s knee. Beside the duchess, Ludwig van der Lande cringed, impatient to reveal the true class of this ‘prince’.

Tourneau let the silence unnerve them. Everyone waited. For the briefest moment, Chjara heard a sound like an organ’s pedals and then a note rang out, a single note, pure as air, half scream, half sigh. The sound touched her neck, electrifying it.

Next to her, Marguerite shivered as if she’d drunk liquid ice. Were the ghosts coming now? Marguerite took Chjara’s hand. She believed the door could open between the seen and the unseen, if only she could banish her fear and ask the truth of God. Please God, let them be whole. Let her see them whole. Her soul flailed. God would not be kind to her because she was bitter. God knew her heart and if He forgave man his failings, who was she to suffer migraines, to withdraw from the world in her grief, to be aloof?

The music had no location. It was all around them, making them uneasy, and while they looked up and around trying to place it, a figure appeared in the air. A figure of light. She hovered. In her extended palm, motes of dust showed themselves.

They shrank into their pews. Henry pushed back against the wall in alarm. He did not know what he had expected but he had not imagined this. The figure looked as if she’d dropped from heaven, her expression

merciful and kind, like a painting he'd seen of the Virgin Mary. But he couldn't think long about how it was done because she began to move. She came closer. Her feet grazed the shoulders of men in the first rows. She passed through them, her hand brushing a face.

'Oh, courier,' Tourneau said. 'Oh, messenger, bring to us the occasion of our transformation.'

The figure hesitated. Vanished. Blackness.

Marguerite sprang to her feet. 'Cretin! You drove her away with your ridiculous babble,' she cried.

'Wait,' Tourneau said.

But Marguerite rushed forward. 'I beseech thee,' she said to the air, 'Mother Mary, full of grace.'

The dark and the music encircled them. The air vibrated.

Tourneau spoke softly. Gently. 'It is illusion,' he said. 'It is the science of optics.'

They did not believe him.

'Yet what we feel — is that illusion? Do we beggar ourselves,' he said, 'if we desire to live the felt life, and then succumb to illusion? This is what you must ask yourselves. We feel love. We see Mother Mary alive in the air above us. We feel fear and love. The source of these feelings can be the illusion of optics or — or! Ask yourself, is life itself a grand illusion? Does the soul itself contain an optical device, given us by God? Come with me,' Tourneau said. 'Let us, with Macbeth, see his friend Banquo in the age of credulity. On the stage of Shakespeare, in the dark ages before science.'

A man appeared. Tall. His head near the ceiling, his feet near the ground. It was as if a mortal had been stretched, elongated. He towered over them. He was full bodied, with a front and a middle and a back, in full dimension and yet transparent.

He moved, approaching slowly. The light quavered.

Marguerite stepped forward, pulling Chjara with her.

'Dear heart,' Marguerite said.

Marguerite looked up at the figure with such hope, Chjara's own throat tightened. Tears welled in Marguerite's eyes.

In the dark, the others perceived a woman's shape approach the shuddering man of insubstantial light. They would not be so brave.

'Dear heart, you are there,' Marguerite said.

‘Be careful,’ Ludwig van der Lande said.

‘You wait for me.’ Marguerite addressed the figure with such relief in her voice, everyone heard it.

The music layered notes sweetly together and the figure fluttered, it faded, it became more gray dust than white light. Marguerite wept, a gulp of feeling, and in the audience others cried out too. He was gone and the music pleaded for grace. Oh, let us still know each other beyond the veil. Chjara heard the feeling in the notes then Marguerite swooned, and Chjara caught her. The duchess’s skin was moist, sickly. Chjara knelt. Pebbles in the floor cut into her knees. Marguerite stirred and breathed as if awakening, then turned toward her like a lover on a shared pillow. ‘We must not fail. We must be more true.’

Behind them, the audience pressed forward, listening, hoping for a return of the man of light. Instead, with the dark sunk onto them again, the showman spoke quietly. ‘It is not real. It is not a man we know. Macbeth says to the ghost of Banquo, *Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves shall never tremble*. I urge you, my fellow liberated Frenchmen. Stay your nerves. Hear me as I lead you through the ages of darkness.’

They looked up, expectant.

Henry noted the sound of discarded props. Chjara led Marguerite back to their seats.

‘Next we shall see Pandora,’ Tourneau said.

The image, at first illegible in the space above them, clarified itself: a young girl with flowing hair and a sensuous mouth, standing by a small chest. Henry closed his eyes against the memory of the whore and the Roman boy. Pandora’s box grew larger. Then a new image appeared. The box had opened. Before they understood what was happening, a terrible creature flew out.

‘Pandora releases the demons inside us,’ Tourneau said. ‘Jealousy...’

They watched the horned creature — the image became clear — rise out of the box with an unsheathed knife and a vicious expression. Someone screamed.

‘Greed,’ Tourneau said. The jealous devil vanished, replaced by a glutton — fat, spit dribbling from his mouth, eyes hollow with need.

Pandora returned with the box. Chjara saw that Pandora’s feet were missing. She peered closer. It *was* illusion. She heard again the remarkable

sound of the musical instrument whose name she didn't know. The tones were stronger, louder. The walls of the catacombs themselves seemed to be a bowl of glass, carrying the sound round and round.

'I have shown you the most occult things natural philosophy has to offer, effects that seemed supernatural to the ages of credulity,' Tourneau said as Pandora disappeared. 'See now the only real horror. See what is in store.' He stepped away from the podium. He made them wait. They felt the cold and they stared at the place where the figure had vanished. Feet scraped. The dark was absolute. No man could see his neighbor.

A skeleton swung at them. Eye sockets empty. Hips vacant. It rushed — from nowhere to the body of a man in the front row. It covered him. It wore him like a cloth. The man rose, crying out, trying to brush it off.

Then it swirled, becoming a dervish of light, catapulted against one wall then another. It seemed to be seeking its next target. It sped over one head, paused over another.

It chose the Ludwig van der Lande. He stroked his mustache, covering his trembling lips. The mouth of light replaced his real mouth. Showed teeth and jaw.

Chjara was beside him. She stared into the light. It passed over Marguerite and drifted onto her. It landed on her hand, creeping over, settling on her body.

It had no heat, no substance. She did not doubt the life after death but this was not it.

'Death is the real horror,' Tourneau said.

Chjara raised her fingers. She passed her hand through the light. Nothing. She touched her breast. She felt her own breathing.

'Death awaits,' Tourneau repeated.

Chjara stared toward the showman's voice. She felt utterly alive. She ducked away from the skeleton — out of its light. Then back again. The audience saw her unafraid. Her own clothes, the princely shirt, the pants, were illuminated by the 'ghost'. The skeleton face was on her face, and she teased it, moving away and back, away and back. It could not keep up with her. She laughed. She could feel the people around her relax; their mood changed.

'It doesn't hurt,' someone said.

Chjara stuck her hand through the skeleton's bones.

‘Death is the real horror,’ Tourneau repeated, cursing again this person who had arrived late and who was now ruining the effect of his show, with his assistant’s unwitting aid.

The skeleton vanished. Chjara clapped. The audience joined in. A flint was struck: they saw light, the torch ignited again and the ugly assistant Fitz-James bowing with Tourneau at the front.



Marguerite led the throng up the stairs. She strode, her spine at last returned to her. The crook of her neck, where she had a thousand times felt herself guillotined, was healed. In the long hall with the statue, Marguerite allowed Tourneau to take her side. Ludwig once again was shunted aside.

‘You will tell Bonaparte: it is for the elevation of France, my petite repertoire.’ Tourneau’s pleading was unseemly. He was so intent on her, he didn’t notice that two people remained below.

A yapping filled the long, cavernous hall. All attention turned back. Yap, yap, yap. Was this another illusion? They’d had quite enough. But Tourneau turned as well with an expression of irritation and surprise. Back at the heavy door with the hieroglyphics, a small dog chased Ludwig. The Batavian’s trousers smelled intriguing. Some time before, another dog had marked this pant leg unbeknownst to the minister but known to his manservant who’d thought, justice done. Besides, the washing was only a week away. The little terrier now made his own claim to the trouser. Ludwig flailed at the dog. He lashed out with his cane. The dog yelped, its anguish echoing in the hall.

‘Stop! You horror of a man.’ Marguerite rushed to the dog’s defense. Tourneau hurried beside her. ‘You are mistaken, Monsieur Tourneau,’ she said, grabbing the dog and holding it to her chest. ‘Death is not the real horror. It is man.’ She spat the words at Ludwig. ‘Man abuses others. That is the true injustice of life.’

‘Of course,’ began Tourneau, ‘but...’

She interrupted. ‘Napoleon doesn’t care about your phantasmagoria. You may proceed unmolested. But you are mistaken: man is the true horror.’ She patted the dog’s ears and glared at the Batavian.

‘You abuse me,’ Ludwig said, ‘but I’m not the one who is deceiving you.’

‘I’m not deceived,’ Marguerite said.

‘Your Amadour is no prince.’

‘He is a girl, costumed. I know that. A daughter of a good family...’

‘Not that.’ Ludwig interrupted. ‘A servant.’

‘She is not.’

‘A body servant. I’m certain of it.’

‘All right then, she’s a servant.’ Marguerite disguised her feelings, which surged in a confusing array. She despised the note of triumph in the Batavian’s voice even while the familiar fear rose inside her. She saw the faces of the mob who’d taken Yann: thick faces, common, women as brutal as the men. She knew in her heart that God wanted her to be forgiving. She had just seen beyond the veil and the girl had held her in that moment.

‘She’s a servant,’ Marguerite repeated, ‘but she does not beat a dog. We must have more goodness, sir, no matter what our station in life.’ She turned her back on him. She looked for Chjara. The dog licked her face. Marguerite looked at its sorry eyes and flea-bitten fur. ‘I will call you Justice, yes?’ she said to the dog.

Now where was her escort? Chjara, Amadour. The little servant.

## Chapter Four

Chjara could not sleep. She lay in bed on the third floor, the merchant snoring safely below her, and she experienced the most extraordinary sensation of electricity. Electricity, the scientist in the park had said, was a force unseen until the lightning bolt exposed it. Then it would travel the length of the sky and into a ring on a kite or anything else in its path. She had felt it herself, she had touched electricity in the park, and now she felt it again. Here, alone, lying perfectly still, she felt kindled. Alive: like a bloom struck by sunlight.

She was not doing anything. She was not touching herself in any way. What was this feeling? Was it love, was it lust? With Jude, she had experienced a low fever of delight, of curiosity. But not this. This affected even her teeth! She laughed at their chattering. Did other people feel this? Did they feel their bodies vibrating? It was like air moving through an organ pipe. Only she was the pipe. Or the air. Or both.

She laughed again and rolled on her side, and asked herself, how had it begun; what had happened *exactly*?

The showman with the red lips had demanded that everyone return to the main salle. But when the musician, a small stooped man, departed from a curtained alcove, Chjara had ducked through the curtains and hidden. She listened as people climbed the wooden stairs. Would she be discovered? She couldn't hear well enough. She pulled off the wig that was part of her costume. Her hair fell from its bun. She had shivered, just as she was shivering now in the bed (was that when it had begun?).

Then a spit of fire from the flagon of light had landed on her cuff, and the ember burned through to her skin. She stood there, shaking with the cold and the illicitness of hiding, alone (she had thought!). She had the sensation of dew landing on her skin from the close and cave-like atmosphere of the catacombs, and also of heat from within like a flush, so there it was: hot and cold and trembling, and watching an ember transgress her skin and reveal a little of the bloody matter beneath. She observed the pain in silence. Had she ever noticed before that a flick of fire was so much

like ice and then like the needle-nose of an insect boring into her and up her arm and into the source of the nerves? The music had been a little like that — there had been pain in the pleasure of it, the way the sound seemed to reach inside her, under the skin.

There she stood, both admiring and horrified at the innerness of her own body, while outside the curtain, the room emptied (or so she thought) and it was quiet.

The musical instrument was now the only presence in the alcove, and it seemed more alive than any ghost. It stood on four legs. The harpsichord-like case was shut tight, and the flickering torchlight reflected in the polished wood. She opened the lid and saw for the first time the row of glass bowls that were the inner workings of the glass harmonica. Nested into each other along an axle, with cork separating them, were thirty-seven glass bowls of descending size

And they were colored.

In the dim light, the low C was the red of a sun-faded poppy, the D and E were orange fading to yellow, F was a milky sea-green. Near the top of the octave, the B was a dark, drenched lavender. She touched each one, from the largest on the left to the smallest on the right. She sat on the stool and her feet found the pedals which were much like the ones that powered the bellows of the Bastia organ. These pedals spun the axle which in turn spun the bowls, and she saw then how the sound was made.

Every child had blown air across the lip of a bottle but not every child had access to fine crystal. Among the priest's table settings, there were wine glasses that her mother kept to a mirror's shine. At some time she had heard the priest and his guests make a tuneless music, amid drunken laughter, by running wetted fingers around the rims of the glasses.

Chjara pumped the treadle. She set the bowls spinning. How fast they turned! Then she saw a dish of water to the side and she dipped a fingertip, as in the cathedral font, and she touched a spinning glass. A vibration shot up her arm to her neck. She gasped. The note stopped in a squawk — she would need to flatten her fingertips and present them to the bowls with a touch as light as a mother exploring the thin skin over the hole in her baby's skull.

She moistened her fingers and she thought of Marguerite falling into her arms — this woman of strength and position who had wept with fear and then relief, the feelings transferring themselves from her damp skin into



Chjara's. Now Chjara wanted to summon the dead and touch the living; she wanted this power herself, and she wanted to let the music travel up her arms. She parted her lips, and drew breath from deep within herself.

But at that moment the curtains in the alcove parted. A man stood there. The American. He looked at her dripping fingers suspended over the wet bowls of the glass harmonica. His face was afire with interest. She heard in her mind the shivering, silvery sound that was like music on tiptoes — music barely touching the earth from its home in the ethereal realms.

She remembered the sound now while lying in the bed and she thought, maybe it had begun when the music played during the ghost show — and not with him, and she permitted herself to think this while she ran her fingers softly over the skin of her arms up to the curve of her neck and along the clavicle where the sheet tucked her demurely in. She felt the most delicious tingling like a prickly rain. The feeling shot through her to all the places under the sheet as well and she might as well have been elevated, half-floating in the bed.

What allowed this to happen?

But she didn't want to think. She wanted to feel, and what she felt was different from the ordinary world; it was very like the moment when you fall asleep. One minute you are thinking, and the next, the mind drifts away and there is a falling, a tumbling from the normal world into the dream one.

'You have no right to be here,' Henry had said, discovering her, but instead of scolding, he seemed amused.

'I don't. Do you?' she said, tilting her head.

He pointed behind him to the padlocked phantascope, Tourneau's ghost-making machine. 'I feel like a common thief. I've been trying to break the locks.'

He looked only moderately apologetic.

He was in his prime, tall enough to have to duck under the low ceiling, with eyes that rested comfortably on her, not darting away but intent and curious.

Then she noticed his lips, which were rounded, slightly pursed, and as red as if they were painted on a fresco.

She answered his questions, which now she didn't remember; they talked about her playing the cathedral organ. He walked toward her while she sat there cupping her hands over the moist, shiny glasses, feeling the presence

of the sound waiting to happen. He said, 'Are you also a thief? What do you steal?' He leaned close enough to lift her hand. His touch electrified her and she did not hide the sensation from him. She met his eyes without shame until he was the one who pulled his hand away, and she laughed.

And because of Marguerite, she would meet him again. Tomorrow. She would formally meet Henry the American tomorrow.

But now she would not think of him again; she would think of Marguerite who was so good to her. After about a quarter of a minute she was back to Henry and the feeling of falling, which made her breathe so shallowly that she was hardly breathing at all.

She threw off the covers and sprang out of bed. She was going to dress and go outside, regardless of the night. With one sock on, she realized Ravenaugh would probably be slumped in his chair by the front door like a spider in his nest, his eyes slitted and watching. She pulled off the sock and climbed back into bed.

The old man sensed Chjara's aliveness. He sniffed at her and drank at her almost — drawing in the sight of her like some healing potion. Victor Ravenaugh was getting better. There was no longer any doubt. He was asking for cheeses. He wanted to work daily on his steps in the park. He wanted her to minister to him at night — in which case she filled his pipe very full, but tonight he had stuck with his resolve to smoke only a little. He had also written Curé Tumasgiu. He refused to let her see the contents of the letter.

Chjara contemplated Ravenaugh's recovery and she contemplated the force inside her that could awaken a stupefied, consumptive old man. I'm like a spring of water, she thought. No wonder men are afraid of women. She pictured Victor's ravaged body and then she pictured how full Henry was in his clothes, and she imagined how she could awaken him. There was nothing thin or wind-worn about him, and now she twisted in her bed again, turning on the other side, then around to the first side again, because she would not allow herself to become preoccupied with him; she would think of Jesus instead. Or Marguerite.

She remembered a moment — half a moment, a sight she had almost not seen — which was her mother handing Curé Tumasgiu a stack of clean bedclothes. Her mother stood on a stair step, eye to eye with the curé, which was unnatural, Chjara had thought at the age of ten. She saw that

her mother was not stooped, not bent, but erect, and the poofs of bright fresh linens in her hands were like blooms, and her mother's hands were rosy and tender against the linens, so human as almost to stain the white.

Her mother smoothed the soft surface of the cloth and Curé Tumasgiu watched the movement of her mother's hands. Then the priest laid his hand on top of her mother's. Her mother shivered as if she'd been doused with water from head to foot.

Was that the electricity also? In her mother?

Chjara hunched down in the bed, forehead to knees under the covers, and refused her mother the feelings she'd found in herself. It couldn't be, it shouldn't be — but what should be?

It would be better to think of Henry than of her mother's feelings for the priest. She pictured Henry's lips and she pictured him kissing her — the thought alone bursting the confines of her willpower and she lay there, paralyzed with desire, and carried away by her fantasies, which were much freer than memory and not at all interested in what had begun, when, or why. A bolt of feeling shot through her, arching her fingers, firing her heart, galloping her breath — this was truly like that electricity in the park.

Lying in her bed on the third floor, remembering the electrical charge that had traveled from hand to ungloved hand, Chjara decided that they were all of them like the electrician's 'Leyden Jar'. They all had the power to affect each other and to lift other souls off their feet. She tickled her arm again with her fingertips. The little disturbance along the nerves was both uncomfortable and pleasant. Such feeling connected people to each other and to the heavens. The same current had traveled up her wrist to her neck when she'd played a single note on the glass harmonica. What if we are God's musical instruments? she thought, the idea coming as a revelation that made her shiver and flush, both. What if God did not mean for us to be modest?

Even with the idea, she touched the electric current. The mind, too, could be a conduit. She shuddered simply while reasoning, not touching or feeling or smelling or seeing. Thoughts too could carry the force of electricity, if they were full of life. She wondered at this idea — we are God's instruments — and she vowed to live by the conviction that what made us feel more alive was good. Yes, one could know goodness. It wasn't confusing. She didn't have to be indecisive. She only had to follow the electricity inside

her, which was a force unseen until music or love exposed it.

She tossed and turned and the light of day refused to come. When she slid into sleep at last, her mind worked still. In it, a tune began to form. When she awoke, its sound was on her lips and then vanished, as dreams do.

Later, many years afterward, when she was more circumspect and had weathered already the reactions to what would be called her Sensationalist philosophy, she would recall this moment of discovery without explicit reference to *la jouissance* and her acute electrical feelings for Henry. Instead, she would repeat: we are God's musical instruments. We please Him when we allow the world to make us ring, when we are kindled with aliveness.



Anticipating Chjara's arrival, Henry and Marguerite sat outdoors in the garden though the weather was damp. They waited on two opposing benches. Henry's had an iron inscription in curling script that read, *The life of man in nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.* —Thomas Hobbes. The other said, *Man was born free and he is everywhere in chains.* —Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rust had obscured the lettering, which was nearly a half-century old.

Henry felt his lip twitch. His conscience seemed to be manifest there; a tic flagellated him with its tiny, ticking motion. He didn't know which was worse: being hardly able think of anything but the scenes from Pompeii, or being hardly able to tear his thoughts from the soft lips and fine hair and blooming essence of that girl in the catacombs. Of course, he thought of them both together. At the moment of seeing her, he'd had a vision of her naked, on the rouge half shell.

'She is a house servant,' Marguerite announced. Marguerite also seemed nervous, her hands clasping and unclasping.

'What do you mean, a house servant?'

'Ludwig informed me. I didn't believe him so I knocked at the door of her house. I was met there by an old man. "She washes me," he said, "here..." and Marguerite pointed down. She shuddered. 'Despicable man. A clothier. A common merchant.'

Henry stared at Marguerite. He didn't like to admit his own dashed hopes. Chjara was not a wealthy daughter? Also, his own father was a

‘common merchant’. Marguerite knew this. In his mind, he couldn’t sort out the criss-crossing prejudices, his own included. He still wanted to see her.

At that moment, the door was pushed open and one of Marguerite’s servants, Françoise, appeared with a tray of tea and *petits fours*. Henry and Marguerite stared at her. Françoise felt their looks; did she have some stain on her apron? She brushed herself off.

‘Thank you,’ Marguerite said.

Françoise curtsied as she went.

‘In America, servants can become landowners.’ Henry heard the false cheer in his voice. He remembered his Harvard landlord admonishing him: ‘Only cads seduce the maids. After the first pleasure, you’ll have nothing in common.’ Now his heart seemed to hesitate in his chest.

‘What will we talk about with her?’ Marguerite was exasperated. ‘Instead of inviting her for tea, I should have taken her to some other event, some other...’ her gloved hand waved in the air, ‘scientific demonstration. We will embarrass her. What kind of conversation can we possibly have? I should cancel the invitation.’ She rose.

‘Wait,’ Henry said. ‘Look.’ He pulled open the bag he’d brought with him. He held up a raccoon hat, complete with the long tassel of its striped tail.

Marguerite recoiled.

‘My father sent it.’ Henry rose and crossed to her bench. ‘May I?’ He was poised with the hat over her head and she nodded, but at that moment, the new dog Justice ran out from the bushes. It leapt

up into Marguerite’s lap and tried to defend her from the raccoon.

Marguerite laughed.

Henry sat next to her. He thought of her fear of commoners, which she wanted to overcome. ‘She would have been a child when the blade fell,’ he spoke quietly.

‘Of course,’ Marguerite said.

He retrieved a second hat from the bag. ‘My father wants me to take these to England. He sent them in October but I’ve only just received them.’

‘Ah, so you are not expected at home yet, after all.’

‘I’m not. Our letters crossed at sea. My father says there’s a man in Manchester who can make fabric continuously with a water-powered loom. I’m to show these hats to the man’s daughter in London.’ He did not mention that he had another errand in London, given him by Tourneau

when he'd told the showman he was going.

The doorbell rang and Henry pulled on the hat. He looked at Marguerite primping hers into place. The expression of endurance had disappeared from behind her eyes. He knew she liked the girl very much too; there was some force of life in her, she'd told him after the ghost show.

Now Marguerite smiled at him.

The Batavian government minister appeared, led by Françoise. Their faces fell.

Ludwig van der Lande, who had waited fourteen days for an invitation, who came now uninvited, saw the American, and the target of his affection. Both looked at him with disappointment.

They wore the most ludicrous matching hats.

He bowed and in the bow disguised his own exhausted sigh.

Ludwig felt he had not earned this hostile reception. He hadn't slept well. He only slept well inside his own bed. He had not slept well, therefore, for two months and thirteen days, not since he'd arrived in France.

'I come to ask you for a private promenade.' He flourished his distinctive Dutch hat.

'We're awaiting another guest,' Marguerite said.

'Who is that?' Ludwig asked.

Henry sensed Marguerite hesitate.

'We are practicing our democratic civility. We've invited the servant and citizen of the South, Chjara Vallé.'

Ludwig tried to disguise his feeling. Nevertheless, his face expressed abhorrence and annoyance. 'Perhaps you could ask your other guest to wait a moment or two? We could walk in your garden.'

'I think not,' Marguerite said.

Ludwig began to pace. The damp, which was not yet rain but which had condensed on the roof overhang, dripped on his collar.

'I beg of you to consider my marriage proposal,' he blurted out.

Marguerite saw that he sweated. 'You have no feeling for me.

Even a servant can show more genuine feeling than you, good sir,' she said with pity in her voice.

'Chjara Vallé is an accomplished musician, you know,' Henry said.

'What?' Marguerite had the dog on her lap. She stopped patting it and looked at Henry, startled.

‘She played the organ at the Cathedral of Sainte Marie in Bastia, Corsica — to great acclaim, she said.’ Henry smiled, repeating the compliment she’d given herself.

‘When did you discover this?’

Marguerite sat forward with more interest than she’d shown during the conversation so far with Ludwig, a fact Ludwig noticed.

Henry told her more about his conversation with the girl in the catacombs. He found it hard to shake the image of the erotic expression on her face when he’d parted the curtains and found her, eyes closed, hands descending over the bowls.

‘She could play the glass harmonica if only she had the opportunity, she claimed. It would be easy for her. I politely disagreed. I said the water quality alone required a certain mastery.’

‘But that’s irrelevant,’ Ludwig said, meaning the whole turn in the conversation.

‘No.’ Henry faced the Batavian minister. They would have a battle of wills over this, if necessary. ‘If the water is too hard, the sound grates. If the temperature is too low, or the fingers are chilled, the sound becomes illegible.’

‘Illegible,’ Marguerite repeated. The dog leapt from her lap and disappeared.

‘Ill-defined,’ Henry clarified.

‘How do you know all this?’

‘I tried it myself in Boston. Ben Franklin invented it, I believe.’

‘I thought Mozart discovered it,’ Marguerite said.

‘He wrote music for it, but...’

‘It’s a ludicrous instrument,’ Ludwig sputtered. ‘It makes the sound of a cat howling. The only reason it’s popular is because servant girls swoon over its cheap draw at the heart strings.’

‘I swooned.’ Marguerite looked up at him, her face composed with amusement at his predicament. He had just called her a servant girl.

The Batavian exhaled loudly, covering his eyes for a moment. Then, to their surprise, he knelt before Marguerite.

‘I don’t know what is in your heart. I won’t demand to know.’ He was a small reticent man but his eyes could soften with deep feeling, as now. He bowed his head. ‘We fear that Napoleon uses this peace to amass an army against us. We, the defenders of our National Assembly and I, ask you to

join your household with mine.’ He lifted his head. ‘I will not impose myself on you.’

There was a pause. His meaning hovered in the air.

Marguerite had gone pale.

‘We will be parents to prosperity and a continued peace,’ he said. ‘Those will be our offspring.’

She seemed to consider him for the first time.

‘You may continue to live as you wish,’ Ludwig said. ‘I’ll not interfere, including with...’ he waved his hand as if pushing away something disgusting, ‘if you have relations with your servants.’

‘Relations?’ Marguerite seemed not to understand.

There was another moment of silence.

‘What are you implying?’ Henry said.

At that moment, the doorbell rang. Chjara’s voice could be heard at the bottom of the stairs. Marguerite and Henry turned toward the sound, the tails on their hats flicking simultaneously.

The Batavian laughed nastily. ‘You lick your lips for her.’

‘Good sir!’ Henry said.

‘You compete for her,’ he continued. Disgust loosened his tongue. ‘You play with innocence, just as in *Dangerous Liaisons*. That book — it is the perfect French book, yes? I read it when I was only a boy and it was a scandal to read. Who would believe a gentleman and a lady would gamble on whether an innocent girl could be seduced? Deflowered. The real scandal is that you live it, you people.’

‘It’s time for you to leave.’ Henry rose. The Batavian’s face twitched. Henry’s lip, thank God, was idle. He stared into the man’s weak blue eyes.

The maid announced, ‘Chjara Vallé, Madam.’

They all turned. Chjara laughed at the hats, enchanted. She herself wore the Corsican finery that her mother had dressed her in for her departure, including the long, encircling, fine shawl with its turquoise trim. She curtsied to them. Ludwig glared at her.

‘He is just leaving,’ Henry said.

Ludwig van der Lande bowed to Marguerite, whose face he saw was white with displeasure. He rose, the fury replaced by a sudden and exquisite relief. He did not have to stay any longer. She had refused him. He didn’t have to see Napoleon again, that odious serpent who hated everything



that reason created. He left, walking lightly, feeling a paradoxical sense of victory in his defeat.

In the garden, Chjara wondered why Marguerite averted her eyes from her. She sensed Henry watching her. She counted to five before she lifted her eyes to him. When she did, instantly the electricity ignited.

‘Do you remember the question that the charlatan Tourneau posed during the ghost show?’ Marguerite removed the raccoon hat.

‘Which one?’ Chjara said, her eyes on Henry, her heart beating evenly. She was strong as a horse. She could gallop. She turned to Marguerite. ‘That man struck me as a font of questions and flowery language.’

Marguerite turned, her eyebrow arched. ‘Indeed he was. A veritable font.’ This servant really was uncommonly articulate. ‘The one I’m thinking of was this: do we succumb to illusions when we follow our feelings?’

She clapped her hands for the dog, Justice, but he didn’t come. ‘By illusions, I believe Tourneau meant his ghosts, which Henry tells me were created by means of some optical instrument.’ She herself, though, was thinking of the illusion of the gentleman from the South, of this girl disguised as a peer. Ludwig’s accusations of a ‘dangerous liaison’ were revolting, but Marguerite knew what such gossip would mean. She could no longer invite the girl to anything.

Chjara focused on this noblewoman who had fallen into her arms on seeing the figures of light. ‘You worry that the illusions misled you.’

‘Yes.’ Marguerite told herself firmly: the girl is an illusion. She is not what she appears.

‘You fear the sense of peace you found will be proved wrong.’ Chjara remembered how Marguerite had wept. She whispered, ‘You saw their heads restored to their shoulders — was that a lie?’

‘That’s not what I meant.’ Marguerite bristled. It was too personal a question from a servant.

‘But it wasn’t a lie,’ Chjara insisted. The lady’s expression was contorted, as if she’d seen or smelled something offensive. Chjara suddenly understood that she was failing a test. Would she be thrown out for being too bold? Oh God, should she be modest? She closed her eyes and felt still the happiness coursing through her. She summoned her courage. ‘You discovered something true in the illusion. Madam, don’t give up the feeling of peace. It comes to you from art, which is always artifice, which is always something

made, created, played...’ Chjara ran her fingers along an imaginary keyboard, ‘to bring you back from fear and loneliness to ecstasy.’ Chjara switched to Persian, quoting Al-Ghazali. In her mind, she spoke also to Tumasgiu, rolling the sounds on her tongue.

They gaped at her. Chjara picked up the raccoon hat.

‘What does it mean?’ Marguerite could not keep from showing her interest.

‘*Ecstasy means the state that comes from listening to music.*’ Chjara stroked the striped fur. The last time she’d uttered these words, she was about to be banished. ‘The ancients from Mesopotamia understood that strong feelings are the route to true knowledge of the spirit. Weak feelings destroy us. But ecstasy, especially when it comes from music or from love or from peace — this makes us pleasing to God. We are music to Him.’

For a moment no one spoke.

She would be sent away. She kept smiling while inside, she felt bludgeoned. Numb. It would happen again. Chjara extended her gloved hand in Henry’s direction. She would at least have one more moment. Her hand, which had already been trembling, seemed only to come more alive — like a divining rod — as she directed herself toward Henry.

‘Goodness announces itself to us by electrifying us. Do you agree... sir?’

Marguerite turned, and saw them riveted on each other. ‘It is a most unusual philosophy. A moral electricity?’

Even inches away from Henry, Chjara could feel the conduit of feeling open. It hummed. She watched Henry’s eyes grow fierce with desire. To prove her point, she pulled back a little. She turned away. She saw Marguerite observing. ‘The discovery of electricity confirms there is a force around us. Between us. You must have felt it with your husband,’ Chjara said.

Marguerite laughed, startled. ‘You are too bold.’

‘Am I?’ Chjara shrugged. Let them judge her then.

‘With my son,’ Marguerite admitted, ‘I did feel a sort of current.’ She pressed her hand to her heart. ‘There was an invisible force there — stronger than love. More... yes, more electric.’

The thought surprised Marguerite. She didn’t know what she meant exactly except that love was more real than it seemed. In this way, it was like the unseen forces that science so liked to expose.

She found herself looking at them — at Henry and Chjara — at the moment when they donned the matching hats. They looked back at her

with the striped tails swinging.

Henry's eyes were bright — electrified — and Marguerite saw that he pleaded with her. He too didn't want to forego this chance. She felt her heart quicken. She was fond of Henry the American. Evidently he was falling in love with this unusual young woman.

The dog padded out at last from the bank of tulips, which were now half eaten. One bit of yellow petal adhered to Justice's lips.

Marguerite picked up the dog, and pecked away the petal. She didn't look at Chjara. She thought of the Batavian's odious remarks and lifted her eyes. 'Henry tells me you are a musician?'

'Yes,' Chjara said.

'Do you have a patron?' she asked.

'No.'

Marguerite considered only for a moment. A patron plucked a musician from a lowly household. Gossip did not attend a patron's attentions. 'I will be your patron. So you must play for me. Henry, will you arrange it?'

'Yes,' Henry said.



Karl Leopold Roellig welcomed his three guests in a bathrobe, even though it was four in the afternoon. Roellig was a genius in his own estimation. In two years, he would be dead and his life's work would vanish except for a few compositions for the glass harmonica and his rambling, incoherent book on the subject of the instrument's effects on the nerves.

Now he had left his native Germany for springtime in Paris and found himself ignored. The letter he'd received from the American had been most welcome.

He scratched his head as he led them through the dark rooms of his street-level apartment, and cursed his bad luck. Why had he slept through most of the day and why was he now receiving these important guests in such a disreputable state?

Next door, behind the partition separating one apartment from another, was the neighborhood patisserie. That day, the baker Samu had unloaded sacks of grain. Fine flour sifted through the cracks in the wall and covered

the floor with white silt. Roellig walked ahead of his guests with a trail of dark footprints.

Chjara followed Roellig, then Marguerite, then Henry. Henry saw Chjara glance back with an expression somewhere between a smirk and a question mark: What a strange man! Welcoming them in his bathrobe in an apartment misted with flour!

For their part, the threesome was also dressed remarkably, in cloaks of fine spring wool, of matching length but different colors. Marguerite's was white, Henry's dove gray, Chjara's a dark heather, leaning from green to brown. They traveled in triplicate — Marguerite's way of flaunting her disregard for the Batavian's complaints about this 'dangerous liaison'. Word had already traveled to Napoleon about her renegade attitude, and she knew she was being closely watched.

In a bathrobe, then, and in over-warm coats worn to make a point, they marched through all the rooms of the narrow apartment, past the disheveled bed, to reach the courtyard garden. There, the glass harmonica perched on a mesa of well-tended moss.

'But it's cold outside,' Marguerite said. 'Shouldn't you keep it indoors?'

'It sleeps there,' Roellig pointed to a closet inside the apartment with a padlock hanging open.

'Overindulgence has made me the man you see before you.' He opened his bathrobe — Chjara gasped, Marguerite sniffed, and Henry kept his shock silent — but underneath were his clothes worn yesterday. He'd simply never undressed. His vest was crumpled and his sleeves a dirty gray.

'The proper temperature, you will find, is exactly necessary,' Roellig said.

'So why do you keep it outdoors,' Marguerite insisted, 'where it's subject to rain and cold and—'

He held his hand as if to stop the nonsense coming from her mouth. He shook his head, disappointed. 'Already you know better than I the conditions for proper playing of the armonica?'

'Armonica?' Marguerite said. 'Not harmonica?' she asked Henry.

'Harmonica,' Henry said.

'Armonica,' Roellig snapped. He closed his eyes. He sighed. Knowing the world was full of fools, he took his position at the instrument. Ceremoniously, he poured water from a porcelain cream pitcher into a tray painted with a tangle of roses. He dipped his hands into the tray and they

came up dripping.

His feet, meanwhile, had already been working the treadle. Out of sight of his watchful, restrained face, his feet pedaled with all the energy of a child leaving school. When his wetted fingers touched

down upon the wildly spinning bowls, all his body sighed.  
Sweet was the tone.

Chjara observed and heard a hundred things at once: the man's erotically stricken face; her friends' mute listening; the bird flapping away from the neighbor's tree; the shake of a leaf; the shake of her own substance, vibrating to the music. In the wet glass of the spinning bowls, she saw the reflected sky. She looked up where clouds drifted toward the point of sun as if blown there.

Roellig played a simple melody in A minor that was minimally decorated with eighth notes, and yet it was exuberant. In the middle, his composition allowed his left hand to abandon the steadying rhythm of arpeggio. The left followed the right in the melody and they danced a little together, like birds answering each other in the morning. Chjara absorbed where the notes were, how wide to spread the hand for a fifth, a fourth, a major third, a minor. At the same time, the dream melody from her sleeping hours pushed its way up into the folds of consciousness and sprang out as a *paghjella* she'd sung with her father when they rode out into the privacy of the countryside.

When Roellig finished, Henry and Marguerite clapped their gloved hands. Chjara, however, stripped her gloves off. Henry politely looked away. 'May I?' she said.

Roellig hesitated to relinquish his position at the magical armonica. Chjara rose onto the moss ledge. It hardly had room for two, so he had to make way.

He was agitated, tipping his noggin down, up, down like a nervous mouse. In this way, he bowed — part twitch, part agreement — yes, surely his student must have a turn.

Chjara pumped the treadle, which moved easily. Her mind also was easy — comfortable and hurried both, as it knew where it wanted to go. She heard all the notes of the three voices in the *paghjella*: the secunda, bassu and terzu. There was no melody as such. There was this chant, a versu — *like this* — which the secunda and terzu reiterated *like this*, and *like this*.

Chjara played the notes with her left and her right hands.

But the third voice was missing, the bassu. Now she repeated the secunda and the terzu's chant with her fingers while from her mouth came the bass line — her father's part. She sang it, surprising herself and her companions, the meandering notes in her fingers alternating with the sustained sound of her own happy alto.

The song was about the loneliness of the shepherd, so far from home. The shepherd could not hear the bells of the village, nor the voices of his children and his wife. He was bereft and the stars cried with him, their golden teardrops falling, falling.

'Oh my home,' Chjara sang, 'My home, my home,' and in the Corsican syllables with their Italian roots the sound of the word 'love' was indistinguishable from the sound of the word 'home'. She sang her father's part and realized how very much she missed him. She was suddenly as lonely as the shepherd. All the feeling not admitted — overcrowded by the pleasures and stimulations of Paris — rushed to her heart. Once, she had been loved by a family, a village. She sang, yearning to be once more her father's child, beloved, protected, sitting on his coach beside him, without a care of her own. Her fingers barely touching the wet glass, she allowed the words to open into pure sound and return again, just as the men singers would do. The syllables merged with the ache of feeling, the notes swelling in her throat. Pushing it uphill, raising the sound as if to say *no, you will not look away, you must feel this with me*, Chjara repeated the chant, this time with more pressure on the glass and more force in her voice.

Roellig attempted to interrupt. 'Moderation,' he said loudly. 'And don't sing.' Chjara ignored him entirely. If anything, she opened her throat more. Marguerite put a restraining glove on Roellig's hand.

Marguerite felt moved. She felt like weeping. She thought, Here is our Mozart. She knew she'd irked the General Consul of France, refusing the Batavian's hand in marriage. She knew her position teetered and that she could be exiled on Napoleon's whim. She also knew that Napoleon wanted a national music to compete with the Germans and the Italians. She began to plan. Why not this instrument, as crystalline as the French character, as refined as the heavenly hosts, as...

Sweat appeared on Chjara's upper lip; Marguerite's eyes were glassy and distant. Henry felt his blood move in him like a strong tide. The music

traveled from her fingers directly into him. He marveled at her ability to play the difficult glasses, and he realized again that she was not merely a saucy servant girl. At the end, the ache of a minor chord gave way to the resolution of major chords in a triumphant finale. Henry and Marguerite sighed.

‘No, no, no, no, *no*.’ The master was distraught. He paced. ‘Would you put your hand on a hot stove?’ he demanded. ‘You would not. Your feelings course in you exactly like heat. It’s a substance: feeling. It is as real as blood. It must be managed. By the mind. By the soul schooled in virtue.’

‘You!’ he pointed at Chjara. ‘You are susceptible. Youth. *Virginal* youth.’

‘Sir!’ Marguerite interrupted.

‘Quiet,’ he shouted, damning his last chance for a patron for himself and his causes. ‘Pardon.’ He softened (too late) and said, ‘We need to be concerned! With the health, the vitality, the permanent damage that is possible, that you see in me.’

Now he did give Marguerite pause.

‘Do you suggest that the glass harmonica could harm her?’

‘*Bien sur*,’ he said.

At that moment, there was a commotion from the garden gate. The baker stepped through, covered with flour, holding a sack of croissants and a pitcher of steaming milk.

‘I intrude,’ he stammered. ‘I wish to give a gift to the musician.’ He bowed to Henry.

‘Please.’ Henry motioned toward Chjara.

Her eyes were round and vulnerable. She pleaded to Marguerite, ‘I want to rest.’

‘You see!’ Roellig said.

Marguerite rushed to Chjara’s side.

‘No, nothing’s wrong. Just — I’d like to sit quietly for a moment.’ She touched the baker on his hand which was bare like hers. There was a sudden surprising jolt of electricity. ‘Thank you. Oh, it’s chocolate.’ She saw in the pitcher. ‘I adore chocolate. I’ll join you in just a few minutes.’

Everyone obeyed — the baker too filing into the apartment. Chjara watched them go, feeling abandoned despite having wished for this solitude.

She sat on the moss ledge. Then Henry returned.

‘May I sit with you?’

She was surprised at the flood of relief.

Her hands were still bare. He removed his own gloves, a finger at a time.

The feeling, which had been dissipating, rekindled. When the glass bowls spun beneath her fingertips, she had experienced a refined, almost piercing, strand of electricity. It tingled. It drove into her along the canals of the nerves, to the muted continent of her body. There, the sensation concentrated in specific locations: a flower of feeling opened in the small cave behind nose and eyes. She was warmed under the direct center of her breastbone. The cluster of nerves in her sex hummed steadily, and another concentration of feeling moved in her feet where the arches joined the toes.

Chjara watched Henry's hand move toward hers. She seemed still in a trance. She could hear him breathing. He touched. He stroked a valley between her fingers. She feared sighing aloud. Slowly, she withdrew her hand. She had to be virtuous. It was more important than ever. He tried to keep her hand. She let him succeed for a little while.

It was late afternoon and the sun played with the brick of the garden wall, dappling the stains left by another year's spring. She moved her free hand delicately over the prickly surface of the moss. She sensed him watching her.

'What do you think?' Her fingers pushed through the coarse green tufts. 'Does the moss taste the dew that covers it in the morning?' She looked Henry, then let herself fall onto the warm moss, throwing her arms out, her face to the sun. 'Does the world feel as we do? Does it have sensations?'

'Yes,' Henry said. 'Absolutely.' He felt pierced through. She was lying there, open to the world, her breasts round and bright.

'Well, then,' she said, rising on her elbows, looking at him with mock seriousness, 'does one morning's dew taste different than another morning's? Does autumn taste different than spring?'

'They taste differently,' he agreed, smiling. 'Indeed, but they all taste.' He leaned closer. He closed the distance between them.

She closed her eyes. She turned her cheek and then her cheek was against his, and she felt the rough caress of his beard against her skin. Her nostrils flared as she drew in the scent of the world, and not just the world, but Henry, who smelled like chestnut blooms.

He whispered in her ear, his lips touching her, 'What about the shadows of the trees? Do they feel as if they are dancing...' he kissed softly, 'are they



dancing when they move around the trees...’ he kissed again, ‘with the progress of the hot sun?’

Chjara smiled, and rolled her head away from him. He had the same feelings as she did. She had not imagined it.

He played with her fingertips. ‘The instrument makes your fingers hot as a fever.’

She opened her eyes and she looked at him languidly. ‘All my body is in a fever.’



Inside, the three dark heads of the baker, the music master and of Marguerite bent over books on the table. The croissant crumbs had been swept to the floor, along with the chocolated spoon. Marguerite had expressed considerable skepticism about the potentially harmful effects of the glass harmonica on a young virginal player. This skepticism deepened as Roellig read aloud from his text.

*‘My friend’s dog scratched at the door to my musical chambers, begging to be allowed in. I refused.’* He looked up at his audience, who were only partially interested. *‘I did not want to perform for a dog. But the misery of the poor animal who wanted only to be near the armonica overwon me. I allowed him, I resumed to play, and within a few bars, the animal was seized by the most fearsome fit. He rolled on his side, scratched the air, his eyes turned in his head, he...’*

‘But Herr Roellig,’ Marguerite interrupted. ‘A dog doesn’t like the sound of whistling either. Surely you aren’t arguing that whistlers need to exercise caution.’

‘A whistler cannot sustain a high note as long as a glass armonica.’ He leaned forward across the table, devouring the space before her. Marguerite pushed back in her chair. His breath smelled of chocolate, curried with his private, inner vinegars.

‘You contradict yourself,’ she said. ‘You announce it as the finest instrument. Then you demand the most hysterical caution.’

He sighed. ‘I must begin at the beginning.’

‘Not too much at the beginning,’ she said.

He held his much-abused tome. ‘I’ve explained everything here. The

desire. The ventilation. One must play only during the daylight hours.'

'You were up all last night,' the baker ventured.

'Yes, yes, it's so difficult to resist! I don't pretend otherwise.'

Chjara entered from the back door, followed by Henry, who had a fierce tic over the corner of his mouth. Marguerite felt a wave of relief: at last. They needed to be careful, those two. If the servant and the American kissed in public, the Batavian's rumors would spread — that she and Henry had bet on who could seduce the girl first.

'She... ' Roellig pointed at Chjara. He turned back to Marguerite, again leaning hard across the table. 'Fear for her.'

'Fear for me? Of what should I be afraid?' Chjara spoke without a hint of dread. She walked to the table and ladled up a cup of chocolate, before the love-struck baker could do it for her.

'In the finale, in the *dum-de-dumdum-dum...*' With his voice and with his fist upon the table, the music master repeated the rhythm of the *paghjella*'s final notes: the major chords, one after another. 'There was an opportunity there. The instrument would guide you — if only you would listen! See... ' He sprang up and grabbed a knife from the table.

Marguerite felt her pulse hurry. He was not stable. He was not predictable — and he said that virginal women had delicate constitutions?

Roellig reached behind Marguerite, knife in one hand, grabbing with the other for a glass from the cupboard.

'See.' He scraped the knife against the glass. It made a horrible, piteous sound, high and harsh, raising the flesh on their necks.

'You must be composed. You must be delicate. You must be controlled.' Roellig pointed with the knife. 'Or...' he pressed it against Chjara's hand, 'the sound cuts.'

Chjara looked at the knife with its point in her palm. It was a dull knife. Roellig pulled it back. 'The instrument can tutor your emotions. It demands moderation.'

Chjara sipped the chocolate which had gone cold. She had liked the raw quality of the chords at the end. Rawness in moderation balanced this instrument's sweetness which could be cloying.

However she said only, 'The tuning is more pure even than an organ's.'

'Yes, yes.' Roellig rose up and down on his toes. 'The glass doesn't

change in cold or hot. It is perfect. Perfect. So the player must match it.'

'He wants you to avoid an excess of passion,' Marguerite said. 'He says you should read his book,' she touched the tome on the table, 'before you proceed.'

'If you do not, you will...' he pushed air through his lips, as if to say she would explode.

Chjara laughed.

'You don't believe me? Then don't believe me. In Germany, in the town next to mine, the burghers banned the instrument. A child died in a cradle, smothered by the sound.'

'No!' she said.

'A cat, driven by the sound, smothered the child.'

'A government banned a musical instrument?' Henry said, incredulous.

Roellig was ridiculous, Chjara thought. Still, it was curious. 'They recognized that music is so powerful?' she said.

'Yes.' Roellig stood more erect. 'The first time in German history that an instrument has been considered extreme enough to inspire legal protections. The passions it arouses must — *must* — be controlled.'

Chjara had heard warnings about excessive passion before, when her father had told her that she'd no longer be allowed to sing in public. Yet singing in public hadn't corrupted him. Excepting, perhaps, when he drank too much in the tavern. Then even his music became lewd.

'Do you consume wine,' Chjara asked Roellig, 'before you play?'

'The music itself is...' he breathed so his nostrils opened wide, 'intoxicating.'

'Yes, but do you drink wine before you play?' Chjara said.

Marguerite privately applauded.

The baker spoke, his face turned away from the beautiful apparition of the woman musician. He pointed to the empty bottles in the corner. 'The German snores from all the wine,' he said. 'I hear him through the walls.'

They laughed.

'I do not feel in danger of corruption,' Chjara said. 'Come, I need to go and tend to the merchant.'

They thanked their host. Marguerite surreptitiously paid twice the price they'd agreed. In return, Roellig promised never to speak of it. He promised never to speak of their visit and the glimpse they'd all had of

Henry and Chjara, lascivious in the moss. Outside, Chjara said, 'This man has nothing to teach me,' and the threesome disappeared into the mist of the lane.

## *Chapter Five*

‘I’ve heard from Curé Tumasgiu,’ Victor Ravenaugh said a few weeks later.

They sat in the courtyard under the one tree. The air sweltered, shimmering above the heated cobblestones. The high-born vanished from Paris with the change of winds. Marguerite had departed for her estate in Dijon; Henry was in London. Chjara felt Ravenaugh watching her. He offered news from a home that was no longer home.

He waited for her to ask what the curé had written. After a while he pulled a letter from under the blankets on his lap. She saw the familiar handwriting. She turned away. The dog cowered under the narrow shade of the eaves. Marguerite had left Justice with her as consolation.

Chjara rose. She crossed the burning cobblestones and poured some water into a dish.

‘Will the duchess claim her pet?’ Ravenaugh meant her, not the dog; she heard the sneer in his voice. Like everyone in Paris, Ravenaugh knew about their ‘liaison’.

She stroked Justice, who was crying. His eyes were infected and crusty. It seemed right that Justice should weep. Destiny had appeared friendly for a moment. Like a gift, like rain in drought, she’d experienced a reprieve from the realities of life. Now she was alone again. Henry hadn’t even written.

Ravenaugh rolled his chair over to Chjara, halfway under the roof overhang. The shade was blue, the sunlight white. She couldn’t look at him or out to the yard. She lifted the panting dog to her breast.

‘Chjara Vallé.’ He spoke her name formally. He incanted it. Her heart seized with dread. She escaped into the house, where the air was suffocating.

He followed, the wheels of his chair creaking. ‘Your father agrees to our marriage.’

‘Marriage?’ She was astonished. Her stomach turned. She blinked in disbelief. She saw in a flash his planning; her vulnerability.

‘You will have a fortune,’ he said. ‘You require protection.’

‘There is no fortune,’ she shot back. ‘It is in your doctor’s purse. As to protection, you are lost without me, you pathetic wretch.’

‘Be careful, wife.’

‘I will not marry thee.’ She used the informal *tu* for the first time, spitting it.

‘We will marry and you will learn the virtues of an obedient woman.’ He held the letter out for her. ‘Curé Tumasgiu says you wrote him, promising to leave behind your disobedient ways.’

All her belongings were upstairs, including her coin and the excellent cloak and other clothes from Marguerite. She started up the stairs to get them.

‘You forget. I have observed your late-night departures. I will tell of your wickedness.’ He coughed.

She hesitated.

He revived from his coughing fit. ‘Your father will be shamed.’

‘No,’ she said. ‘I’ll write him the truth.’ She would tell her father about Marguerite. He would not make her do this odious thing. Or would he?

‘I am forty-two. You would get children. I promise thee.’

Chjara turned and stared at Victor Ravenaugh’s ravaged face. ‘You are not potent,’ she said, realizing it herself.

‘You have no dowry,’ he said.

‘I will write to my father as your nurse. I will agree to marry if my father still insists, but only once he knows your true condition. You are not forty-two, good sir.’ She resumed the formal address, keeping disdain from her voice.

‘But I am.’ He put his hands on the chair rests and looked at his own knuckles which were swollen, and his fingernails which were yellow. In his mind, he saw the hands of his youth. ‘I am made old by this disease.’ He looked up at her. ‘Which disease is now near vanquished.’

To her surprise, Chjara felt the pulse of sympathy. He despised her, and she despised him; they had known their respective positions since she arrived here. And yet now he feared that without her, he would fall back into consumption induced by his opium smoke.

‘I know what you require,’ she said. ‘You require fairer air. Look at this place. The disease lives here — in the cushions...’ She picked up a sofa pillow and slapped it like a baby’s bottom. Dust spewed forth. ‘Look outdoors.’ She swung open a drape. Outside, heat caused the ivy to sag. It looked ready to give up the struggle of clinging to the building. ‘We require a change of scene.’

In this way, Chjara arranged for August in Dijon. In this way, she convinced the merchant to wait to marry. In the next weeks, she sent urgent letters one after another to her father. She received not a single reply. Her letter to Marguerite, however, was quickly answered. Marguerite would send a carriage to bring them to Dijon. In the meantime, Chjara should practice: Marguerite had arranged for the baker to evict the German, and for the glass harmonica to remain. Chjara should practice for Napoleon. Marguerite was arranging an August music festival. Henry would be there also, Marguerite promised. (But why didn't he write?)

Marguerite's letter concluded: *You write that your destiny encircles you like a snake and you cannot struggle free. You must resist such peasant ideas. None of us, not if there is to be peace in the world, may relinquish our wills to fate. Such thinking is a form of drowsiness and there are others who are awake and scheming, your Victor Ravenaugh for example. Will you be strong or will you be weak?*

It was a startling letter. Not since Tumasgiu had anyone spoken to her with such certitude. Chjara could only re-read it occasionally, not wanting to face the truth in it. She didn't know what choice she had. She did, though, go willingly to practice the glass harmonica.

She arrived at the street-level apartment where Roellig had spent the spring. Instead of his unkempt and dark living space, however, she found the windows open and washed, the floor swept, the cushions fluffed, and the bed hidden behind a Chinese screen. In the garden, a riot of flowers bloomed in shades of blue. The glass harmonica no longer 'lived' in the closet by night and on the mossy ledge by day. Instead, the baker had opened a hole in the wall that separated his pantry from the musician's closet. Pantry and closet together made one very nice alcove. In sealing shut the wall where his pantry doors had been, the baker left an opening along the top. This allowed the sound of the glass harmonica to drift into his shop.

It also allowed the scents of the bakery to rise up and drift down on Chjara.

She played the first morning as cinnamon from Barbados and butter and raisins melted onto the pans of the hot oven next door.

She was supposed to practice the music left behind by Roellig, but the cooking reminded her of the *cumparaggiu*, the festival that occurred at this time of year during which two friends promised loyalty and affection for life by jumping together, holding hands, over a bonfire. She had in mind that

she would tell Marguerite of this peasant custom.

In this way, she began her 'Suite for Corsica'.

She composed until the baker's oven cooled. She composed while the baker's customers entered, tarried, and finally left.

'The German — he has changed his tune,' one matron said, listening. Her companion, a dark-haired sister, agreed.

The baker neither confirmed nor denied that Roellig was behind the wall. He gave the woman her bag of buns. 'We are fortunate,' he said, 'to live in these times.'

The matron, who managed the house Rossignol, rolled her eyes. She knew it was true: food was cheap at the moment and the nobles were generous. The Rossignols overlooked the laziness of the goodfor-nothing son of her sister, keeping him as a servant, and no blood of revolution spilled into the streets. The soldiers lingered in bars. Yes, it was true, these were good times, but the baker *always* said, 'We are fortunate to live in these times.' She mocked him as she left, making a face to her sister.

One day, after the baker had closed his shop and Chjara had stopped playing, nothing happened. It was midday and even the cats took a break from mousing. Across town, in Ravenaugh's lodgings, Victor cursed his immobility and cursed Chjara for being hours late. He finally made his own meal, discovering in the process that the five or ten steps he was now strong enough to take alone sufficed. He was even able to reach the jar of goose fat, which all housekeepers insisted on storing on the uppermost shelves.

Chjara sat in the silence that follows music. It was a silence that included the scrape of her shoe against bits of gravel left by the construction work. It included the sound of her own breathing, which was long and slow and punctuated by sighs.

Into this silence came the baker's knock.

To say the baker was a man of rare words would be to exaggerate. He was known on the street for his few, repeated sentences. He was considered dim-witted.

Now he garrulously asked, would she be able to eat anything? He pushed open the door and held out a platter. On it was a rib of beef from a very large animal. This steak, running with juice and smelling of pepper, caused Chjara to nod.

Her head was extremely heavy.



He put the plate on the table. He made to leave.

‘No,’ she said. She motioned for him to sit.

He sat.

She ate.

She didn’t know that the steak represented several weeks of profit for a baker. At another time, she might have guessed. But she was simply cutting one piece, staring at it in wonder, inserting it into her mouth, and feeling her body revive.

He didn’t want her to know the cost of the steak to him. He especially didn’t want her to know how hungry he was. His belly had other ideas. When it produced a growl that could have wakened even the deaf old woman upstairs, Chjara grinned noiselessly. She lifted a hunk of meat and passed it to him. He was about to say no when his stomach interrupted again.

Chjara mimed: eat.

He mimed: no.

Chjara mimed: yes. Insisting.

He took the hunk, observed it, and mimed eating it all at once, wildly, with abandon. Then he took a small, decent bite.

She laughed and laughed. The frown of long concentration from her practice hours vanished. The baker listened and watched her laugh, pretending again to watch with small, decent glances.

But he did rest his eyes on her mouth.

Chjara observed that the baker had the packed shoulders of a man who lifts bags of grain all day, and she observed that his head, shaved nearly to the skin, was firm and round.

He saw her look at him with the feeling of a woman looking at a man. He rose from the table. He crossed over to her. All the while she encouraged him because she did not deny him. He bent, she could feel his breath against her scalp. He didn’t speak. She was as still as a note about to be played. He lifted her. He crossed the room in three gargantuan steps. He threw her onto the bed. Her dress billowed in the air. She couldn’t help laughing out loud.

He mimed that she strip off her clothes, his arms flying as if her clothes were hot as steam. She obeyed. She lay naked as he paced around the bed, touching her here, stroking her there, and there again. Finally, at last, she

pulled him to her with a groan so deep that it rumbled into her bones.

The next day, she completed the first movement of the ‘Suite to Corsica’. The song rose from her fingers like a vase on a potter’s wheel. Where there had been the raw material of notes, suddenly there was a shape, and all day she sang the melody to herself. She sang it aloud as she charged into a chapel, the sound swimming among the frescoes of the virgin birth, and she demanded of God what He meant in creating such a confusing contradiction: she felt blessed. She felt invited into His host of angels and yet she was a harlot. She was a loose woman, and thinking of it, she wanted one hundred men, she wanted to take them all inside her. Her dreams had been of men’s organ pipes. How could she ever be docile? How modest was it to want to play the pipes of men, filling them with desire and longing, and sating them with the notes from her mouth, her fingers, and, oh God, this was not how His host of angels sang, this was not what a blessed person did. She was sitting in a pew, her hands grasping the bench in front of her. She lowered herself to her knees. Lust was her sin. She begged God to forgive her. She should be more modest. In the midst of repenting, her mind alighted on the fact that Tumasgiu, as God’s representative, demanded she marry Ravenaugh. To marry Ravenaugh was as wrong as anything she’d done; she could not write any suite for Corsica from such a state. To marry for gold — that was harlotry. It made no sense. Meanwhile, Henry had proved unreliable, as Jude had. Nothing was right that men decreed was right, and how could a soul sort truth from lies except by her best instinct, which God had given her? Chjara demanded of God: be patient. Do not judge me. It’s your praise that I sing. Then she abruptly rose and left the chapel, only to return and kneel at Mary’s feet and weep. Her despair was inarticulate. Just help me, she thought. Help me.



At the inventor’s house in Manchester, England, Henry sat with raccoon caps sagging in his lap.

‘What do you want to accomplish during your lifetime, Mr. Garland?’ The inventor’s daughter’s eyes were intelligent and sad.

‘I don’t know,’ he said ‘I don’t relish this assignment to trick you into

thinking I am here for a reason other than your father's invention.'

She was called Melanie, and she reacted to his honesty with an expression of relief. 'You are the first of my suitors to admit why you are here.'

Henry offered her the hats. She shook her head. He rose and walked to the windows overlooking a garden.

'You're the son of an inventor?' she inquired.

Actually, his father was a middleman. He took inventions to market. But why quibble? 'My father helped invent a country.' He glanced back at her, shrugging. 'That's all.'

She smiled.

Outside, pansies knelt at the feet of hedges. Henry fingered one of the buttons in his pocket. Melanie appeared beside him.

'What do you have there?'

She had auburn eyes, exactly the color of her hair. They would never see each other again in a thousand years. He handed her the button, looking intently out the window.

She brought the button closer to her eyes, and he realized she was myopic. He heard her breath stop. It was the button that showed the boy pressing his lips to a woman's sex.

'My goodness,' she breathed.

'Yes.' He raised his eyebrow. 'My goodness indeed.'

She laughed. Her eyes shone. Her mouth twisted with the delicious taste of the secret. 'My goodness.' She peered at the button again. 'May I have it?'

Henry hesitated for a fraction of a second. 'Of course.'

'I will buy it, if you'll let me.'

'It's up to you. You can accept it as a gift from my father, as all my money is his.'

She scoffed. 'Let's leave our fathers out of this.'

She gave him a purse of coins that contained many times what he might ask for it. The purse hung heavily in his hand.

'Take it,' she insisted. At the door, she touched him on the arm. She leaned close. 'Are there more?'

Later, in the guest house, he counted the coins. He could live for two months from the amount she had paid. He wondered if she had friends. He knew sailors who could carve scrimshaw. The buttons could be reproduced

easily. He projected amounts, ink flying from his fingers into his private notebook. He remembered the prison administrator saying, 'We will create a science of insanity.' He said to himself, We will create a science of sexual relations. By talking about it. Admitting it. Bringing it into the parlors of women, not just the secret societies of men. All night, Henry scribbled in his notebook. When at last he slept, he dreamt of Chjara Vallé's superheated fingertips.



He returned from Manchester to London, a journey of several days that passed in a frenzied instant. Bouncing along, he pictured telling Chjara the story of the inventor's daughter. He broached the subject a hundred ways in his mind. He tried it another way, with Marguerite as his audience. He thought he would lie and say he'd found the buttons, and then he thought he would not lie: he would tell the truth. Electricity, he imagined saying, comes in many forms. Music, yes? They would agree. Love, yes? They would agree on sentimental love first. Then he would ask, What about sexual love? What about sexual ecstasy? He imagined pronouncing the words with a serious expression and then with a pleasant expression and all these conversations distracted him during the many miles through the bucolic terrain of England.

Tourneau had asked Henry to do an errand for him in London and the address he'd given was for a ship's captain named Dunlop. Henry stood at the front gate, which was latched shut. He called, 'Hello?' The day was bright. In a park across the street three women walked, twirling their parasols. Henry said 'Hello' again, this time in the direction of the stables. They too were dark, the barn doors sheathed over with spider webs. No one was home. His spirits sank. He wanted to hurry back to France.

'Michael Dunlop's gone off to South Africa.'

The three women stood across the street, calling as if across a river.

'He's not been home for years,' one said.

'That's not true,' another said.

'Excepting a month last year,' the first corrected, 'and he called only on his lawyer.'

They observed him from beneath their triplet parasols, which were each spinning in the same direction at the same speed. They were like pastel-colored witches.

‘Thank you,’ Henry said. ‘Can you tell me where I can find his lawyer?’

They whispered together, the two who’d already spoken. ‘We don’t know,’ they said in unison. But the silent middle one, who had blond hair curling around her face like a child, said ‘It’s Mr. William Davidson. Of Blanchette Street.’

They all smiled at him. He bowed again. He walked away with his heart strangely aching.

He found William Davidson Esquire’s shingle dangling akilter from a rope strung on a post, as if from a noose. The door was ajar. Inside, papers lay on tabletops. Candles were burnt to stubs. A smell of ink permeated the air, sharp as rubbing alcohol. In a corner, he found a half-eaten roll of bread and butter. He sniffed at the butter.

A few minutes passed, twenty, an hour. Henry took from his pocket the sealed envelope Tourneau wanted delivered to Dunlop. He broke the seal.

Tourneau proposed that Dunlop send his new exhibition to Paris. He wrote that a group of scientists, including Napoleon’s personal physician Cuvier, expressed a profound interest in seeing the exhibition ‘and inspecting her’.

Henry had hoped that this errand would have something to do with the phantasmagoria. He wanted to know how it worked. Now he looked at Tourneau’s letter and at the empty office, and he began to search the papers on the desks. Who was the woman they wanted to inspect? His curiosity aroused him. He wasn’t sure what he was looking for, but then he found it: a broadside announced the exhibition of Captain Michael Dunlop’s ‘Hottentot Venus’, ongoing nightly at Piccadilly Circus.

Henry dressed as if he were going to the secret society in Paris. He perfumed himself. His hands shook as he buttoned his cuffs, pulled on and smoothed his stockings, closed the clasp of his pants just below the knees. He combed his hair. He used some coins from the Manchester inventor’s daughter and took a carriage, instead of walking to the place.

London was more crowded than Paris. There seemed to be no end to the people milling about. The Thames smelled rotten and the taverns spilled their effluent into the streets. The carriage driver abused the horses

so much that Henry, when he at last disembarked, looked around him with his excitement already tarnished.

The line to enter the exhibition circled two blocks. Daylight faded and the moon rose before a ticket man relieved Henry of a mere five pence for admission. It was a price that the rough men could afford. Twenty people entered at a time, and Henry was the only one in his group in gentleman's garb. Twenty people every fifteen minutes for twelve hours daily made close to one thousand times five pence per day, Henry calculated as he ducked under the door. That was 500 pounds, a princely sum.

She sat on a stage elevated two feet off the ground, a horse blanket draped over her. Her skin was black as plowed good soil, and her small feet with their pink soles kicked against the stage. She hummed. She sang something low and interrupted by clicking sounds, while they filed in around her.

'Up,' her keeper said.

She rose and the blanket fell off her.

She was naked, her skin dusty except where water had run down between her legs. She was small as a child, but her face was a woman's. Her breasts hung pointed downward. She covered her sex with her hands.

The man pointed to her buttocks. 'Notice the rise of the flesh here.' He held a ruler. 'The civilized peoples have buttocks of about twelve inches at the maximum point. Good sir — can you read the number of the Venus's dimension for the rest of us please?'

Henry realized that the man was addressing him.

Uneasily, he moved closer. He read the number on the ruler. 'Eighteen inches.'

'Not only the size marks the animal nature of the Hottentots, but the upthrust...' the man slapped the woman's buttocks as he would a horse, 'which is composed entirely of muscle. You see it doesn't jiggle.' Again he slapped. 'Our Venus has the intelligence of a tenyear-old human child. She has a sweet nature, but of course...'

'The goods, man,' someone shouted.

'They say it hangs like a turkey's red neck,' another said.

'Of course,' the man continued, 'a dog can have a sweet nature.'

'Woof, woof, woof.' A boy rose up on his haunches, pouncing onto the stage.

The woman recoiled. In doing so, she dropped her hands.

Against the dusk and the dust on her skin, her sex hung pink from its nest of brown flesh. It *was* as long as a turkey's neck — much larger than the women's in the Pompeii demonstration. It was wet; it was shiny with droplets of water and Henry realized that she'd been fresh-washed between shows. The mound of it glistened, and he wanted to touch it and feel its flesh between his fingers.

A hush had fallen over the men.

'How much?' one croaked.

'The Venus only displays herself. She has signed a contract only to this use. If, however, you were to find her during her leisure hours...'

'What street?' someone interrupted.

'The Devonshire Road.' The keeper motioned to the Venus. She sat, or rather collapsed, to the floor of the stage.

'Time's up, blokes.'

The men objected. There was shoving. The air felt close and Henry stared at the space where she'd stood, still half in his trance of lust. He looked down as the keeper draped the blanket back over her. Her shoulders hunched. She made herself as small as she could under its cover.

Henry left. Outside, the putrid air turned his stomach — or was it just his own sinful nature turning over and over in him? He didn't know. He was ashamed. It was an effort to swallow. He pictured her, he saw between her legs, he saw between Chjara's, and he saw a man in the shadow of a tree beside the river, relieving himself of the pressure of desire.

For two days, Henry kept to his guest house.

In the middle of that time, he awoke with a sudden understanding. He realized that Tourneau intended to create a ghost show of the Pompeii frescos. He intended to use his phantascope to present scenes of men and women in sexual congress. Of boys tilting their tongues toward the mounds of women. Of the Hottentot Venus, rising from the dust motes in the air to stand above them, her heavy genitalia hanging over them. All that they wanted to see, they could see, and it would have the feeling of reality. He imagined it, and it aroused him, and he imagined the profit of it, and it excited him. He felt a tremendous pressure on his sternum as though some giant with a walking stick leaned heavily on a single point there, and he was bruised.

The bruise spread within him until he could hardly breathe. In a room with velvet curtains and a floor almost covered with India carpets, he sat

curled over the pain, with his hands over his eyes. How could he ever have imagined there was a goodness latent in this business... that he could create a science of it, and trick sexual knowledge into being? It was all lust and all dirty. No woman would — or should, if she only knew — tolerate his presence, especially not one who had asked whether moss might taste differently in each season's dew. He struggled to find his home in reason.

Henry decided to go home to New England. He would physically escape temptation. If his love for Chjara lasted, he would return. He would court her with letters. He tried to begin one. Maybe they could have their own ghost show, he wrote. She could play the glass harmonica. He could find something... his pen hesitated... something wholesome? Something true? What ghosts would he summon with the phantasmagoria?

He gave it up. Now he could only think of the Hottentot Venus hovering in the air. Since he couldn't be honest about his thoughts, he didn't know what to write to Chjara. Everything sounded as false as it was.

The next day, Henry received a letter from Marguerite. She planned a music festival. She'd invited Napoleon. Would Henry search London for musical instruments, in great variety, to entertain her guests? She planned a collection, as of fine art. Would he bring as many instruments as he found interesting in exchange for a gift of a hundred francs?

He thought about accepting. One hundred francs would keep him in Paris through the next winter. But would he be able to avoid the temptation that Tourneau represented?

He rose and went to the window to sit on the broad sill. He saw his trunk with the cloak from Marguerite folded in it. He gazed at it, his mind on how his father had once castigated him. He must have been six years old or so. 'You are filth,' his father said. 'You are the reason God had to sacrifice His only son. For the likes of you.'

'For the likes of all of us,' his mother had added.

The three of them — himself, his father, his mother — were standing in a row at the kitchen table, which was laden with strawberries and melon and blackberries. And there was also that morning a sticky cake which he wanted so much his fingers had itched during the prayer.

What is the difference between one impure thought and another? he wanted to know. He understood that he had been a child with a simple desire for breakfast. He understood that his father's religion was not the



only one in the world; Jefferson's Deists gave Henry the confidence that the world had been created to work rather well regardless of his breakfast.

And yet there was this ache. This doubt. This feeling that there was a reason that he was broke, and not productive — not adding to the good of the world. His father had helped create a country. He, by comparison, imagined a business that drew upon men's most earthy desires. It was time to be an honorable man.

'Dear Marguerite,' he wrote. 'I have to disappoint you. I will be glad to send you some instruments, but I have to go home. Please tell our mutual friend Chjara Vallé that I will write to her from America.'

He assembled clothes from the floor. He took his bathing supplies from beside the basin. And then, as he was getting ready to close his trunk, he took out the cloak that Marguerite had given him and swung it over his shoulders. He let the wide berth of it swim around him, and he lifted the front seam to his face, masking himself below the nose. His eyebrows wiggled. He moved about the room with the grace of a seal, like the seals he loved off the point of Portsmouth Harbor. He had about the same shape — a slender head and a smooth, soft body and smaller feet, and he also had for those brief seconds the same buoyancy. The cloak protected him and he danced one last, dashing dance by himself in his room before going out to make his arrangements to leave for Portsmouth, New Hampshire.



At the summer estate where she'd been born, Marguerite Charon slept with her wine-dark hair draping a white pillow. Her hair was so long, it could touch her waist, and no one had seen it in a decade. Her face was peaceful, her eyes shut even when there came the scrape of the new false-window opening. It opened to the hallway, not the outdoors, and in the hallway, a slender peasant carefully took a guitar into his lap. Then he began to play.

He had been instructed to follow his own heart in the selection of songs, and so this morning, he played '*Recuerdos de la Alhambra*'. The Spanish melody had been taught to him by a sailor and the sailor had learned it in Venezuela from a fallen priest. The priest had modified the tune to the rhythms learned from his Mayan wife.

The world thus sang Marguerite awake, and she lay with the sound moving in her. This is how she imagined it: music traveling like liquid, spilling from an instrument and entering the body. Then, it traveled further within her. Without exerting a muscle, she was moving — moving in response to music as a sail does to wind. *Music is physical exercise and recommended for women and intellectuals.* So said the *Traité des Effets de la Musique sur le Corps Humain*, which she had been reading. The esteemed physician Joseph-Louis Roger wrote it almost forty years ago, in 1765, and Etienne Sainte-Marie had translated from the Latin, adding an explanatory preface. In her new role as musical patron, Marguerite studied all the books she could find to solve the problem of whether the glass harmonica would be harmful to Chjara. That simple question opened into a hundred others, and she had decided to test — by way of scientific experiment, trial and error — the fundamental concept.

*Pleasure is virtue by another, gayer name*, the tome said. The idea was foreign to Marguerite: how could pleasure and virtue be the same? Weren't they opposite? They were as alike as sand and chocolate.

But she wanted to know the truth, not hide in the shyness that was her natural state in relation to her body. She agonized before asking the servants if anyone could play an instrument, and before requiring this new service to waken her in the morning. Now the music drifted into her dream, and her first thought was not a word, but a sound.

As the *Alhambra*' moved from its minor opening to its happier, major middle, Marguerite stirred and sighed. In one more breath, she would rise. There was a lot to do. The music made her tarry. What if Phillipe Charon had heard music in bed in the morning? Would he have been kinder? She remembered him as a stern presence. He hardly spoke. His lips had always been dry from being so much pressed together. She and Yann filled the rooms with their jabbering, and Phillipe had always seemed worried. Of course, there had been a lot to worry about.

Still, she'd been sixteen when she was married to Phillipe Charon and he'd had no youth left himself. He'd been her age now — thirty — when they married. Her own skin still felt soft. Oh, the sound of the guitar was a balm. How gently it caressed the morning into being. If only she had given the gift of such music to Phillipe, he might have had a better life. What a sadness — to exist only in worry.

Now it was her obligation to be happier. The book argued that joy in music, as in other kinds of *la jouissance*, produced a blossoming of the body, which produced in the spirit a similar blossoming. It gave birth to courage and love, and to the *bienfaisance*, the doing of good.

Her inexperience in sexual passion now seemed sad. Had God made joy the gate to a more generous, less bitter soul? The music returned to its minor plaint and Marguerite felt her self go with it. How easy it was to resist the call to *jouissance*. It was embarrassing and required the courage to live like a child, out loud.

The guitarist finished. The maid entered. Marguerite kept silent as she was dressed. Beatrice tightened the gown in the back with cold fingers. She combed Marguerite's long hair, then plaited it. When she began to pile it in a bun, Marguerite said, 'Leave it this once.'

'M'lady?' said Beatrice.

'Leave it in the braid, down my back.'

'Yes, m'lady.' Beatrice stroked it, smoothing it, and gave it a quick, playful, straightening tug. 'It looks so lovely,' she said, and the compliment made Marguerite's heart thrill in a silly way.

At the estate chapel, she prayed briskly, Please God, may I not add to the world's meanness today. Allow me to act in your service. She wondered if she had anything to add to this new prayer. She decided she did not.

Marguerite hurried to the former winter ballroom, which she had ordered made into the new music room. She opened the windows along the row of balconies looking onto the garden which was dominated by a dark-green maze. The severe and perfect angles of the hedges seemed to her this morning an affront to beauty. Was it too late to mow them down and plant tulips instead?

Probably it was.

With Beatrice's help, she began to unpack Henry's crates. In the first, they found a brass mouthpiece which was like a nipple. Then she recoiled. There was a snake in the straw, but a dead one. She lifted it out. Heavy as a wine barrel, it was a beast made of curves of wood, one after another, covered over by leather tied with brass stays. Henry had labeled it 'The Serpent'. It made the lowest of sounds, like a trumpet but octaves deeper, he wrote.

Unpacking all morning, they uncovered an archlute, a lute with long strings on a thin arm perilously attached to its pregnant belly. There was a

pochette, a walking stick convertible to a violin and a glass xylophone. Five Turkish drums nested inside each other. The surprising American had also shipped a virginal with a scene of naked angels cavorting on the interior of the lid. Henry wrote that this harpsichord was not expensive despite the painting, which the seller had assured him was the work of a Dutch master. All harpsichords were cheap, he wrote. The pianoforte was leading the race for the most popular instrument, he'd learned, with the glass harmonica also still in the running. But the poor harpsichord had suffered numerous improvements — such as double quills to pluck a louder sound, and stiffened leather picks to create a softer one — before losing to the new fashion of the pianoforte. The Paris music conservatory had burned its stock of harpsichords during a recent freezing winter. Marguerite had already capitalized on the bargain price: the music room contained two harpsichords, to which she added Henry's.

While Marguerite and Beatrice unpacked, above them on scaffolds men from the village painted the room. They moved about on the creaking scaffolding and effaced the cream color, which began below the gold trim and surrounded the ornate wall mirrors. The new shade was pomegranate.

When the sun shone fully through the windows, a messenger arrived. He brought a note from Napoleon, and news that a coach was coming up the long lane to the estate.

Marguerite tore open the seal. Napoleon declined her invitation to the festival. She sighed with disappointment. He would send in his stead, he said, some men among whom he hoped she'd find an amusing husband. If no one else, would she choose the Italian — that is, if she earnestly did, as she'd written, hope to please him? He would prefer an advantageous marriage to music. He looked forward to that another day. Marguerite folded the letter, hiding her exasperation. Not only did Napoleon refuse her invitation, but his list of alternatives numbered six — six suitors, all of whom had to be housed.

Not long after the letter, a clatter of horses' hooves announced the coach. Beatrice went to the windows and remarked with astonishment that the horses were white Lipizzaners. But then she could make no remark at all because a man alighted from his coach and ran for the river as if burnt on his backside. There, in full view of the busy grounds, he stripped off his fine clothes and plunged naked into the water.

Beatrice turned back to the music room and saw that Marguerite stood among the still-full crates and the spilled-open ones. She looked dismayed.

‘Did you see him?’ Beatrice asked.

‘Who?’

‘There’s a naked gentleman in the river.’

‘What?’ one of the villagers said. He leaned from the scaffold for a better view. As he bent, his paint bucket tilted.

Pomegranate oil paint dribbled onto Marguerite’s long plait of hair.

Pandemonium. They rushed at her as if she were on fire. Marguerite gazed at them, and at herself in the full-length mirror that adorned the wall.

Her mouth was pressed shut as Phillipe’s always had been.

‘We’ll rub it out with linseed oil,’ one of the craftsmen said.

‘Not linseed. Not in her hair. You should use...’

While they talked, Marguerite fanned her hair out, shook it loose, and saw how it wouldn’t shake over one side because of the paint.

‘What an amazing mess,’ she said, her tone soft. ‘All from one dollop of paint?’ She looked at the men. ‘I see you all have short hair.’

They laughed — and then she laughed too. In the mirror she saw glances of relief tossed like apples, behind her back. ‘Get the scissors,’ Marguerite told Beatrice.

‘Oh no.’

‘Oh yes. It’s the only thing to do. And it’s not my head you’re cutting off, is it?’

They hesitated. The mood almost changed.

‘Can a wig be made of this very soon?’ Marguerite asked, holding out the cut tresses.

‘I have a cousin in Plombières who can do it,’ a painter said.

She smiled and left them to recover from the incident. In the garden, she realized that for the first time in her adult life she did not have the headache that came from carrying all that heavy hair. She found the guest who’d bathed naked in the river waiting for her in the jasmine-roofed alcove. He was now dressed. He announced himself as the Mesmerite, Yves Danton.

‘The Mesmerite?’

‘You sent for me. The disciple of Franz Mesmer.’ He bowed.

She remembered then. Mesmerites used glass harmonicas in their séances. They called them ‘mesmerizing’ sessions. ‘Did you bring it?’

‘I came to offer that you travel back with me to my clinic for a séance.’

‘I don’t have time,’ she said. ‘Our festival is in two weeks.’

He raised his hands. ‘Yes. I thought you might be upset.’

‘I’m not upset. I will simply buy a glass harmonica from someone else.’

‘Oh! Do you want to buy it or rent it?’

‘Well, I’ll buy yours then,’ she said, leaning forward.

‘But it’s not for sale.’

‘You’re impossible.’

‘Really. You would benefit from the relaxing effects of the free flow of animal magnetism. It is not only Mesmer who can mesmerize,’ he said, bowing. When she did not reply, he said, ‘I would prefer to show you the full effect of a cure at my clinic in Plombières, but I do have with me some magnetized rods — to give you an idea. I also have a letter of recommendation from your friend, Barbara Camoin.’

Marguerite narrowed her eyes. ‘You have a letter. You want something.’ She was putting it together out loud. ‘You want to sell me your services.’

He bowed. ‘It would be a great addition to your household during the festival.’

‘Ah,’ she said.

He straightened from his bow. ‘In which case, I would have to bring the glass harmonica.’

‘You are quite impertinent,’ she said.

‘No. No, I want the best for your guests.’

‘I believe you want the best for you.’

‘Let me show you the workings of—’

‘No, not today. I’ve had enough to try me.’ She stood up, ‘But I will—’

He interrupted. ‘It’s exactly when you are tired that the blossoming of the health of the body is most important.’

She stared at him.

He used the exact same phrase as she’d found in Joseph-Louis Roger’s text. Was this charlatan literate?

‘The blossoming of the body — is this the intention of your magnetized rods?’

‘Health is the root of all good deeds,’ he said. ‘When the flow of animal magnetism is blocked in the body, the result is illth.’

‘Illth?’

‘Illth. Absence of life force. Stasis of energy.’

‘But how do the magnetized rods work?’

‘I will demonstrate,’ he said.

While he reached behind a garden chair where he’d stashed a loose sack, Marguerite grew more and more flustered. She had not meant to invite him to treat her with this... this... what was it? Everyone suddenly was talking about inner flows. Movements. Music produced it. Magnetized rods ensured it. She thought, This is a fashion that may well be lunacy.

His back was to her and he manipulated lengths of iron. ‘Think of a warm place where you are sleepy and relaxed.’

He approached with hairy arms exposed, with his sleeves rolled up. Marguerite closed her eyes.

‘Think of your bed this morning,’ he suggested, and she snapped her eyes open.

Did he know? About her musical experiments? Was it gossip among her servants? Probably.

‘Close your eyes. Imagine a warm bath. The water is the temperature of your skin. It flows in a gentle waterfall that...’

Chjara might be a musician for such a Mesmerite. It could be an income for her, perhaps an alternative to marriage with Victor Ravenaugh — whose suit might yet be dismissed if he were properly handled. So she gave in to the fizzy spa waters invoked by his words. She gave in to the suggestion that the world was a soft and luscious place where she might lie down for a moment and receive the sun’s holiness. She kept her eyes closed. She kept her body upright in the seat, her hands on the armrests, her feet on the ground. She became a part of the chair, leaning into it as the imaginary waters warmed her skin like a flush. Then she felt it — the metal rod. It touched her at the neck. Cool — cold even — it stimulated a kind of shock. Ice that was also heat traveled from the point of contact, and shuddered through her.

He removed the rod. Again he warmed her with words. Again he touched her for a few ice-cold seconds on the neck. She felt the movement inside her and a thundering of her heart. He was talking again. She was waiting for the next application of the metal rod. The heat coursed in her body, and it was time for the cold. Wasn’t it time for the cold? She slitted her eyes, clutching the armrests, her back pressed against the chair. He

looked into her eyes, which were now watering. He said, 'Yes, release it.' And then he touched the metal rod to her again.

The feeling rocked her chair back. It forced her mouth open and pushed out a cry.

'That's exactly right,' he said. 'That's exactly right.'

When she'd caught her breath, and her heart had begun to return to its normal rhythm, she asked him, 'This is healthy?'

'Yes,' he said.

She considered. A bird trilled in a bush nearby. She stood up. She was a little shaky. She felt moist everywhere.

He looked at her. 'You have not had this sensation before?'

She didn't answer.

'In the séance we do this in groups. The magnetism is more powerful with the baquets nearby.'

'The baquets?'

'The magnetizing baths. You sit in a bath. The music of the glass harmonica electrifies the air.' His hand made a shimmering gesture.

'Well then,' she said, 'I would be most grateful if you would transport your clinic here to my estate for the festival.' She paid him and returned to the house. She was headed to her private room when she was stopped by the brusque matron who had presided over the functioning of the household since before Marguerite was born.

'The ivy room is ready for your inspection,' she said.

The ivy room was the best of the guest rooms, located on the main floor, in a private hall off the drawing room.

Marguerite didn't even consider refusing to inspect right now. She simply followed, and flowed on her light feet with her lightened scalp and her own light burning hard within her.

The room looked splendid. In the late afternoon sun, the ivy patterned the floor, whose wood shone with wax. The bed was large and covered with a golden tapestry. The wardrobe had inlaid ebony and redwood. The walls were painted a ferocious auburn-brown with a gleam that made the blue water pitcher glow on the bed stand.

'Shall we put Msr. Aourosque in here?' the matron said, more in the tone of an announcement than a question. Msr. Aourosque was the wealthiest of the suitors, and counsel to Napoleon.



Marguerite looked across the room. Who most needed this honey warmth in order to act with generosity and selflessness?

‘No,’ she said, inspired. ‘This will be the merchant’s room. Victor Ravenaugh.’

With that, she returned to her room for a rest. Her nipples felt hard as almonds and she rubbed them with cream to loosen the ache.

## Chapter Six

The carriage arrived to take Chjara and Ravenaugh to Dijon. The driver gave her a letter from Marguerite which ended with the news that Henry had gone home to North America. Chjara stood stunned and dry-mouthed in the street outside Victor Ravenaugh's door. The old man waited for her to lift him to his seat. She felt as if she'd stopped breathing even while her body continued on. She stepped into the carriage, tucking the letter into her skirt, Ravenaugh forgotten.

The wheelchair creaked. He rose without her help and approached the high step into the coach. Still she didn't move and couldn't move. He looked at her with an expression of intelligence and suspicion. Then he mounted the steps. He let out involuntary grunts of pain. Then he righted himself. He might as well have succeeded in mounting her, so abject was his pride.

The effort exhausted him so he was soon asleep. As they traveled, Chjara allowed herself to think of Henry. Henry the American. He had wanted to break the lock on the showman's machine. He was not docile or modest. He'd touched her fingers and he'd spoken of how the shade danced around a tree in the sun. Was God punishing her? Well then, let God do what He wished. God was hopeless. God was inconsistent. She didn't want God, she wanted Henry, and he had gone. She was left alone again. She stared at the passing landscape, sunflowers hanging their heavy heads in the heat. Her eyes were as dry as sand.

The dog licked her fingers. Chjara reread the letter, which had said something about food for Justice. There were herbs in the basket of provisions that would make the journey more bearable.

Marguerite's apothecary had mixed them for the dog, *but you too may partake of the herbs with some benefit*, she wrote. Chjara remembered Victor sneering that she was herself one of Marguerite's pets. Who loved her? Marguerite's letter drifted into philosophy: music repaired the spirit and the body; hadn't France suffered the most egregious conflicts, that had estranged the classes from one another? Marguerite had invited the village to Chjara's concert, as well as the noble persons and their families.

Napoleon Bonaparte remained intrigued by the festival, Marguerite wrote, but had a commitment elsewhere. He looked forward to hearing how Marguerite's experiment healed the wounds of the country.

So now, Chjara, the pet, was being brought to cure all of France.

They traveled for three days in silence. On the last day, they departed their inn at dawn, aiming to reach the estate by nightfall. Ravenaugh looked shriveled by pain. She watched him press his fingertips into the cushion to raise himself off the seat during the bumps. He was a man in misery and who was she to withhold comfort from him? He was a part of France. Chjara scoffed but the sound was hollow. She looked out the window. The mist of morning parted as they drove. She could smell the breath of the horses in its moisture. She remembered riding in her father's coach through a night and a sunrise. In the world, the sun rose and fell. Rose and fell. Days repeated themselves endlessly. She didn't feel strong enough to lift off the weight of destiny — destiny being, she realized, the accumulation of anti-electricity. They were stronger, those people who turned each day into chores. She understood then that she could marry Victor; she could serve him inside marriage as well as she could out — it was all the same. Acts of mercy could change with each sunrise and sunset, turning slowly to affection, just as chores, day after day, changed to modesty and goodness. This was a kind of alchemy, worked by the power of the world's opinion.

It made her tired, though. She felt the pull of despair, a weight hanging inside her, drawing down her throat. Across from her, Ravenaugh worked for each breath as he slept. His mouth was a straw. He sucked and sucked to the dregs of his lungs, and then sighed out, capitulating. He would die after some time. Then she would be like Marguerite, a worn woman struggling to be good instead of running to meet the great mysteries. Marguerite did not have enthusiasm, *enthousiasmos*.

Chjara wanted to be ignited, and she felt that Henry would do it. The baker was nothing. He was meat, sustenance. Henry's touch would enflame her whole body and even thinking of it, she stirred in all her veins. Dear God, did everyone really agree to live without this electricity, and to move woodenly from one day to the next, praising each other for their good sense and moderation? If this was life, she didn't want any part of it. Without electricity, the best part was over. Let the spring in Paris be all she had.

At midday, they stopped in a village for lunch. Ravenaugh didn't waken.

The innkeeper gave her a pasty white barley stew dotted with shriveled, vinegared mushrooms.

‘Beware the bandits,’ the innkeeper told the coachman. ‘Go quickly from here and don’t stop until Plombières.’

‘How far is it?’

‘Two hours unless you dawdle.’

Back in the carriage, she heard the coachman climb to his bench. Beside them was a barn and beyond it, a wood. Ravenaugh slumped into his same position. Chjara could readily slump too, the food and the heat making her sleepy. She had her gold coin sewn into her pocket. Silently, so the coachman wouldn’t notice, she pressed the door handle. She stepped out and walked through the barn, past the cows. She walked into the forest and lay down under a tree. She heard the carriage disappear down the road.

She woke after dark. Owls hooted. She remembered the bandits. Fear coursed in her nerves, a strong sensation, not drowsy. She stepped from the forest into an open field of wheat. The pleats of her dress trailed behind her as she broke through the low wall of grain.

Lights from the village flickered in the humid air, but she kept walking away through the field. She shivered, feeling as if she were in a kind of dream. Her fingertips grazed the tops of the wheat where the air was cooler than the current of warmth she breathed. She dipped low and discovered she was in a river of air of cool depth and warmer surface. She drew the air in deeply, and her chest rose and fell. All around her was the shimmering wheat, and beyond, the shimmering world: forest, field, forest, stream. Village. She closed her eyes and lifted so that she was flying like a common bird, and she flew away to her home, to Bastia. She dreamt herself hovering over her family house, almost within reach. She saw them all sleeping there, her brothers, her father, her mother. They might miss her sometimes but all love would pass. She didn’t care for Jude anymore. She was as fickle as anyone — as Henry, and as God who retreated from sight when it pleased Him to do so. She opened her eyes and saw the moonlight on her fingers, spread wide and skimming the grain, the tops pricking her palms. She was separate from herself and saw herself. She closed her eyes and extinguished herself. Opening her eyes. Closing them.

She felt both her presence and her absence from the world into which she had been born; this round of days; this circle of life and death. Then

she was at the end of the field and walking onward to the stream, which was cold. Her mother had taught her that spirits haunted the creeks. Chjara walked into the water. Her skirt sagged, clinging behind her to the rocks. Still she pushed forward — she did not want to stop; this was all she knew: go. Like a child in a temper tantrum, she did not think or choose so much as move, move on... flee: her flight now, however, quite weighed down by water.

She followed the stream around a bend. She splashed on until she was at the lip of a deep pool. Water tumbled into the basin, which was black-dark and white-shining with the moon — both. Her wet skirts nearly drew her in.

Staring at the depth, she met him here: the suitor who was death. He invited her, hand outstretched. All her body trembled. She could sink in. She hesitated to take his hand. She peered at this moment: what was it like here with death at the end of all struggle?

It was cold, as if the heels of her feet allowed the water in, or siphoned it up, sucked by each breath higher into her hips and chest and skull. So cold that now she rattled with it, and she looked up at the clear sky with its wash of black night and tried in vain to imagine day. The night was a black curtain, the moon no more than a moth hole in it. She leaned back and was near to falling.

But she did not fall back.

Death was a storm coming for her and stronger than she. Oh, he was tempting, as was any great sensation. She could fall now, and be rid of this life.

She tried to lift her skirt. Her fingers were white. The cloth felt as if it weighed a hundred pounds. She saw her face in the water glass. It startled her, seeming so entirely herself. She saw herself alive, she saw the person there and felt a surge of protective love for this woman with wide eyes and squared shoulders, the image wavering in the water. She grunted, raising the coffin of wet fabric. Her skirt dripped, her legs were numb, but she found good footing in the black water.

When she reached the bank, skirts hoisted high, she turned and imagined leaving her young face behind. She imagined that it sank out of sight, sank to the bottom and could rise up like a ghost to anyone who might look into this riverbed at night.



At the country house, Marguerite received the news from Victor Ravenaugh that Chjara had disappeared. The merchant's face was a grimace of twitches. He clutched Justice in his arms so hard that the dog winced. Immediately after settling the merchant into his room, Marguerite received a letter announcing that Napoleon had changed his plans yet again and would arrive with his entire retinue in a few days. She found that she felt no panic at either development. The music that awoke her each morning had made her conscious of the space in each day. Time could repair itself, she had discovered. It would lurch with changes of fortune, but it also slowed on the command of a stilled mind.

She dispatched three of her best men to look for Chjara. She gave them more in gold than a bandit could hope for, instructing them to be generous to those who gave information. In the chapel benches, her father had stored tents for hunting parties; she found fourteen muslin tents in good repair save for some mildew. She ordered them set up in the field, and arranged for their taut walls to be washed down with rosemary water. She would stay in one tent herself and Chjara, when she was found, would also rest in a tent, as would some of the servants. In this way, she could make the manor rooms available for Bonaparte.

The man who had recently installed himself as France's General Consul arrived on horseback, cheeks aflame with exertion, a day before his expected arrival. The retinue came directly to the tents where Marguerite stood in her simplest gown, wigless, with her short hair curling about her ears.

Slipping off his horse, Napoleon walked around her, taking her measure. She felt annoyed at this inspection. He turned his attention to the tents, and smiled.

'I have missed my days on the battlefield. How clever of you to arrange this encampment for me.' He looked again at her hair, then he strode into the first tent. This one was to have been hers, where she'd put flowers from the field in a vase made from a wine bottle. He looked at her with curiosity and amusement. 'We are grateful,' he said, with a genuine expression, 'for your hospitality, Madam Charon. And I look forward to meeting the musician from my homeland.'

Now it was late in the afternoon on Wednesday; the concert was to be on Friday. Marguerite could not bring herself to mention that the star was as yet absent. She went back to the manor to find Victor waiting like a

gargoyle at the edge of the garden. Drawing nearer, she saw that his eyes were no longer twitching.

‘Has she come?’ Marguerite asked.

‘No.’

‘Oh, my Chjara.’ Marguerite sank beside his wheelchair.

There was a pause. Victor Ravenaugh had experienced a startling few days. When he had arrived without Chjara, he had been welcomed warmly regardless of the fact. He had been a merchant to the nobility before succumbing to the opium habit and as such he had understood his role: to provide the luxuries and bow on the way out. This time, he arrived not only without the requested luxury, but with his bad habit and his too-tight grip on the treasured dog. Justice was found to have a broken rib.

None of these egregious failures seemed to matter in the least. He had been shown to an elegant room. On the table in the center of it was a hookah and a small dish of powder. He parceled this out to himself, measuring the amount for the first time in the months since Chjara had joined his service. In this way he cut back his dosage dramatically without intending to. His body trembled as if his bones were alive. He commanded himself to endure it in the spirit of the moment.

‘I regret that I have failed you,’ he said to Marguerite in the garden.

Marguerite saw the nervous twitching resume.

‘I have not always been an opium smoker, you know,’ he said.

‘I suppose I could have guessed that.’

‘No. Not always.’

‘And before?’

‘I managed great feats — as you are doing here.’ His gesture encompassed the expanse of tents below and the hive of activity in the house behind. ‘I traded fabric for the king; I purchased in Egypt, in Turkey, in England. If Louis wanted green velvet within the week, chances are I could obtain it.’

‘Is the guillotine what began it for you? Is that when you started smoking?’

Ravenaugh smiled a gargoyle’s smile, the grimace of one who had long watched the world from an opiated distance.

‘I am not such a good man,’ he said.

‘Why do you say that?’

‘I do not feel much sympathy for my fellow man.’

‘That is not a good trait,’ she agreed.

He looked at her, twitching.

‘You feel sympathy for...’ Again, he gestured to include everything and everyone.

‘No,’ she said. ‘They murdered my child. My husband also.’

‘They why are you kind?’

‘Why am I kind?’ she asked herself.

‘To the likes of me?’ he said, twitching furiously. Not only had she welcomed him without disgust when she’d noticed his condition, she’d offered the professional services of her ‘Mesmerite’. The newly installed clinic featured a padded room where Victor had been invited to release himself, under controlled circumstances, to the epileptic-like fit of the starved opium demon. The service had ended with a bath that soothed his raw nerves.

‘I have been told that virtue springs from pleasure. We have tried everything else, have we not?’ she said, rising. ‘We have tried despising people who wrong us. We have tried escaping them. I found myself isolated inside myself, not feeling anything. Not caring.’

‘You tried opium?’

‘No, no.’

‘If you think that virtue springs from pleasure, you should try the flower of the Orient.’ He offered a twisted smile. ‘The pleasure is so wonderful, you cannot imagine. Yes, you are isolated, you don’t feel your own body, but instead of the despair of isolation, you float in the peace of the gods.’

‘Yes, well, I will leave it to God to give me peace when I return to His heavens. For now, I am here and I want to do one virtuous act myself. One. This is what I thought: I would help Chjara be free — to be free also of you.’

He heard her. He didn’t react.

‘She must have been very afraid of both of us and our designs for her, to flee from the coach.’

Marguerite stood above Victor Ravenaugh, and spoke with regret and shame in her voice. ‘I think God teaches me to rely on His presence everywhere, including inside of myself. I depend too much on others. I demanded too much of Chjara. I should not ask someone else to create pleasure for me. We must each find a source of music within ourselves, I think, Mr. Ravenaugh. Will you accompany me to the music room?’



But it was three flights of stairs to the winter ballroom with its new pomegranate walls. She went alone, while Ravenaugh repaired to the Ivy Room. The bowl of powder tempted him. But instead he took the figs and sugared almonds and the sweet lemonade that were provided for him. And he slept.

In the music room, Marguerite chose the virginal with the dancing dames painted inside the lid. She thought of Chjara, lost. She touched a note. She touched one below it. And the one below that. In this way, she began 'Mary had a little lamb'. She cried, hearing the sound of it in her head. She cried because of course her unskilled fingers mashed the melody. She didn't know if she was Mary and Chjara was the lamb, or if she was the lamb as well. She didn't know if her selfishness would ever give way to virtue. Hadn't she tried? Hadn't she pushed her intelligence to the limit? Now Chjara was gone. Other than a farmer who had watched her walk off, nobody had seen her again.

Marguerite's fingers sought the right notes and she put together a little more of the melody. Had she done everything she could to help find Chjara? A nagging voice inside her answered: yes. The hunters from the estate, whom she'd dispatched to find her, were among the best trackers in France.

Perhaps Chjara did not want to be found.

*And everywhere that Mary went, the lamb was sure to go.'*

The melody plucked itself out of thin air, it seemed. Marguerite played it with only a few mistakes, and then again, with fewer, and after a time, she got the whole song. Her heart returned to its normal rhythm, though it still felt squeezed.

Perhaps Chjara did not want to be found. In which case, Marguerite was to make the festival happen on her own, without depending on the service of others.

That night, the villagers and soldiers and the soldier-king ate sumptuously. The matron who managed the kitchen offered them all a picnic of boiled eggs filled with a piquant cream sauce; of rabbit baked at a high temperature, the skin turned crispy and the insides fatty and delicious. There were beans cooked for days with sweet berries and hocks of ham, and wild mushrooms, roasted and ground into a pâté. All these dishes had been divided into small portions and wrapped in wax paper and set out in baskets to be shared. They opened their twists of paper like children at Noël.

And so they did not feel the absence of the musician. Until about midnight. By then, everyone had consumed much wine.

‘Now it’s time for some music, wouldn’t you say?’ one person said to another, until there was a cacophony. People banged their fists on tables, stomped their feet.

‘Yes, it’s time for music.’ Marguerite rose from where she sat between Bonaparte and the suitors to whom he wanted her to pay attention.

She wiped her fingers on a cloth, whispered to the matron who was always waiting two steps behind, then Marguerite sang.

It was such a surprise to hear the duchess sing that they all listened. It was a song for children. She had a light, simple voice, like a mother’s singing a lullaby. She sang it without inhibition or grandeur. When she was done, they all applauded for this strange woman who was surely mad to throw her riches on the likes of them.

‘Now it’s your turn,’ she told them. ‘Please come, a few at a time, and follow me.’

She led them to the music room. Before they entered, they dipped their hands in lemon water which the matron had hurriedly prepared. They dried their hands on cloths that had been washed in lavender soap.

Their hands were clean. Their stomachs full. Their spirits eased by wine. So when she invited them to try any instrument they liked for a time, they hesitated only a little. They made a noise that was awful and happy.



In Liverpool, England, where Henry’s ship was due to depart for Portsmouth, the ship required repairs. Would the gentleman consider taking passage on the *Magdalene*, a trading vessel leaving now for Le Havre, France, thence to depart for America in one month’s time? The *Magdalene* had carried ginseng from the United States to China; it had brought tea back to France, and it could accommodate a passenger on its return to Boston.

Yes, he would consider this other ship. He accepted, understanding as he did so that he was not a man of principle. He was a man who yielded quickly to temptation.

In Le Havre, Henry disembarked and immediately booked passage by

inland barge for Dijon. He had three weeks before he needed to return. Tourneau would not be in Dijon. Tourneau's temptations were in Paris. Henry could still make it to the music festival. He did not believe in fate but some hand seemed to have intervened to let him see Chjara once more. He could give up happiness for the rest of his life, he could bend himself to labor — honorably — in his father's business if only he could have one more touch of her fingers.

He arrived when the household was sleeping off the party. A somnolent doorman greeted him, wakening only enough to say that Victor Ravenaugh, the fiancé of Chjara, had arrived from Paris. 'Fiancé,' Henry said, stunned. The doorman further informed him that Chjara herself had disappeared and her fate was unknown.

Henry let himself be led to a guest room — actually a broom closet hastily made up because of his unexpected arrival. A gap the width of a fist made a narrow window in the thick stone wall. He didn't know that archers had once defended the estate through this narrow slit. He leaned into it, trying to draw air into his lungs. He pictured her forlorn face. He saw her in the oversized wig, bereft. He wanted to keep her from harm. He wanted it with all his being, from that first sight of her. He may not be a good man, he may not be principled or a great inventor of things or ideas, but he loved her. He loved her hands and her face, he loved the way she spoke in Persian, he loved the way she made him feel. She was the electricity in his life. And he had walked away from her.

Was she suffering? Was she frightened? Was she dead? Outside, horses moved in the night. The air smelled of the ancient forests all around. What if she returned alive and well, but married this fiancé and not him? All night he felt the kind of fear that has no name, the purgatory of not knowing the fate of someone you love. He imagined the worst, he imagined the best, he didn't sleep, and so he was among the first in the morning to hear a donkey cart approaching the estate.



Chjara had hidden beside a spring in the woods for a week of nights. She filled her stomach with berries and nuts but she felt sick from uncertainty.

She waited until her skirts were well and truly dry. She wandered toward the village and turned back again twice, and in the process she understood her choice: use the coin to follow Henry to America, or go to Marguerite. She would not return to Corsica. Only she didn't know how to begin. Then, as the sun sank again without her being any surer how to resume her life, a trader's family with their donkey cart prepared to camp by the spring. They lit their candles and began to chant in Hebrew. Chjara understood that they were practicing their Jewish religion out of sight. She walked up to the group, humming the melody herself. This way they weren't frightened. They couldn't speak to her, as neither husband nor wife knew French, or Latin, or Corse, or Greek, or Persian or Italian, and Chjara knew no German, Yiddish or Hebrew. They managed with hand signals until the youngest child, only five, blurted out a complete and perfect sentence in French. The parents looked at their daughter in astonishment. Chjara didn't show her gold coin, but promised that they would be paid handsomely to take her to Marguerite's estate. They agreed to set out before dawn.

As the the overladen cart arrived in Marguerite's courtyard, Chjara slept snug, as if swaddled, between the trader's wife and the eldest daughter. When the cart stopped, a wheel rolled off. They climbed down and were greeted by a doorman who blinked at them through a wine headache. A tall figure hurried up behind him.

Chjara saw Henry and the feeling leapt in her. Sleep was yet on her like a blanket and she was a different woman with the memory of the dark stream still in her fingers. There, though, was Henry. He had not left for North America. His face was clean and rosy, his eyes were kind and urgent, and he wanted so much to come to her. She took a step forward, he did too, and then it was rapid, it was a rush toward each other before they could think otherwise or notice the face of Victor Ravenaugh peering out from the ivy that covered the window of his excellent bedroom.

Henry felt Chjara fully in his arms for the first time. He urged his mind to please, please record this roundness, this softness — R, S. His fingers found the impossible fineness of her hair.

For her part, Chjara — dirty, unkempt and travel-weary — was confronted with this man who smelled of chestnut blooms, the scent of her homeland. She sank into him. She let him hold and surround her with

himself. She gave herself completely to the embrace. Just once, this once.

The trader rattled the wheel of his cart, trying to push it straight.

‘Oh,’ Chjara said, separating herself. ‘They helped me. I promised to pay them.’

‘Here.’ Henry stepped forward. He held out the small velvet purse that contained all the coins he’d earned from the sale of the Pompeii buttons.

The trader opened the bag. He saw how much was inside, and he took out one coin. He hesitated. He took another. Not looking up, he returned the sack to Henry, who took for him a third coin and kissed the man impulsively on the forehead.

The trader bowed. ‘*Danke*,’ he said. The wife said something in rapid Yiddish. The trader motioned to the broken wheel.

‘Of course.’ Chjara crossed the cobblestone yard. At the stable, a man emerged with a blunt expression on his face that the Jewish trader knew well. Chjara ignored the look. ‘Give him anything he needs to fix it. Also food. Also a bed.’ She issued the commands, knowing Marguerite would accept the cost.

She and Henry sat on a bench beside the ivy-covered wall behind which Ravenaugh listened.

Henry gripped her fingers and held tight. ‘I thought you were gone forever.’ ‘You left.’

‘I left. I’m a fool. And it’s worse.’ He let her see his confusion. ‘I don’t know what’s right or what’s wrong. What’s true. False. I don’t trust what I’ve learned in my life, except...’ He looked at her intently. ‘Except with you.’

She blinked back her emotion. He was saying what she so much wanted to hear. A small voice in the back of her mind wondered: would he have more courage than Jude? Was this love going to be any different, any more constant? Wasn’t this just the same flush that would fade?

‘With you, I feel I could be a good man.’ He was promising her something.

‘But you are a good man,’ she blurted.

‘No. I am not. Don’t assume that.’

His expression was urgent, and she sensed him reaching for some truth between them.

‘Well, I am not a good woman then.’ She should tell him about the baker.

‘Yes, you are.’

‘I am lawless. I am immodest. I don’t like to obey.’ She spoke with guilt and pride, both.

‘I’m lawless,’ he whispered into her ear.

His mouth touched her neck. The feeling ignited.

‘With you, I am more alive,’ she said.

‘With you, I could want nothing else... Nothing... Nothing.’ His mouth touched her, again, again.

‘When you’re not with me...’ All over she was trembling as he kissed her cheeks, her forehead. ‘Did you forget me Henry?’

He paused in his caresses. Her eyes were soft but direct, unflinching.

‘I will not make that mistake again,’ he vowed.

‘Then I will not either,’ she said.

‘You won’t marry him?’

‘Him?’ She should tell him now about the baker.

‘Who is he?’ Henry said. ‘This fiancé?’

Chjara pulled away. She rose. ‘Victor Ravenaugh.’ She paced. ‘A man with a bag of coins but no bag between his legs.’ She returned to her seat. ‘I can’t marry him. I can’t. My father demands that I do and since I won’t, I can never go home. Ever again.’ She breathed. She looked at him. ‘I don’t know how to escape. Will you help me?’

And so the two lovers hatched a plan for Chjara to run away with Henry — for her to hide in the river barge and go back to Le Havre with him. They talked about how Marguerite would help them.

All of this Victor Ravenaugh heard from behind the ivy curtain.



The glass harmonica was not in the music room. Marguerite had wanted to take it upstairs, but out of respect for Victor Ravenaugh she had not done so. Instead, it had been positioned on the first floor where he could wheel into the main ballroom. As evening ended the day, as the tents faded into shadows, as the drunkenness of the night before became a memory, and the prospect of another meal and more music became a reality, the democratic crowd from the village and the soldier-king and his men walked together up the hill to the house.

Napoleon entered the main floor immediately. The rest stayed outside where picnic baskets had been stacked in a pyramid. They ate rather glumly in comparison to the night before. The men who knew each other from the village grouped together. The women who knew each other took their food in awkward fingers while Marguerite's matron attempted to make conversation — as she had been instructed to do. The matron had with her the Jewish trader and his wife and three daughters who were dressed according to their custom for formal occasions all in black, in stark contrast to the colorful finery of the French.

In the ballroom, the glass harmonica presided on a throne in the center of the room. Coaches had been arriving all day. Nobles clustered in groups in the cavernous space, their jewelry shining. Champagne flowed generously. They applauded when Napoleon entered. Then they turned their attention back to the glass harmonica and the musician standing beside it.

Chjara wore a deep-red velvet dress adorned with gold braid below the bodice. Servants had washed her hair and arranged its fine, shining curls high on her head. Her bare shoulders and neck fairly glowed against the burgundy dress. On her feet were soft silk slippers stitched all over with a pattern of wild roses. These Marguerite had embroidered for her.

Chjara felt bewildered, as if the world was a kaleidoscope and she was in it. She could not remember her own musical composition. She could not hear one note of it.

Napoleon approached her. He addressed her in Corse.

'You are the shepherd girl,' he said. He walked around her, inspecting.

What had Marguerite told him? Was she supposed to play the part of a shepherd girl, to pretend she was not a house servant? 'I sing the songs of shepherds,' she said. When he was in front of her, she smiled in the teasing way that people do when they share secrets.

He could not help smiling a little in return.

'I was a servant in the bishop's house in Bastia. Not a shepherdess.' Now her smile was conspiratorial.

'Ah.' He tsked indulgently.

They progressed to the champagne fount, talking in the language that was incomprehensible to everyone else in the room. The noise of the party slowly resumed around them. Chjara answered Napoleon's questions as simply and directly as she could. Bonaparte's questions placed her father's

family on the same side as Napoleon in one of the blood feuds that were Corsica's history. She pressed her feet into the floor to keep from tipping over in excitement. He began to call her his relative.

Still, she could not remember a note. Above them, the candles in the chandeliers wept into their cups. Around them, the noblemen talked and laughed in groups, and the groups each had a woman at its center: one in a pale blue dress, another in a persimmon gown, another in shiny chartreuse. Soon the cluster around Chjara included several of the suitors of Marguerite. These middle-aged men were eager for Bonaparte's favor.

Standing with Henry, Marguerite watched from a few feet away. She was not interested in the suitors and she whispered to Henry that she had trouble even remembering their names.

'Remember just the first letter. Then add some private association to it,' he advised her.

'Like what?'

There was a Balthazar among them, and with Henry's help, she tagged him Bathless Balthazar. By the time they joined the assembly around Napoleon, laughing between them, they had nicknamed them all.

The conversation had switched to French.

'Do we wish to see our French fortunes drained into the Mississippi?' asked the man Marguerite and Henry had dubbed Crying Christian. This man's eyes were indeed moist, though from chronic inflammation of the sinuses, not excess emotion.

Napoleon welcomed Marguerite into the circle with a pleased nod. 'I don't believe you know our friend Vicente Figliero of Milan.'

A small man, smaller than Bonaparte, bowed to the statuesque Marguerite.

'He is a composer of opera,' Napoleon added.

'Is he?' said Marguerite to Napoleon. 'Are you?' she said, unable to resist the pleasure of the idea. She and Henry had dubbed him Vini, Vidi, Vicente.

'But we are speaking of Louisiana,' Napoleon said. 'Tell me Marguerite, have you ever had the desire to sail there?'

'You must meet my friend, Henry the American,' Marguerite said.

'Ah yes. Our shepherd musician has mentioned you are here.' Napoleon said 'shepherd musician' with tenderness.

Henry and Chjara's eyes met but very briefly.



‘Come. Tell me what you know of French America. I’m told Louisiana is a waste of our treasury and I should accept your president’s offer to buy it.’

In this way, Henry was invited to stand between Napoleon and Chjara. Henry’s and Chjara’s arms brushed against each other, which caused them to pull sharply apart as if from a flame.

Napoleon asked for Henry’s views on the consequences to the balance of power if the United States succeeded in acquiring French America. It would hurt the British, Napoleon wagered, more than the French, didn’t he agree?

Marguerite drew aside the composer, Vicente. Unlike the other noblemen in their powdered wigs, the small Italian had a curly mass of dark hair, which Marguerite looked into as into a treetop. Directly she asked him: did he think pleasure was virtue by another, gayer name? They talked about the philosopher Joseph-Louis Roger and his theories of music — during which debate, Marguerite saw the composer look frequently over at Chjara, at Henry, at Napoleon, and back at Marguerite. His eyes darted — a habit that might have been annoying to Marguerite if not for his expression. ‘Oh yes?’ his face said. ‘Is that so?’

Marguerite touched the Italian on the arm. She smiled, drawing his attention to her. ‘Roger describes three forces in the human being: the intellectual, the moral and the animal. The second, the moral force, needs to be informed by sensibility — by the senses.’ She summoned courage. ‘By sensuality.’ Flushing now, she added, ‘For example, by the pleasure found in music. Do you agree?’

‘Eh?’

‘You are not listening,’ she said, disappointed.

‘But I am.’

‘You are?’

‘I hear every word. If I enjoy music *profundamente*, am I awakened to the lives and needs of others?’

Marguerite breathed a sigh of satisfaction. ‘Yes.’

‘Does the habit of listening make me awake and aware?’ He wiggled his eyebrows. ‘Do you notice the unusual dance,’ he whispered, ‘between the American and the red dress? He doesn’t touch the dress, do you see? Even when it would be natural to reach across the back. This red dress is like fire to him, yes?’

She looked into his face and found his eyes on her.

‘While you,’ he said, ‘are like a vase that wants to collect flowers.’

‘I am a vase who wants to collect flowers.’ She pretended to be above such a compliment.

‘You prepare the world for beauty,’ he said.

She would have dropped her eyes if his did not twinkle and invite her to look into him. ‘Yes,’ he continued, ‘for beauty. It is beauty that is another word for virtue, I think.’

‘Ah,’ she said. Yes, that was better.

‘I suspect you find that the world resists your efforts.’

‘Sometimes,’ she said. Then she told him of the night before, and the peasants and the music room.

It was in the midst of this story that Victor Ravenaugh rolled into their circle, his chair pushed by the Mesmerite Yves Danton.

Chjara noticed him first. The few notes that she’d assembled in her mind from the opening of her ‘Suite for Corsica’ vanished again.

Her attention on the man in the wheelchair drew Napoleon’s attention as well, and the others followed suit.

Victor rose with the use of two canes, while Marguerite introduced him.

‘You have met my fiancé,’ he said to Napoleon, then he bowed to Chjara.

Taking in the situation — of young Chjara and the decrepit gentleman — Napoleon said to Ravenaugh, ‘I congratulate you.’

‘Do you?’ Ravenaugh sneered.

The background conversation was stilled.

Ravenaugh leaned forward on his canes.

‘I believe I am most exquisitely unfortunate.’

‘Victor,’ Marguerite said.

‘I have been deceived.’

At this point, they heard a sudden clatter of drums. A blast of the tuba-serpent. A tinkle of bells. Napoleon frowned, plainly annoyed.

‘The villagers,’ Marguerite explained. ‘I invited them to enjoy my instruments in the music room upstairs.’

‘Yes.’ The expression on Napoleon’s face was not of pleasure exactly, but painted with it. ‘Good.’

The sound smeared from one squeak to another.

Victor raised his voice. ‘I have been deceived. By the *innocence*,’ he mocked, ‘of youth.’

‘Stop, Victor,’ Marguerite said.

‘It enters your veins, like the powder of the Orient. It makes you hope...’ he looked at Marguerite, ‘and then dashes hope. It gives you a feeling the world could be good — and then you are betrayed.’

From the open windows of the music room above, a set of scales played evenly, climbing once up; once down.

‘Do you think *you* will escape?’ Victor turned away from Marguerite. ‘Do you think any of you will escape my fate? Will you...’ he turned to Henry, but his body lurched and faced not Henry but Napoleon directly, ‘not rot?’ He bared his yellowed teeth. ‘Will you not lose sap?’

No one breathed. Napoleon’s nostrils flared. From upstairs came again the sound of a random but clear set of notes.

‘Dispose,’ Bonaparte hissed, ‘of this madman.’

A servant materialized.

‘Take him to prison.’

‘Oh sir,’ Marguerite said. ‘Let me quarantine him. He is ill.’

‘Put him in prison, where he will... rot... till he dies.’

From above in the music room came the sound of what seemed a hundred harpsichords.

In fact it was three, of the sort modified to have two strings plucked simultaneously instead of one. The three daughters of the Jewish trader didn’t know that the pedals had released the louder mode, and in any case, they were embarked on the piece they had agreed upon, in whispered Yiddish. The Bach prelude thundered in orderly fashion, one note hammering upon the next.

To this music the guards wheeled Victor out of the ballroom. Victor shouted. Chjara was a harlot. No one could make out his garbled agonies over the music. Henry too would be cuckolded, did he not know it? Napoleon stood rigid with an expression of tolerance strained to the edge of violence. Chjara saw Victor struggle to escape his chair. A guard knocked him down, needing only the force of a single finger. People laughed as Victor collapsed like a man beheaded. Chjara remembered him in the carriage, holding himself off the seat to avoid the pain.

When it came time for Chjara to play the glass harmonica, she asked God to let Victor hear her. The opening phrase seemed to travel from her fingers without her aid. It spoke of the loneliness of the shepherd and of

all the loss that afflicted a man. Like a wind high in the lonely trees, the whispering sighs of the glass harmonica stroked open the heavens and poured down relief. She lifted her head, seeing her audience leaning toward her to listen. She knew loss. She heard for the first time that the melody of this first part coincided secretly, in a kind of echo, with the sound of *'Barbara Furtuna'. Addiu Corsica mamma tanta amata*. She would go to America and never return. Never in her lifetime. Never in the life hereafter, not in the streams that flowed down from the mountains above Bastia.

At the end of the first part she sighed and her shoulders fell, and she dropped her hands in her lap. She could hear them shifting on their feet. A cough. She closed her eyes and began the second part. The allegro danced from her fingers, the music she'd conceived when Henry was gone and the baker held her in his strong arms. Defiant joy, a demand for life — these made her fingers skip from note to note. All the difficult passages, all the rapid triplets, waltzed from her fingers as if she were, like the curé's woman, wise and soiled. The music was a harlot who could curse and laugh at life with its terrifying injustice. Why did love fall where it did, and not where it should?

Victor could not prance. She didn't want to marry him but she didn't like to think of him alone in a cell and suffering endlessly. He would not even have the comfort of his opium.

The final movement began with the sorrow of the first. It remembered the joy of the second. Chjara had written this as a prayer of hope that was also resigned. She believed in what she had known that morning after the demonstration of electricity. There was a way. There was a way to be good. She looked at Henry. Their freedom would come at the cost of Victor's suffering. She felt the audience watch her and follow her eyes to Henry. She concluded with a single major chord, adding the sixth with the faintest touch. The sound held the hint of a question. Instead of the perfect thirds of the Bach prelude, the sixth on top hung in the air as if there were more to come. Her feet pumped the treadle evenly and the notes rang and rang, until she slowly lifted her fingers and there was nothing left.

In the applause, she saw Henry blinking. Marguerite held on to the Italian's shoulder as if she would fly if she let go. Napoleon Bonaparte approached her with a look that implied he intended to possess her as soon as possible.

Chjara thought, I will contradict my destiny. From now on I choose my own life.

In the decades to come, the fate of the merchant Victor Ravenaugh would prey on the conscience of all three of them. Henry, who knew the prison from his tour in Paris, would awaken with night sweats, picturing the old man crooked and shivering in the relentless dark. Chjara would hesitate in her prayers, wondering if she was in some way truly responsible and disputing it, while believing it, and disputing it again. And Marguerite would spend a considerable piece of her fortune, dipping into the Italian's (whom she would marry), trying to get Ravenaugh out alive. She felt no doubt that his punishment would only add to the misery of the world.

## *Part II*

### *Chapter Seven*

America smelled. It smelled of lumber and sap and horsehair plaster and lime dust, and from the window it smelled of fallen leaves mixed in the mud of the street, and it smelled of the ocean — of the black mussels lining the shore and spitting out their sea juice. The air was damp, and in this damp the currents of scent moved. Chjara sat alone, looking out from the second floor of the Widow Hart's boarding house. The richness of the air made her almost nauseous, as if a feast had been spread for her after she'd already consumed too much. She waited for Henry, staring down the street.

Chjara had first noticed the smell when they still were sailing toward this land, far from the sight of shore. Henry had been by her side at the bow. A sailor originally from Cornwall, who told them he ached a little more each day in his joints as they left behind the dry southern winds, explained the odor to her. Using Italian, he said it came from forests, the great hairy forests which still covered New England like a pelt, and which one could notice from 200 miles out to sea... that is, one would notice if one was a person of great sensibility, such as she was. He had touched her mouth with his eyes.

'Why do you speak to me in Italian when you know I endeavor to learn English?' she said, also in Italian. She smiled.

'Because your paramour, he does not know the language of Italy.'

Henry had laid his hand on her waist. 'Italian is not so different from French.' He spoke with affection, not as a man challenged.

As they arrived at the harbor of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Chjara observed that a pelt was not, in fact, a true description for these forests. There were great holes in this animal's fur on the the hillsides and at the towns, she had told Henry.

‘We have been farming here for generations. We’re a new government, but not an unsettled country.’

She saw that his face was tight. Already then, his worries had overtaken him.

Now she sat in the room where Henry had left her while he sought his father’s consent to marry, without which they would be penniless.

He’d left her waiting here already for eight days. He had not introduced her to his family. He visited briefly in the afternoons in the parlor amid the other ladies and then he acted as if he’d never touched her — as if he had never wanted to touch her. She knew he was cold for appearance’s sake. It was unnerving how well he could act the part. On American soil, he was not ‘Henry the American’. He was the anxious son of a powerful father. Today, he had sent a reporter in his stead. The reporter had interviewed her as the ‘musical sensation of France’.

Her room was narrow and long, and Chjara sat desolate in one corner with the newspapers that the reporter had left. She picked up the one on top and tried to decipher the English. A headline read, ‘Now or Never: A Living ELEPHANT at Mr. Wilcox’s Tavern, Nov. 1.’ She feared that Henry might waver and not marry her. She felt doubt as if a man had gripped her, here, underneath her breastbone, had picked her up like a carcass of beef and hung her in the wind to age. Her courage left her. She was like an invalid, like Victor. All her limbs were knotted. It was fine for Marguerite to resist peasant superstitions about destiny’s power. Marguerite had never been a peasant or a servant. Chjara was thousands of miles from anyone who could protect her, and Henry had left her like luggage. In fact, he had taken his luggage to his parents’ and left her with hers.

She closed her eyes, trying to calm herself. She rose abruptly and strode to the window to play the glasses: eight crystal glasses whose clear notes, when she ran a wet finger along them, recalled the glass harmonica as a ghost recalls a man. It was not satisfactory. No. She wanted the instrument. She wanted all thirty-seven bowls, on their sides, in the colors of the rainbow, spinning evenly on their spindle, and she wanted to play. She wanted to lose herself, to feel right in God’s unseen world, and not so uncertain. Not so foolish. What had she been thinking, leaving the protection of Marguerite?

She was thinking of the touch of Henry’s body. Which was not glass. She was thinking of the space between them that was lit with feeling made

manifest. Just as music manifested feeling. Just as electricity manifested the unseen force in the air.

Where was he now, and why had he not presented their love to his parents as a *fait accompli*? How could he have sent the reporter to her, and not come himself? A reporter who had stumbled on her name until he said, 'Ah! It rhymes with tiara.' What in the world was a 'tiara'? The reporter only repeatedly circled his head with a finger. Where was Henry while she was here struggling with English by herself; where was he now, where was he now? Her mind was a fool, a dog spinning around its tail. *Come. Hurry and come back to me.* It exhausted her, thinking this again and again.

Chjara closed her eyes and returned to the *Magdalene*. The crew had improvised a cabin out of canvas that smelled of the ship's former cargo, ginger root. The ginger had made their eyes water. They were told it was harvested from the Kentucky forest floor. From the wild. She had smelled the ginger and she smelled Henry and she smelled the varnish in the wood. She had practiced the English word *smell*, which Henry explained was both a verb and a noun and which she had learned to pronounce in the crook of his neck: 'I ssssmell you.'

One of those days, when they were stalled in the windless sea off Gomera and the heat bore down on them like judgment, he had held onto the rope lintel of their cabin door. He swung in and out of the room. She lay in the hammock. Sun fell through the porthole as if poured from a bucket. He was explaining why he had left his home two years before. He was talking about why he and his father argued, and it had to do with elections. 'Opponents aren't just wrong. They're allied with the Devil.' He swung under the door leaning toward her, pulling the rope with him, and the whole wall of the cabin. His chest shone with sweat. 'My father said voting for Jefferson instead of Burr was as bad as marrying a sister. Or worse! A Catholic.' He smiled ruefully.

Chjara reached for him with her Catholic hand. She pushed off from his chest and swung away from him in the hammock. At the far arc of its swing, she kicked against the ship's curved wall and propelled herself back with enough force to collide with him and knock him over. Then she fell down onto him and they lashed themselves together on the salt-sticky wood slats, appalling each other with the fierceness of the passion that overtook them. This Catholic. This Protestant.



So of course she had known, or suspected, what awaited her from his family here. But then, in the cabin, she had not arrived here yet. Time was only night and day. Only light and dark. And on that small ship in the big sea, they were the Lovers.

She tired Henry with her desire and he tired her, and still they continued. Henry had been such an adventurous lover, suggesting positions she hadn't dreamed of. He had surprised her. Somehow, he had seemed boyish and naïve. In the real world, he gave an impression of inexperience. But his desire was boundless, and hers was too. At one point, a sailor approached Henry with an offer of help — in the form of a slender, hard piece of whale bone or scrimshaw shaped with a knife, chiseled and sanded to complete smoothness, and initialed inside the hollow, JDB. Chjara responded to the love dagger which Henry set before her without a word, in the same way that the peasants in Marguerite's festival had reacted to the instruments of music. She wondered at how it was made and the ingenuity of it. She asked Henry to try it. They let loose the last of their resistance and cried out together in the course of their lovemaking.

The sun burned down; the seabirds called. Chjara and Henry forgot the world. The gods once loved like this. The ancient gods would have looked down upon the ship without judgment. They would have listened to Chjara's cries, and watched Henry take a lap on the deck one night, naked as Zeus, with a sore penis and his chest shining with sweat. The sailors applauded him in the starlight. They doused him with their beer. Chjara, in her one silk, followed the noise. She stood revealed. She paraded before the sailors. Breasts showing through the silk. The dark of her sex. Waves licked the side of the ship. She turned and looked overboard just as a sea creature, white-finned and gleaming, swiveled to the surface with one eye peering.

And now she was here in the Widow Hart's boarding house. She fell asleep that night, curled into a child's shape. In her dream, Henry came to her on stilts. She reached overhead to take his hand. She stretched up, she leaned against his leg which was wooden. She couldn't reach his hand. He called her name and his voice was the same but he was too far away to see.



In the middle of that night, Henry burst out the front door of his father's house. The air was rotten with silence. Not a single light shone in a tavern or a house. He felt like the only man alive. He felt alive in every pore. He was supposed to go immediately to the South Bridge on an errand of his father's. He would do what his father wanted, but not yet; not quite yet. The Widow Hart's boarding house was on the way.

Everything here — just like his father's ludicrous opinions — was exaggerated. During the daytime, Portsmouth sounded louder than Paris. This town of hardly 5,000 seemed to have to shout itself into existence: the men in the barges on the Piscataqua hollered to each other when talking would do; in the tinman's store, Jacob Wright slapped tin against tin, so that Henry's ears rang even after leaving the store. In the tavern's common room, the Reader of the Newspaper enunciated clearly and authoritatively, and if everyone didn't stop to listen, they still applauded at the end of an article as if they'd heard fine opera and not the weather almanac.

At night, the people of his father's town similarly proclaimed the Need for Rest. Rooms and streets were suddenly emptied of life. Bed claimed every soul. He could hardly stand it. Henry's boot heels struck the wooden walkway in front of the General Goods store, sounding as bold as Turkish drums. Henry ached for Chjara. His pace quickened. He cautioned and counseled himself. If he destroyed the illusion of a chaste courtship now, his father would win, or think he'd won — blind as his father was to the truth of the Electric Root of Vitality. When Henry had used this phrase, his father took on the expression of a cat in the act of defecating. Henry laughed, remembering. Bitterness tinged his laugh. He knew his father thought him weak-willed, and Henry hated that his father's opinion seeped into him like water finding the smallest crack in a roof. He knew it was the most selfish act of his life: to bring Chjara here, where she would be despised. Randall Garland didn't even want to meet her. My God, Henry should have made his fortune and then gone to collect her. That's what he should have done. Instead, he'd emptied what was left of his purse when the sailor, JDB, tempted him with an entire case of love daggers, which he called Nantucket Husbands. On Nantucket Island, the whalers' wives had a long history of purchasing polished scrimshaw phalluses. There was even one hidden inside a walking stick. Slip off the brass handle and underneath, there it was, erect and shiny. The secret world thrived on ships among

sailors trading goods across the world. More buttons were easy to make. When they disembarked, he'd hidden the crate in the attic at his parents' house to keep Chjara from seeing it. The worry that his father would find it flowed briefly over him now.

Above Henry, the night rattled with stars. The Atlantic crossing had made Henry firmer, slenderer, more muscled, and he moved like a person ready to win a race. He looked more determined than he was. He was a man who wanted to do the right thing — wanted it terribly without a clear idea of what the right thing was. He arrived at the Widow Hart's boarding house door. He knocked.

Given the silence at midnight, his firm knock was as good as a shout.

A window next door opened. A person moved behind the curtain.

Henry waited. Across the road, a window squealed against its sash. He didn't turn around. He knocked again. Louder. He had to see her. When at last the Widow Hart's door opened, it was not Chjara who answered but another guest, a traveler from England called Mrs. Janet Moore. She stood blinking with her candle, wearing a gray dressing gown with her hair loosely knotted on top of her head.

'Good evening,' Henry smiled. He knew Janet Moore was in the United States to write a travelogue for her countrymen in England. She was calling it: *The Free American: An Investigation into the Manners, Customs and Circumstances of the New Man*.

'I have a manner, custom and circumstance for you to observe,' he said.

She looked at him as if he were mad.

He felt like dancing.

'Henry!' A woman descended the stairs. This also was not Chjara. Where was Chjara?

The Widow Hart was a tiny woman. In her nightdress, clutching a guttering candle, she looked even more than usual like a child. 'What are you doing?'

Henry announced his news: 'The elephant has arrived on Partridge Street.'

'What?' said the Widow Hart.

'The elephant. The great Wonder of India. The second such beast ever to grace America's shores,' Henry said, quoting the newspaper. 'Some men have set bonfires near the South Bridge, waiting to see her pass. A crowd's gathered.'

‘In the middle of the night?’ The Widow Hart’s face lit up with excitement.

‘The elephant’s here!’ Henry called out. Where was Chjara? If he could at least see her with her face still warm from sleeping...

‘Everyone can hear you, Henry!’ the Widow Hart said. They were friends from childhood, and now he winked at her.

‘I’m just saying, if any one wanted to see the elephant for free, they could. Now.’ He called it out, there in the doorway. If everyone left for the South Bridge he could sneak a moment with Chjara.

Hearing Henry, the Elliotts in the fine house across the way came to find out what was happening, and the row of small poor houses behind the Market Street stores got the word, and the deacon Pearse’s widow and her children came down the stairs of their dwelling house, followed in short order by eight strapping boarders who were stevedores on the river.

Chjara, exhausted by unease, didn’t hear a thing.



Randall Garland, Henry’s father, stepped up onto the porch of the Congregational parsonage, with a hatless boy following in the shadow of his upraised torch. Narrow as a mast, taller by a head than most men, Randall rapped on the door, coiled with purpose, giving no hint that he was consumed by a terrible sadness. Henry was a fool. His son, who had learned his figures in one startling month, who could recite Cicero at twelve, who snapped up the most recent scientific knowledge at Harvard — his son had been made a fool by love and he, Randall Garland, was at fault. He had not prepared him. He had not advised him. He had not told him that the choice of a woman was the most important earthly choice a man ever made, and could bring a man to ruin.

Randall knocked again, louder. The door opened. The parson stood blinking.

‘Deacon Henry,’ the parson sighed.

‘Half the town’s awake while you sleep,’ Randall cried.

‘What are you talking about?’ The minister scratched his buttocks.

‘Tell him,’ Randall commanded the boy.

‘Who’s this?’ the minister said.

‘One of the elephant’s keepers,’ Randall told him.

‘Elephant?’ The parson blinked stupidly.

‘Wake up, Samuel. The elephant. The elephant! The one that was due to arrive tomorrow. It’s come tonight, and why? Why?’ Randall turned to the boy. ‘Speak, man.’

The boy mumbled, ‘We travel at night so no one will see her. They are supposed to pay to see her.’

‘Exactly.’ Randall owned a one-eighteenth piece of the elephant — had bought it as an investment, and paid his portion of the beast’s keep from Boston to Portland. ‘They travel at night so as not to be seen, but they are being seen. Why? Because we have no control over our flock, Samuel. None. Dozens are gathered. Dozens dance right now around bonfires beyond the South Bridge, drinking and cavorting like heathens while they wait for the elephant to show. How can we not know about it when half the town arranges to gather in the middle of the night? How can we be caught sleeping, Samuel?’

Get up. Get out.’

‘Randall?’ A woman’s voice called out from the road.

Randall realized suddenly he’d been shouting. He turned to see Anna, his wife, approaching. Accompanying her was the Methodist minister. Anna smiled indulgently at him and Randall tried not to feel the gorge of his fury. She was with child. Forty-four years old and with child, and she wouldn’t listen to him and stay in bed? Did they have to fight over this too? It was the force of their fighting and making up that had led to her becoming pregnant after all these barren years. His heart flooded with affection and worry.

‘We’ll simply ask everyone to go back home to their beds,’ Anna said.

‘They’ll see reason,’ the Methodist said.

‘They won’t.’ The animal keeper scoffed. The boy’s face was tinged gray with weariness. A forceful cowlick made his hair sit like a shelf on top of his head. ‘There’s a man has followed us since Billerica. He gets word to the farmers. He tells them, “You got the right to assembly in 1791. You voted it yourselves through your representatives.” One way or another he lets them know that I pass on the road with the elephant before daybreak, and that they’ve got a right to see us pass. They won’t disperse. They drink hard cider and lots of it, instead of our beer. If they don’t pay to see the

elephant, we lose all that income.'

'They are out there drinking hard cider,' Randall said to the parson, 'while you sleep.'

'Where is the elephant now?' the Methodist asked.

'Gerald's got her hid.'

'His brother,' Randall said. 'The other keeper. He's tucked the elephant away in the woods.'

'We can't keep her hid for long,' the boy warned.

'You must lead, Samuel,' Randall told his minister, exasperated.

Why did half the women of the town flock away to the Methodists?

The answer stood right before him, effete in his nightdress. 'Get dressed. Summon the deacons. Daybreak is in five hours. I'll meet you at the South Bridge. My son Henry should already be there.'



At the Widow Hart's house, Henry sneaked upstairs. He unlatched Chjara's door.

Chjara woke to find Henry with the now familiar expression that seemed to say, I know a secret. Let me whisper it to you. She lifted herself with the muscles of her belly, in a graceful single sloop as a dancer would, and turned slightly from Henry's ready lips, pressing her mouth instead to his neck. There. His smell. His briny rose smell. He was the sea-rosehip itself, salty and fully of tang, and she sucked a rosehip out of his neck while he entered her, quickly and quietly — exploiting the diversion he had created for this purpose, in broadcasting the arrival of the elephant.

'I will punish you,' Chjara whispered to him.

'For what.'

'For every minute you leave me. You torture me.'

'I don't mean to. I swear it'

'Please stay with me.'

'I should leave now,' he murmured, but he could not lift himself from the tangle of her arms. Her skin was a miracle of softness.

She stroked his hair. 'Your father didn't consent,' she guessed.

'No.'

There was a long silence between them.

‘Will he?’ she asked.

Henry twisted, pushing himself against the pillows. ‘Now he’s demanding your father’s consent as well.’

‘But that’s impossible. My father should approve from across the sea?’

‘The letter of the law requires it.’ Henry minced his words in imitation of his father. ‘The *letter* of the *law*. Americans have ignored this law since the *Mayflower*. It was impractical. Why should it apply to us? And yet, if we marry against his wishes, he says he’ll have us charged with fornication.’

‘Fornication?’ she repeated. He’d used the English word so he had to explain it.

‘Here there is a law. We could be charged.’ He looked at her. ‘What he wants is to control my every thought and move and deed.’

‘We’ll go West then,’ she said. It was an idea he’d broached on the ship. She’d refused at the time, despising the wild as any of her people did. Who would leave a good village for the loneliness of fields and mountains? ‘You want to go West. I’ll go.’

‘With what money will we go?’ He smiled, aching. He should tell her what he’d done with his money. He should admit it.

‘We have my gold coin.’

Henry shook his head. ‘Your coin will buy your glass harmonica.’

‘I can wait.’

‘I don’t want you to wait.’ Henry held his hand over his eyes. He couldn’t tell her that his father was refusing even to meet her. ‘Appeasing him isn’t working,’ Henry said flatly. ‘Because my father believes God is coming tomorrow. Or perhaps the next day.’

‘So soon?’

‘He believes it the way you and I know the sun will rise. It’s a true fact to him — though why Jesus should return during his lifetime, instead of any other time in the last 1800 years, I don’t understand.’ Henry sighed. ‘The irony is that I finally agree with him that I need to learn the world of business. I want to apprentice myself to him. He’s been waiting for me to sit at his knee, to bow down to him. Now I’m finally willing and...’

He felt her watching him.

‘Because of me, he repudiates you.’

‘Not yet,’ Henry said.

‘Can I play music for him?’

Henry looked out the window. Music would have the weight of a feather against his father’s resolve. ‘Perhaps we made a mistake coming here,’ he whispered.

‘Let me speak to him. He’ll see I’m no monster.’

‘You could go back.’ He sat up. He turned and looked into her eyes, every one of his feelings sharp as nails. ‘Go back to Marguerite and I’ll follow. Your coin will buy a passage and Marguerite will buy you an instrument.’

‘No.’

‘And then I’ll follow.’

‘You are my home.’

‘You need a better home,’ he said.

‘You,’ she said, rising, swiveling onto his lap, ‘are my home. You,’ she whispered hard. ‘I have followed you.’

He blinked. He loved her and should do right by her. ‘It will be better for you, away from me.’

She pressed herself down onto him, her fingers digging into his shoulders. ‘No,’ she insisted. ‘Not better.’

They were interrupted by a knock. The Widow Hart spoke through the closed door. ‘Mademoiselle?’

‘Yes?’ Chjara sprang to the door. Henry hid. The door was opening. ‘What is it?’

‘Henry has been here to tell us of the elephant.’

‘The elephant?’ Pushing the door almost shut, Chjara glanced back toward Henry.

‘Come. Come on with us.’ The widow reached past the door for Chjara’s hand. ‘I’ll explain as we walk. *Venez, venez.*’

‘*Oui.* I will assemble myself,’ Chjara said.

‘Hurry,’ the Widow Hart said, leaving down the stairs. ‘I can’t believe you didn’t hear him. Henry was shouting. He shouted!’

Chjara dressed and went with them, Henry sneaking out after.



Henry needed to beat the walkers to the South Bridge; he needed to appear



to have been there sooner, and his only option was to go by river. He found his father's skiff where it always was, tied at the very front of the Bow Street docks. The river was moving in its great tidal rush to the sea. The rope was sticky with salt, the knot difficult. He held a torch in one hand, working the knot with the other. Time raced. He threw the torch in the river — he could not row with it anyway — and freed the knot by the last hiss of its light.

‘Henry?’

He recognized the Widow Hart's voice. He stood wide-legged in the small boat, holding the rope like a rein. ‘Here!’ he called. Chjara was coming along the dock between the widow and the Englishwoman.

‘Henry, I thought you were long gone,’ the Widow Hart said.

Henry smiled, racing to come up with a plausible story. He realized in a flash that Chjara would meet his parents tonight. Because of the elephant, they would encounter each other.

‘How can you possibly navigate in the pitch dark?’ The English woman held up their torch.

‘I've rowed this river all my life.’ He knew, though, that the currents changed and could be treacherous.

‘We'll go with you,’ the Widow Hart said.

‘I'll never,’ the Englishwoman declared.

‘It'll be fun. Don't be afraid,’ the widow said, climbing in.

‘What is a... afraid?’ Chjara said.

The other women laughed. Henry saw Chjara flinch, almost imperceptibly. ‘Afraid, not a *fraid*.’ In French, he added, ‘Lack of courage.’

In stiff French, the Englishwoman shot back. ‘There are no sandbars? No submerged logs, no rocks, here in America? Nothing we can strike in the dark that will tumble us — *splush* — into the river?’

‘What is she saying?’ The widow didn't understand French.

‘She's saying the river is dangerous.’ Chjara spoke in her new English. ‘But life is dangerous. Death waits there.’ Chjara met Henry's eyes as she joined him on the boat.

‘What rot. Stupid decisions are dangerous. Not life.’ The Englishwoman's voice was tangy with fear.

They all looked up at her, still on the dock. She held the torch high.

‘It's not far,’ the widow said gently. ‘It's just around the bend. It will be fine.’

‘There is only one torch.’ Leaning out, the Englishwoman saw Henry’s dead in the river. ‘You threw yours away.’ She looked at him with disdain and then took the middle place on the bench. The Widow Hart clasped the Englishwoman’s hand.

‘You are brave,’ Chjara said.

‘No. Foolhardy.’

Chjara didn’t know the word.

‘Risk. For no reason.’

‘Yes,’ Chjara agreed. ‘But when you are brave, you don’t always know the difference, do you?’

The Englishwoman looked at her with interest. Then Henry launched them out. The river caught and carried them on the fast tide. Mysterious sounds swept around them, like birds or wild Indians or simply wind in the trees, and a faint smell of smoke tinged the salt air.

Chjara watched Henry row. She remembered the dream of him on stilts, and her heart thickened inside her; how easily he had

imagined sending her away. She felt unmoored and *foolhardy* herself, and she leaned over, drawing her fingers through the water — there, the river that led to the sea... Water in all its immensity covered the earth, and the same water — some piece of the same water — encircled *Corsica mamma tanta amata*, and yet nothing would be the same, ever. She had not known one could go so far from home, to where home was no longer imaginable.

Henry pulled hard on the oars. The torch dwindled to a small triangular flag of blue light. The wind made the river choppy, and the Englishwoman’s fearful face under the dying torch was granite chipped by shadows. Chjara’s hair flew out from its pins; their speed into the dark frightened her too, and she began to sing without preamble, ‘*He leadeth me beside still waters.*’ She sang it in the Latin she’d learned as a child during Curé Tumasgiu’s Easter mass, and she knew Henry understood. He laughed softly and translated the psalm for the others. The melody was simple and she kept it strong, repeating it like a mother teaching a child a round: loud on each down beat of the new phrase. After her third time, the other women sang along. Then she floated away from the melody line, twirling a little side song underneath the familiar tune. The tide rushed them toward the sea.

Henry was glad to have the women distracted. The torch was almost out. He felt the change in the water where the South Pond met the Piscataqua

River. He couldn't see anything. They were out in the middle and needed to get back to shore or they'd pass the South Bridge by. There was a strong whiff of smoke. He rowed and grunted and they seemed for a long moment unable to escape the pull to the sea. But then he yanked harder and suddenly a peninsula of trees loomed before them. He swiveled the boat, and then they were on the other side of the peninsula where five bonfires in a row burned on the South Road, right before them. A crowd filled the bridge overhead and there was shouting. Above it, one voice rang loud: 'Where is your conscience?'

It was his father's voice, preaching.

'Good wives, if the door to your hen house were open, should I walk in and take your eggs? It's the same thing.'

'Where's the hen house?' someone in the crowd yelled.

'Where are the hens?' someone else called.

People laughed.

The skiff scraped onto the rocky shore but no one heard them in the noise of the crowd.

'You think Christ would be pleased to see you stealing from each other?'

'We're not stealing and you're not the one to tell us we are, Randall Garland. We're in the open night air.' Henry didn't recognize the speaker's gravelly voice.

The crowd hurrahed.

Henry helped the women to shore, he held Chjara by the arm, and quickly they climbed up to the bridge and entered the crowd.

The gravel-voiced speaker was crossing to the center of the bridge. There his father stood. Beside him, arms locked, were the Congregational pastor, the Methodist preacher and his mother, blocking passage over the bridge to the bonfires. There was no elephant in sight.

The new-comer spoke: 'I am Bill Manning, son of William Manning of Billerica. Whose pocket is it, Randall Garland, that you want to protect here? Is it our Christian conscience you're wanting to preserve, or your own purse?'

The crowd cheered.

Henry's mother caught sight of them; she saw him and she saw his Chjara.

Henry met his mother's eyes and he felt Chjara beside him. He leaned down and whispered, 'That's her, my mother.'

In the midst of the noise, Chjara curtsied quickly.

Randall Garland didn't notice. 'Yes, I have a property interest in the elephant. You accuse me of venality.' He stared at Manning with fire in his eyes. 'Do you have property, do any of you have property?' Randall stopped in front of a farmer. 'Do you ever have a cow to sell?' He turned to the tinman. 'Do you sell tin?' Randall held the torch high. 'What is the cost to our souls if we grab the property we want without regard for other men's just and reasonable rights? Would you have us all be monarchs, selfishly grabbing all we want?'

When he turned again, he came face to face with his son. The crowd looked with him.

They all saw her at once: the Papist from France.

Chjara felt the heat of their curiosity. She looked into Henry's father's face and saw him master his surprise. His lip twitched — Henry's own gesture — and his eyes were furious and sad. She straightened, she would not be cowed, and he turned away without a greeting or a nod or any acknowledgment. Everyone saw it. He rebuked her without uttering a word.

Shocked, Henry seemed to be throbbing instead of breathing. His ears rang with fury. How could his father treat Chjara like that? How could he? He would have spoken but he had no breath, no tongue.

'We inherited a dream.' Randall's voice carried, low and strong. 'A calling to be good, as Christ would be.'

From the distance, a woman called out: 'But Deacon Garland, you said yourself, the elephant's a wonder. You said it yourself!' A woman's voice shrilled. 'There's no sin in seeing the elephant.'

'But you can't simply take, take, take. What is the price we pay — all America...' Randall held up his torch, circling with it. He paused for the briefest second before his son, his voice cracking. 'What price do we pay if we follow our desires under cover of night?'

Henry leaned slightly closer to Chjara, whose hair, he saw, was disheveled, whose face was flushed. His father had guessed they were lovers. He would have guessed because Henry had arrived late, with her, and his story of a chaste courtship was now a lie.

'Randall Garland's right,' shouted Manning, oblivious to this unfolding drama. 'He's right.' There was a restless silence. Was Manning conceding? Would they have to go home to their beds before the elephant even ap-

peared? ‘Fair is fair,’ Manning continued. ‘So give something to the boys who move the elephant.’

‘Yeah!’ shouted others.

‘Give what you’ve got — an egg, or a beer. Tomorrow pay your coin, if you’ve got one, to see the clever tricks they do with the beast, tomorrow at the show. We do not deny the man his property.

‘But tonight! Tonight and any night, we have a right to gather. We’ve a right to walk across this bridge. We don’t need any by-yourleave from those that say fair is what just so happens to enrich them.’

Cheers rose up and the crowd pushed forward, pressing against the ministers and Anna blocking their route.

A man stinking of hard cider appeared at the front of the crowd, studying Randall up and down. ‘He don’t look like an elephant.’ He bent over, making a trunk of his arms. He swung it wide. He swiveled and struck Randall Garland from behind. It was so quick, so unexpected, and suddenly Randall was on the ground with the crowd surging forward.

Henry saw his father go down; he heard his mother cry out. ‘Get under the bridge,’ he told Chjara. ‘Go,’ he said to the Englishwoman. They went, and he rushed to his father. He reached him at the same time as Manning. Together they lifted him up.

Manning waved his torch, shouting, ‘Peace! Be peaceable. Are you a mob then?’

Henry felt his father shaking. He saw his mother’s worried face and in a flash, Henry saw his father compose his fear. Firm himself. Henry’s mother took their hands and Henry found himself in the middle of the human chain blocking the crowd from town who wanted to cross the bridge.

‘So are you a mob?’ Manning shouted again. ‘Or are you citizens?’

The crowd roared, ‘Citizens!’

Over the crowd, Henry saw Chjara and the Englishwoman drop down the bank. He was exasperated to find himself trapped here between his parents. As if sensing his resistance, his father’s grip clawed tighter.

Manning faced the row of them. ‘By what law do you block this bridge?’

Henry asked his father, ‘Is there a law against assembly on a public road?’ Their eyes locked. Henry persisted. ‘What is the letter of the law here, Father?’

‘My father teaches me to obey the letter of the law,’ he told Manning.

‘Then you must let us pass.’ Manning smiled, but his eyes conveyed warning.

Randall Garland stared at his son. Henry returned the favor. Without breaking the look, Randall handed the torch to Manning. ‘Go then,’ he said.

It was a riot then — of rushing men, women and children, the ministers joining them, and Henry going to find Chjara.

Randall Garland stood like a rock, Anna in the shadow beside him, while the crowd surged around them.



‘There cannot be many places to hide an elephant.’ The Englishwoman had minty breath. The river water sluicing under the bridge stank of fish guts, and something swooped in the rafters above them.

‘Let’s look.’ The Englishwoman ducked out the other side of the bridge, pulling Chjara with her. They moved away from the bonfires and the crowd, onto the peninsula with its dark copses of trees. Chjara smelled it: she smelled a sweet-sour aura which was the anxiety of the beast. She had never experienced the world of odor so keenly before America. The Englishwoman stepped in a pile of dung.

‘Who goes there?’ The animal keeper appeared out of the shadows.

The Englishwoman shook off the dung. ‘I want to ride it.’

‘You don’t,’ Chjara said, surprised.

‘I saw it done. In Liverpool for King George’s birthday. I want to ride her.’

‘You aren’t a Fraid?’

‘I’m not a coward.’ The Englishwoman’s chin thrust up.

‘But you don’t have to prove...’

‘It’ll be a dollar to ride it tomorrow,’ the keeper said.

A dollar was a king’s fortune.

‘Here.’ The Englishwoman produced a coin.

The keeper took it and put it away in a purse which he pocketed but still he didn’t move for a long moment. ‘All right then, she’s over here.’

She was a shadow darker than all the other shadows. When the animal keeper struck his flint and lit his torch, the elephant’s eyes shone inside folds upon folds, full of foreignness and misery. She was exotic, she was unknown,

she was beastly — and while the keeper talked with the Englishwoman, Chjara reached out and touched the trunk of it. Of her.

‘You can go too,’ the keeper said. ‘There’s room for two.’

The torch light drew the crowd’s attention. ‘There it is,’ someone shouted.

The keeper switched the animal behind her knee, and she obediently bent low. The Englishwoman waited but the keeper lifted Chjara first. The creature allowed Chjara to step up its great gray belly. She found her footing on ridges of wrinkled flesh. Then Chjara was on top, a broad and flat place with a harness easy to grab. The crowd shouted encouragement and warning. The elephant began to rise.

‘Wait! I’m the one who paid,’ the Englishwoman scolded the keeper, who twitched the animal behind the knee once more. It bent down again.

Chjara pitched forward. To stay balanced, she embraced the neck of the great beast, which was studded with black bristles as stiff as sewing needles. Blinking with pain, she clung to its enormous collar of muscle.

The Englishwoman, meanwhile, tipped and wobbled up the elephant’s side. Her arms cartwheeled. The crowd roared and laughed as if she were clowning. Janet climbed onto the back and the animal heaved itself up. Chjara straightened from her crouch at the same time, and then they rode toward the crowd to enormous cheers.

Chjara looked out over the Americans. She remembered riding on her father’s shoulders in the Rue du Dragon tavern. It had been like this only now she wasn’t a child and, though the townspeople cheered, they had seen Henry’s father rebuff her. Who would protect her here? Would Henry? She closed her eyes briefly and when she opened them, she felt that she *was* the beast, with folds upon folds around her eyes. The elephant’s footsteps shook the ground. In the tremor of it, there was the memory of electricity. Embers from the five bonfires crinkled the dark. The crowd’s exclamations could turn to jeers, and looking over them, Chjara understood that destiny was made by such people, by crowds of people — by their opinions which gusted into the air like the fires’ heat and created currents of praise and rebuke. On top of the elephant, she felt small and apart. She held on. Her heart swelled hot inside her while her skin felt cool, exposed. Nausea rose in her throat.

Then the elephant swung its trunk up and bellowed.

It was an inhuman trumpet. It sounded part bird, but bird magnified to mountainous size. The vibration shook through Chjara, the sound coursed

between them, and Chjara breathed a long outward breath, joining the sound inside herself. The sweat of nausea disappeared as quickly as it had come.



Henry returned up the bank to the bridge, and from beside his parents he watched the Wonder of India and the woman who would be his wife. He saw how Chjara's shoulders moved with the animal, up and down in the same slow and sure rhythm. The Englishwoman struggled. Teetered. She leaned forward, clutching onto Chjara. Chjara guided the woman's hands onto her hips, and Janet began to ride with the elephant, not against it, following Chjara's example. Henry thought, Where did you come from? How are you the person you are? She moved with the beast as if she were a part of it — part of the mystery itself. He looked at her with wonder and he wanted to possess her. He wanted to be for her what she was to him: necessary. He wanted her intelligence cleaved to his own.

'She is a fine woman,' Henry's mother blurted.

'Anna!' Randall Garland glared at Henry's harlot. On his elephant. A beautiful face. A full figure. How could he convey to Henry that he understood the temptation to do as one pleased? He himself would like to hold Henry to himself, his prodigal son. 'Henry, if you marry the Papist,' he said, 'I cannot love you.'

'Oh Randall,' Anna said.

'Freedom of religion is also the letter of the law,' Henry said hotly. 'Why can I not marry whom I choose? Because of religion?'

'Sophist,' Randall said. 'You know you transgress. You feel it — here.' Randall placed his hand on his son's chest.

Henry looked away, his lip twitched. 'I will marry her.'

Randall stared at Chjara Vallé on the elephant, and he knew she would only make Henry's chance at grace more difficult. Wasn't it difficult enough? Randall wanted to cry out. He looked at her and he looked at the female elephant, which now showed him her backside with a huge slit that dripped urine. He smelled the urine and the fetid female odor.

'I will renounce you and all I've promised you,' Randall said.

'Husband, would you cast the first stone?' Anna said, furious.



Chjara looked down and saw Henry's father and mother beside Henry, all their eyes fixed on her. Chjara understood Henry's parents about as well as the elephant did. She watched the beast's long ears rippling. They were arguing about her, no doubt. She couldn't join the conversation. She felt a thousand miles removed from them and their angry gestures and red faces. As if from the distance of a dream, she observed them caring; feeling urgently. That was what it was like to care. And yet it didn't matter what the content of feeling was at this moment. She remembered being in the chapel in Paris after leaving the arms of the baker; how she had wept. She had wanted so much to feel certain of each choice she made and instead everything had been confusing. Here on the elephant, she felt like a foreigner to feelings, their language distant and confused.

The elephant swung toward the river. She dipped her trunk into the water. She tilted her head back, and Chjara leaned with her. The elephant bellowed again, this time spraying water over the whole gathered crowd. Children squealed with delight. Fires hissed with the spray.

Henry walked away from his father. He was no longer a rich man's son. With part of himself, he knew this outcome was what he'd feared. He knew his avarice. And he knew now that he would have to sell something from his new supply of Husbands and buttons. A frisson electrified him all the way to his stockings. It was a feeling like looking down from a great cliff, and anticipating the fall.

## *Chapter Eight*

Anna Garland walked around and around the block on which the Widow Hart's boarding house stood, debating whether to disobey her husband flagrantly. She should not meet with Henry's woman, absolutely not, nor engage with Henry on the subject, Randall had said. Her husband was most peevish when he was unsure. She yearned to love this aspect of Randall as Christ would, without reservation. But she did have reservations. Quite a few. In fact she had some reservations also about Christ's teaching, because unconditional love seemed so utterly unsuited to the human condition. A dog could love a person without reservation. A dog could love regardless of what fool idea settled into a husband's mind. But should not a wife love intelligently — and likewise, a servant of God love Christ intelligently? Of course she should.

Anna Garland raised her fist to the door of the boarding house, poised to knock — and did not. She looked over her shoulder. Henry was arranging some business at the docks, as he'd told them at breakfast. Randall at that moment was with the magistrate to undo Henry's rightful patriarchal inheritance as eldest and only son. Neither of them was likely to be on Main Street now. Still she looked behind her, and at that moment the door opened and Chjara almost stepped into her.

They clutched each other in the near collision and Anna knew that Chjara must feel the swelling in Anna's belly.

They stood speechless, face to face.

'Ah,' said Chjara, staring at the woman who was rejecting Henry because of her. Her hand stung with the hardness of Anna's pregnant belly. 'So. You replace Henry with a new son.'

'I will not.' Anna stiffened. 'You do not replace a child. No one recovers from a child who is gone forever.'

'I am gone from my parents forever. I have no home except with Henry.'

Anna had to restrain herself. For the first time she understood how desperate Henry's woman must be, desperate for a home. She wanted to reach out and fold this child of God in her arms.

Now Chjara's face changed. 'Do not pity me.'

'But I do.'

'We'll find our way, Henry and I, with or without you. Now I'm going to the sea.' She lifted up her skirts and pivoted around Anna.

Anna watched Chjara go. 'The sea is easier reached that way,' she called as Chjara headed inland to the west. The girl did not turn or acknowledge Anna's words. Anna leaned against the porch railing and felt herself smile ruefully. Of course Henry would love such a woman. Of course he would want someone proud and brave.



Henry walked back and forth along the Portsmouth docks. He couldn't sell anything here. Any transaction would immediately become gossip. He did not want to get caught. But he needed to sell something, anything. How in God's name could a man generate capital in an honorable way? This was a mystery greater than religion, and rarely broached. He turned up Penhallow Street and saw his friend Blake Howell at the gate to his excellent new home. Here was a man with money to spare. His round face was as bland as a customs official's, and he had a habit of dancing his fingers upon his waistcoat. He looked down the street as if Henry was exactly the one he waited for.

Henry did not know that during his absence, Blake had become Henry's father's partner in a venture selling a newfangled apple corer. Unfortunately, the venture had failed.

Henry approached, tingling with debate. Should he broach the subject of the contraband? He thought perhaps he would.

They greeted each other, they talked about old times, they went to a tavern, and just as Henry felt almost committed to speaking, Blake asked him about his prospects.

'Funny you should ask.' Henry hesitated.

'Yes?'

He reached into his pocket where he had one of the buttons.

Blake said, 'I ask because you may be interested in what I have to sell. I want to go into bricks.'

‘I don’t know anything about bricks.’

‘You don’t. But you’re an educated man. I want to go into bricks so I must part with my bookselling carriage.’

‘A carriage?’

Blake leaned forward. ‘There are so many new roads. We are a nation of road builders, I tell you Henry — now and forever, I predict it. On these roads...’ his hand gestured out, ‘commerce flows. I have made a small fortune already.’

‘Then why would you sell it to me? Especially as I can’t afford it.’

‘Your father can.’

‘My father renounces me.’

There was a pause. Blake’s bland face did not reveal that he knew, as everyone in town knew, of the dispute between the Garlands

Senior and Junior. ‘Does he?’

Henry pulled his hand from his pocket.

‘You can afford it nonetheless,’ Blake said.

‘For what? For this?’ Henry opened his palm, and the coins there included the button, strategically placed.

But Blake ignored Henry’s open palm.

‘Of course I wouldn’t sell it to you for a pittance.’

‘What then?’ Henry closed his hand, which shook as he returned it to his pocket.

So Henry received an education from Blake Howell in the new money policy that had taken hold in the United States while Henry was in France. Respectable men today could borrow money from a bank without help from their fathers or anyone else, as long as the business to be purchased could be proved to be a good investment. Such enterprising men were being called *entrepreneurs*. Hadn’t Henry heard the word? It came from the French economist Jean-Baptiste Say, who praised rather than scolded those who took on risk.

They walked to the barn where Blake kept the carriage. It was full up with books, and Blake showed Henry those on top: Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography; Webster’s spelling book; two kinds of Bible, one more expensive with illustrations.

‘I also sell *The Coquette*,’ Blake said.

‘What’s that?’ Henry’s heart quickened. Did Blake also sell illicit goods?

‘The ministers don’t like it. They prefer Franklin. They prefer advice books: how to save, how to live virtuously.’

‘What is *The Coquette*?’

‘A good woman is engaged to a minister. Ah, but the minister is so boring. She meets a gentleman from our Southern colonies. He has fine manners. He has a habit of writing...’ he lifted a copy of the book by two fingers, as if it burned him, ‘love letters.’

‘Yes?’ Henry waited.

‘The women like it. They weep and cry.’

‘Why?’

‘The gentleman also writes letters to his friends. These are in the book. By them, the reader knows that the Southern gentleman is not true. He’s the wolf in sheep’s clothing. The girl doesn’t see it. She loves him. She yields to him.’ He put the book back. ‘She dies penniless, in a boarding house, giving birth to his bastard child.’

‘The wages of sin,’ Henry said, wearily. He thought of Chjara and the risk she took with him. On the ship, she’d shown him the herbs that made her monthlies come reliably, including — to their relief — last week.

‘It is the most popular book beside Webster’s and the Bible.’ Blake drew balance sheets from a leather satchel. ‘Thanks to all the preaching against this book, everyone knows of it. They ask for it. The ministers demand that the libraries do not keep it, at least not in the rural towns where I go, so you must always have many copies.’

The balance sheets showed a significant profit.

When they were near to agreement, Blake told him the accounting depended on selling all these books in the carriage before Christmas, which was why the carriage was packed and ready to go.

The next day they went to the bank. Henry received a promise for the loan, and in triumph, he went to his parents first and then to Chjara.



It was a cold day and Chjara was sitting in the boarding house’s parlor with the Englishwoman and the widow, Katie Hart. The chimney did not draw well and they were treated to gusts of smoke tasting of ash and grit. They

sat on ladder-backed chairs with their knees nearly in the flames, as they tried to catch the small warmth of the fire.

‘The Congregational Church has cancelled your concert,’ Janet said. ‘They said the weather was too poor.’

This last bit was news to the Widow Hart. ‘The concert is supposed to be two weeks from now,’ she said, bristling. ‘How can they know the weather then?’

There was an uncomfortable moment. Of course it was because of Henry’s father. The Widow Hart looked at Chjara with pity. ‘What are you going to do?’

‘In my village,’ Chjara said, trying her English, ‘someone in my family would...’ she motioned with a knife across the throat, ‘to Henry.’

‘No!’ said the Widow.

Chjara shrugged, yes.

‘The customs in England are more civilized,’ the Englishwoman said.

‘Of course they are,’ the Widow Hart said with sarcasm. The Englishwoman took offense — and she took notes for her book on American customs.

‘Do you like herring?’ Chjara asked incongruously. ‘Do you eat the herring in vinegar bath, like the Dutch?’

‘Not “vinegar bath”,’ Katie Hart said. ‘Use “pickled”. Pickled herring.’

‘Yes. You have eaten this?’

‘Yes.’ The widow smiled.

‘It makes the mouth, the nose — squeeze, yes?’

‘It’s tart.’

‘Tart,’ Chjara repeated.

‘There are tart fruits — strawberries. Rhubarb is tart. A lemon is tart.’

‘Yes, yes, this is what I mean. The sensation of tart. For me, it is tart to be here.’

‘No, no.’ The widow laughed.

‘Yes, yes.’

‘No. You can’t say you feel tart. It’s not English.’

‘But it’s true. I’m...’ She crinkled up her nose and tightened her body into a curl. ‘I feel squeezed. I feel...’ She tried to find a better word, but no word came so Chjara just puckered her lips. Mouth pursed, cheeks sucked in, shoulders drawn up, she held her breath.

The women laughed. It was a very funny face.

Henry came.

For an endless time, it seemed to Chjara, her hosts made conversation with Henry. She watched his face, so capable of maintaining the show of patience. Didn't he want her? Didn't he want to shoo them out? At last the ladies stood up. They would go to the tavern to collect fresh milk.

'We are leaving you without a chaperone,' the Widow Hart said, 'but no one will know.'

'Thank you.'

'Now you are a tart,' the Widow Hart said, smiling wickedly.

Henry had to explain. Chjara flushed. 'A tart is a *puta*?' Oh, it was so impossible. Was there a word in English that didn't have two meanings? She hated feeling so mistaken all the time. But the Widow Hart winked. She pulled the Englishwoman with her out the door.

Up in her room, Chjara listened as Henry told her about selling books. Then he announced that he needed to leave immediately, the next day, to sell enough books before Christmas.

'You can't go with me,' he said.

'But how could you leave me here?' She was stunned. His face was guileless, earnest, while he tore her heart.

'I need to make my fortune.' He leaned forward, his eyes bright. 'It's for you.'

'I am your fortune. I am your nation. Your riches.' She was quoting him, her tongue dry.

'Yes, but I also need money.'

He would abandon her here? He didn't mean it. The air had vanished from the room. 'You will take me with you.' She stood up from where they'd been sitting together on the edge of her bed. She went to the windowsill and took down a crystal glass, rolling it into her one silk, beginning to pack.

He came up behind her. 'We cannot travel together, unmarried.'

'Then we will marry.'

'No one will marry us — not against my father's wishes.'

'Elsewhere. In Boston.'

'You would be a... ' He hesitated.

'I would be a tart? I don't care.'

‘I do. I will come back for you with a fortune in six weeks. Maybe eight.’

‘How can you make a fortune so fast?’

Everyone is buying books,’ Henry said. ‘I’ll be back at Christmas and I’ll bring you a glass harmonica for our wedding and I’ll give you a child.’ He pushed himself against her. He did not dare tell her that he needed privacy because of the case of contraband he would slide among the books. God willing, the honorable books alone would make his fortune.

‘I don’t want your child.’

She was crying now, and ferocious. He was cruel. He would leave her. She punched at him, hard.

But he was larger, and he fell back on the bed with her blows, pulling her with him. They rolled and he held her down. Immediately he was aroused. She snapped her teeth, ready to bite him.

He whispered, ‘I will give you everything.’

She snapped harder. She bit his ear, drawing blood. ‘Everything except yourself. Here in this bed.’ She tasted her own tears on his neck and she felt through the front of his shirt to his chest hair. Pulling there. ‘I would be so lonely in this bed without you.’

He withdrew. ‘Not in this bed.’

‘Why not this bed?’ she said.

He sat up. ‘My mother wants you in her house.’

‘But they despise me!’

‘My father despises you.’ Henry’s eyebrows wiggled. ‘My mother may yet convince him, the old monster.’

‘That old monster will be a father again.’

‘What?’

‘Your mother is pregnant.’

She had never seen Henry go so pale.

‘My poor mother.’ He stood up. He spun around. ‘He should leave her alone. Will she survive a pregnancy at her age?’

‘Maybe she does not want to be left alone.’ Chjara stared at him. ‘Your mother looks strong. She looks like a happy woman, full of life.’

‘Help her.’ Henry knelt down beside her. ‘Please. Live with them. She needs a daughter.’

‘She needs no one. You men need each other. To fight with, to abandon us because of your secret schemes and plans.’



‘What secret schemes?’ He flushed to the roots of her hair but she wasn’t looking at him. She stared out the window.

‘Why did you buy this bookselling carriage? Why did you choose something that would take you from me?’ She turned to him. ‘Henry, why?’ She made her appeal, she begged him, her eyes hot: please don’t do this, please. Her whole being pressed forward.

‘I haven’t paid the Widow Hart for last week’s rent. I haven’t paid her for this week’s rent. I don’t have money, Chjara.’ There, he had admitted it — how desperate he was.

‘Money doesn’t matter.’

‘It matters.’

She shook her head, no. The heat in her eyes became tears, and she was weeping.

He went to her, he glimpsed her face twisted with agony, and he couldn’t look; he wrapped her in his arms. ‘Chjara,’ he whispered. ‘We will be rich by Christmas, I promise you. I’ll come back.’

She listened to him and she knew with a stone where her heart had been that his mind was decided. He would leave her here. She swallowed. He was going, no matter what she said.

‘Do you think I won’t return?’ he lifted her face. ‘Could you possibly imagine I wouldn’t return to you?’ He would not let her turn her head. ‘Please believe me. Please let me prove myself to you. I am not the fool my father says I am.’

Chjara let Henry tell her more about the book business. Together they looked at the figures and the loan agreement. She felt hollowed out. He explained to her what Blake Howell had explained to him. There was a mania for learning in the new United States. People wanted to learn to read and write — farmers and bakers and candlestick makers. They learned with the help of Noah Webster’s *Book of Spelling*, so he had 300 copies of it to sell. They wanted to learn to read newspapers, and novels too. He didn’t tell her about *The Coquette*, not now when he was leaving her unmarried and alone in a boarding house. She listened, hiding her fears, trying to remember how to be a foreigner to feelings. What would happen to her here without him?

When he left just two days later, he asked her for her mother’s gold coin, for the glass harmonica to be made in Boston. She could not refuse him.

She could not say, yet — I'm not sure I trust you.

She had nothing, not even a penny, after he disappeared down the road.



She was in the house of Henry's father for more than a day before Randall Garland spoke a word to her. She did not know that he was in the house on the morning that Anna Garland showed her into every room, as if exhibiting it to a royal audience.

It was a new three-storied building made all of wood. Who built with wood which burned? Chjara wondered. Did they have no stones, no bricks? All the materials were American, Anna told her. The maple floors came in fact from a tree in their own yard. The stone for the fireplaces was quarried just six miles inland. In the parlor, two large windows looked onto the snowy street. The kitchen occupied the entire basement level which opened onto the hillside. All eight rooms had fireplaces large enough to set beds inside, it seemed to Chjara. On the second floor, overlooking the street — and opposite the room where she was to stay — Randall Garland had his 'Historical Library'.

'He's collecting the records of the founding of New England. There's sundry else,' Anna said, with a casual sweep of her hand.

'May I read them?' Chjara stood before a wall of books as extensive as the one she'd read in her childhood.

Randall appeared. Anna started, and her face reddened.

'I don't want her in my library,' Randall said with quiet violence.

'All right,' Anna said.

Chjara didn't move. 'Do you think I poison your books by reading them?'

'There is nothing for you here,' he said.

'What about this?' Uncowed, she took down a title in French.

He snatched it from her. Then he saw what it was: John Calvin, who first wrote his treatise in French Switzerland. Randall had purchased the original edition although he didn't know the language. He watched her take another book from the shelf.

'It has the same name. Oh! You have the same book in French and in

English. But that would be perfect for me! To learn your language.'

'What is it?' Anna said.

'Calvin.' Randall eked out the word.

Anna laughed, touching him on the shoulder. 'God speaks to you, husband.'

Randall ground his teeth.

Anna said, 'What harm can come of reading Calvin?'

He nodded agreement and exited without a word. The two women glanced at each other, a conspiratorial smile passing between them before Anna followed her husband out.

The next day, Chjara saw that he had locked the library door. She read the two books, she studied, and for a week she lay long in bed in the mornings and evenings. Marguerite's experiment to use pleasure as the spur to true virtue seemed a preposterous idea during the long hours shut away in this room. One night, when she couldn't sleep and when an owl hooted outside her window with maniacal consistency, she wrote Marguerite a letter.

I have a terrible sense that destiny will thwart me though I try to refuse it any power over me. I feel like a child stomping her foot down. Victor Ravenaugh schemed to get me in his marriage bed, and I schemed to get away from him and go to Henry. Now I am alone without him, waiting, waiting, thinking of him as an owl hoots and hoots, and I hear myself, calling him back to me. I wonder if John Calvin isn't right, that our reason betrays us. We think we know how to proceed toward freedom and virtue. We excite ourselves with these wonderful ideas. Perhaps we do see through a glass darkly. What if our minds are incapable of truth and it is really only one illusion after another — hoot, hoot, hoot?

I will blaspheme and say that to me, at this moment, the Holy Spirit, which I call Electricity, seems to me a fickle and indecent provider. What if Pleasure, too, is like a husband, and it can go where it pleases, come when it wills, and leave us aching, aching, for its mighty staff?



The next morning at dawn, Chjara heard Randall Garland leave at a gallop, as he had done every day. She washed her face and read her English, staring up at the ceiling as she heard the servants on the third floor move

around. More than once she heard her name spoken above her, in rooms very like the one she'd had on the top floor of Victor Ravenaugh's house. There seemed to be more people up there than she'd met.

'We keep two servants,' Anna Garland said when they were out walking later, 'and two freed slaves although the Negroes are of no use to us.'

'Why are they of no use?'

'We took them in when they were already old and feeble.'

'Don't they have families to care for them?'

'All their children were sold. Martha and George's owners manumitted them, I believe, so their own heirs would not be burdened with the care of them. My minister and I agreed that it is our Christian duty to house and feed them.'

'I see,' Chjara said. 'And now you must also house and feed me like a Negro.'

Anna Garland stopped in the street. For several long moments the two women observed each other. It was as if each of them dared the other to deny the fact first.

But then Anna, with her hands on her hips, said, 'Yes. You're right. I show you Christian kindness.' She leaned forward, eagerly. 'Tell me. Am I doing it wrong? Am I not kind?'

Chjara laughed, tilting her head and looking, truly looking, at Henry's mother. Anna's face was alight, her eyes keen, her full cheeks ruddy, her hair specked with gray.

'I'm sure it's possible to be kind in the wrong way,' Anna said. 'If I believe Randall, we are doomed to get everything wrong, one way or another. *I am a lost undone creature by nature and I have made myself more vile by practice.* We said this prayer on our wedding night.'

Chjara laughed.

'I say it no more. Are we not capable of goodness? Can't I help you in some way?'

'Yes. You are being kind to me. But I am a burden. As a Catholic, I am the object of either pity or revulsion.'

'No,' Anna insisted. 'I love you as Christ would.'

Chjara was silent.

'Or that's what I try to do,' Anna continued. 'Perhaps it's truer that I love you so that I can gain Henry back.' Anna looked ahead intently.

‘I’m selfish in that, I admit it. I argued that we should forgive you your Catholicism.’

‘Forgive my religion.’

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘It is not the correct one.’

‘You’re so certain?’ Chjara walked in the same rhythm as Anna without looking at her.

‘Yes, I am. You must have a direct experience of God. You cannot give this experience away. You let the Pope and his priests speak to God for you.’

‘But I know God through the glass harmonica. I know God through electricity that is in the world.’ They were passing a burial ground with tall pines. ‘I know God through the light that falls through those pines there. I know God through the light I feel in me when I love...’

‘You’re already Methodist.’ Anna was triumphant.

‘No, I am not.’ Chjara said. ‘I am not. I am the child of my family and my religion.’

‘Randall says the same thing. You will always be a Catholic and so your children will be and Henry will be, if he stays with you.’

Chjara sensed Anna sinking. For several steps, neither said anything.

‘You are yourself a different religion than your husband,’ Chjara said gently.

‘But we’re Protestants!’ Anna cried. ‘We’re all Protestants...’ Anna swept her hand across the vista of the town. ‘There are no Catholics here. Not in our country.’

‘In Maryland.’ Chjara repeated what Henry had told her. ‘The Catholics founded Mary-land.’

‘But that is so far from here,’ Anna cried again. ‘Would you take Henry away from us?’



Randall Garland, when he finally spoke again to Chjara, asked her if she would like transportation to Mass on the first Saturday of December, which was the next day. Snow had not yet fallen but it seemed to be in the air. Anna and Randall were standing at the foot of the stairs at the front of the house; Chjara was coming down the steps at noon, having lain in bed

reading until she could lie still no longer.

Apparently, he had been waiting for her. He stood with hat in hand and his bright eyes aimed at her forehead. She felt almost that she had some spot there, some mark.

‘I’ve inquired. There are two families who journey to Rollinsford on Saturday morning. They return Sunday evening.’

‘Randall Garland, you will send her into the wilderness.’ Anna’s face flushed.

‘Rollinsford is in the wilderness?’ Chjara asked.

‘It’s upriver by a day’s barge,’ he said.

‘Inland there are Indians,’ Anna said. She spoke in a high pitch and her color was high.

‘I will accompany you, if you choose to go,’ he said.

Chjara felt instantly that she was being tested. Did he think he could frighten her? She saw the questioning look Anna cast at Randall.

‘Yes. I choose to go.’ She started back up the stairs but then turned around. ‘Thank you for arranging this for me.’

They needed to travel with the tide, before four in the morning. Anna saw them off in her sleeping gown, wrapping a blanket around herself. One of the servants gave Chjara a basket of warmed bricks, inside of which nested potatoes in a wool shawl. There was a second basket for Randall, and a third which the servant took, following them meekly — a sloe-eyed, dark-haired woman.

‘This is Eugenie,’ Randall said as they boarded his carriage for the docks. ‘Eugenie’s mother is Abenaki. Her father was a French Catholic, like you. We’re going to the Papist mission where she grew up and lived before converting to the true church.’ With that, he snapped the reins, and they went into the dark. The baskets of warm bricks were welcome against the cold wind. Not one of them spoke, not even when they arrived at the river and met the other families. At the docks, there was a black man, thick-muscled, who carried bags from Randall’s carriage to the barge. Chjara wondered what was in these large bags.

Only when they were under way did she see, through a gap in the top of one, a skirt of her own. She pulled it out. ‘How did this come to be here?’ she asked Randall.

His face was hard and his eyes were frank. ‘You should have the choice.

A free choice. You live with us because your circumstances force you to. I'm giving you the opportunity to live with your own people.'

Her heart banged. Did he plan to leave her in Rollinsford? Chjara stood up quickly; the boat rocked. The boatman told her to sit. All the English she had been hearing even in her own mind vanished. Without realizing it, she spoke in French: 'Mr. Garland, do you intend to abandon me in the wilderness?'

The other people in the boat looked at them, hearing her French and the terror in her voice.

He didn't answer, he didn't look at her, he refused to acknowledge her feeling.

'Are you going to leave me there? To keep me from Henry? He will come for me.' She was a thousands of miles from anything familiar. It was the edge of winter when travel would soon cease. 'Henry will come for me,' she repeated.

Quietly, Randall spoke to Eugenie. 'What does she say?'

Eugenie translated.

Chjara looked at the servant. 'Why have you not spoken to me in our language before?'

'He told me not to.' Eugenie spoke in a flat, nasal voice.

To make me lonelier? Chjara thought. Or no, she realized, to spy on her when the opportunity came. She swallowed. She looked at the bag of her clothes. She thought of the planning done in secret — a secret kept also from Anna with Eugenie's help.

'We are taking you to the Fathers,' Eugenie said. 'You will like it there.'

'I will not.'

'You will,' the servant insisted.

Chjara stared at her.

Eugenie spoke in quick French: 'He promises to release us both. It is beautiful there, I will show you.'

'I am not a servant. I do not need to be released.'

The servant's eyes were frankly mocking inside the disguise of her placid face.

Chjara grew quiet. She let the silence take over, as thick as the darkness around them. Occasionally someone shuffled a foot or a child sniffled. She counted thirteen people and noted that all had large overstuffed bags. They

were all traveling far; none planned to return. But of course Randall would go back to Portsmouth.

She thought hard. Henry would not hear for weeks where she was. What had Randall planned for her once she was abandoned without money or friend in Rollinsford?

When they arrived at dawn, she refused to disembark.

A look passed between Randall Garland and the boatman.

‘You intended to leave me here and return yourself with today’s tide, not tomorrow’s.’ She accused him. She sat firmly with her hands clasped on her knees and her face alive with knowing she’d been right.

He looked over at the settlement. His voice was low but clear: ‘You need to be with your own people.’ He held his hand out, meaning to help her from the boat.

She shook her head, her heart loud in her ears.

‘Henry is now my people,’ she said.

Randall looked at her with a sick expression. For a long minute they said nothing. Then he turned his back and walked toward the village.

Chjara held to the seat of the boat. She would not step foot on that shore. Time passed. The boatman ate. The boatman who wore only a shirt and pantaloons shivered, his black skin no longer glowing with the sweat of poling up the river. He didn’t like her looking at him. She saw the gray stone of a chapel spire behind the first row of houses. Then there was a Jesuit Father coming toward her in robes so much like Curé Tumasgiu’s that she squinted and stared at him to make the familiarity go away. This was a more slender Jesuit who was sickly and pocked on his face. Randall Garland followed him. They halted at the boat.

‘Come with me,’ the priest commanded.

Chjara swallowed against a dry throat. ‘I will go back to Portsmouth and choose another faith, Puritan or Methodist.’

Randall Garland started. ‘What?’

The Jesuit jeered at her. He spoke in a rapid and guttural French. ‘You would choose damnation for the sake of a rich American, who purchases your soul with lascivious attentions?’

She spat, ‘The son has no money. But how much are you being paid by his rich American father to keep me here against my will?’

The Jesuit was not embarrassed. ‘We do not sell our souls. We buy



supplies which are much needed — and we agree to help you get back to France.’

‘To France?’

‘We will send you to Montreal with our traders, where he pays for your passage back to Le Havre.’

She looked at Randall and thought of his cunning. She could go. She could return to Corsica. She would never be with Henry again — which was exactly what his father wanted. ‘I renounce the Catholic Church,’ she repeated. ‘I love Henry as I love my God.’

The Jesuit continued in French. ‘Your love is carnal.’

She said in English, ‘My betrothed and I find in our union a taste of what union with God can be.’ Now she was quoting Calvin, or nearly so.

Randall looked at her with a peculiar expression that mingled bitterness with interest.

Now she had his attention. ‘I have been studying your book and find much in it to agree with.’

The Jesuit said to Randall, ‘We cannot keep her here against her will.’

There was a long moment. Randall turned to the Jesuit. ‘Then I will accept the return of my donation to the Catholic Church.’

‘We are not the ones who changed the bargain.’

Randall Garland was silent. His face was pasty from the pressure of contained anger. He turned his back on Chjara and returned toward the settlement, his walk swift and purposeful. The Jesuit hurried behind.

When Randall returned, he carried Eugenie on his back. She kicked and screamed. Following were her mother and sister, weeping and calling out. He set his servant down — not too roughly, Chjara saw — and then waited for the weeping to subside.

This took some time.

During which Randall stared at Chjara.

During which Eugenie began to plead with Chjara. ‘Please, mademoiselle, get out of the boat. Please let me stay with my family. Get out, at least for a little while. I have not seen them in three years.’

Randall told Chjara, ‘The price of your selfishness ripples into every life you touch.’

Chjara turned from Eugenie’s pleading face to Randall Garland’s, which seemed to her as wicked as it was solemn. ‘I do not accept responsibility for

your foul bargains.'

Cocks crowed. Garland grew paler. Eugenie and her family spoke in their own language, chattering and whimpering. Brown leaves blew off the trees. The Jesuit ambled back to the crowd assembled at the bank, which had grown larger during the argument.

The Indians stopped talking altogether.

'Eugenie,' Randall said, stepping into the boat and holding out his hand.

'Does she have no right to choose?' Chjara said.

'When she's no longer indentured to us, she can live where she wants to,' he answered.

Chjara willed Eugenie to refuse him. She did not speak any encouragement though. She was afraid to unman Randall further. She was afraid for herself.

Eugenie hesitated.

'Do you abuse my trust as well then?' Randall Garland said to his servant. 'I cannot help you if you are then imprisoned for the remainder of your indenture, a contract which was fair and reasonable, was it not?'

The mother said something to her and Eugenie stepped into the boat.

Her relatives keened as the boat departed. The sound of their grief lapped against the banks, echoing as they drifted away. In minutes, a strong wind swept away the sounds of the settlement. The boatman labored, his dark shoulders pulling them around obstacles near the banks. Eugenie sat with her eyes squinted against the wind and both of them.

'You do not care very much for your soul, I think, Mr. Garland,' Chjara said.

'Do you care for your soul?' he snapped.

'With every part of me.' Fury made her explicit. 'With every part of my mind and my body and with my head and my breasts and my loins.'

He said, 'God knows if you're telling the truth when you promise that you'll convert. God knows if you lie and dissemble and only pretend to choose rightly.'

'Then God must be well acquainted with you,' she snapped. 'Anna, too, will learn of your lies.'

He bent over the edge of the boat and vomited.

This act so surprised them that even the boatman, in his distraction, veered and they spun one full circle in the river before he righted their course.

Chjara watched as Randall cleaned his face with a handkerchief, and the soiled place on his clothes. His lips trembled. 'I abandon the care of my soul because I cannot watch you lead my son to ruin.' He wiped his mouth. 'I care for my son...' he glared at her, 'more than for my own soul.'

His urgency moved her.

Chjara knelt to him in the boat. She recited the words of the 'Song of Solomon', the song Calvin had said was like the joy of being united with God. She had memorized the English to recite for Henry's return, but now said the words for Randall Garland. *As was the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters. As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.* The words made a triumphant and mournful melody. 'This is how I love your son, and the soul of myself and my betrothed, and I would love your soul as well if you would not despise me.'

'It is the Devil in you I despise, child,' he said.

She shrank a little then. She sat back against the boat's bench. She folded her hands under her legs. 'I don't feel the Devil in me.'

'No,' he confirmed. 'You don't. Your reason disguises from you your sinful nature.'

'But your nature also then,' she said.

He did not answer her.

When they arrived in Portsmouth, he did not tell Anna why they returned so soon, and neither did Chjara. As the days passed, there was again silence like a wall, but also a rapprochement. They took meals together, served by Eugenie. The library door did not close again.

## Chapter Nine

'If you can't go on, I can't either.' Henry stood next to his horse, which sniffled. The horse had been Henry's since childhood, named Paddy for its red hair like an Irishman's, and now Paddy stood with a lame leg hanging. The other horse drawing the bookselling carriage stood yonder, beside the enormous pothole that had made Paddy lame. Paddy's traces hung empty like some cruel exclamation mark.

'I've squandered you,' Henry whispered in the twitching ear. He petted his horse's forehead and looked again at the leg, wishing it would heal itself, wishing for magic. It was the same as when he last looked, only more swollen. Henry's breath steamed from his mouth, and the horse's steamed from its nostrils. Minutes passed. Then Henry knelt under Paddy's long nose. He drank in the exhalations; he tasted the taste that was in his horse's mouth, the hay and the dried purple clover that had been the horse's ration just an hour ago at farmer Ravenwood's. Above them, the morning sun made cherubs of the clouds. 'C'mon then.' Henry took the horse's lead.

But he let it dangle in his hand. 'I'm not made for this work any more than you are.' He thought of Ravenwood's wife crying. She had cried in the larder while Ravenwood counted out her egg money — one penny, two pennies, three — to buy a Webster's. Their eight children had stared from gummy eyes. Henry charged them a quarter of what he'd paid. The idea of selling them buttons or Husbands was so ludicrous, he now let out a strangled laugh. 'Oh God, Paddy, do you think I wanted to do this?' His voice cracked. 'I don't want to be an *entrepreneur*.' The word with all its syllables soured in his mouth. He wept with frustration and grief. He should never have asked his old horse to pull this heavy carriage. He should never have left Chjara behind. And how was she faring?

The horse shifted away from the weight of Henry leaning on him. A birch arm brushed against another in the wind, a bow drawn across a wire. A patch of melting snow dropped from its small perch on a bush. From the road, the other horse watched them.

Henry fumbled with his rifle. He pushed the bright flag of cloth into the

stock. He walked, slowly at first, then faster, up a rise into the wood. The horse began to follow as Henry hurried to take aim. The horse's leg buckled. Henry returned to him. Their breaths mingled in the trees above. Henry hobbled the horse. He stepped away again, several paces, only to return with his rifle cast to the ground. All this, the horse in the road observed.

After a time, there was a rifle shot. After a time, Henry appeared and put his own shoulders in the traces. Henry helped the other horse pull the carriage full of books up the hill.

Twigs, bright with a few clinging yellow coins, covered the dead animal in the woods, whose dark side already seemed the color of the mud stirred into the snow crust. Despite this camouflage, the farmer with his new Webster's followed the vultures and found the carcass. The farmer cut Paddy into meat. Even the head, whacked off with a clean blow of the axe, became soup.



Days later at Beacon Hill, Henry dressed for dinner, taking each item from the trunk on the floor: his white silk stockings, white breeches and a silk waistcoat trimmed with rich gold lace. Everything reminded him of the poverty in the houses along these roads. The trunk had been carried here by an old servant, who hoisted it with difficulty up to the second story of Jason Moldridge's fine brick home. Henry swept back his own warm-colored hair with an ivory comb and looked in the mirror at the black in his eyes. He was a man who had needed to buy a new horse. He had needed to make the money for that.

Another servant rang the gong for dinner. Fourteen of them were gathering for the meal, all friends from the university, and they had received invitations on flax paper, saying 'Come. Be regaled by Henry's stories of bookselling in the wilds up north.' This was written in India ink that came from Bombay.

'I have sold eighty-four books,' Henry said to mock-polite applause that night. He did not say that he'd needed to sell three hundred. There was brandy on the table and they smoked tobacco that smelled of pines and wet sunshine, typical of Georgia where it had been grown.

‘And who was your most interesting customer?’ asked a man with a face so narrow it might have been closed in a door. His lips were red and glistening with a fresh sip of brandy.

‘That would have been Mrs. Harrison’s bawdy house in Beverly.’

‘Good God.’ The man set his brandy down. ‘The whores read?’

‘Some do. The lady of the house asked me for a book I didn’t have. It’s called *Aristotle’s Masterpiece*. It also goes by the name the *Young Folk’s Bible*. Have any of you heard of it?’ Henry observed that at least half of them signaled a kind of recognition. They smiled but then quickly erased their expressions for something more dishonest.

‘I’ll admit I don’t know it,’ said Jason Moldridge, their host. ‘Come on, then. What is it?’

‘A midwifery manual,’ Henry answered.

‘With illustrations,’ said Chester Thurman, whom Henry had known only slightly at the college.

The men laughed, most of them nervously Henry noted. Chester Thurman held his gaze.

‘She showed me her copy. There are lines and lines about how a woman is made willing to conceive.’ Henry watched their faces. Everyone was interested.

‘Hence the sobriquet: the *Young Folk’s Bible*,’ Thurman added.

More ribald laughter ensued.

‘But why *Aristotle*?’ the host asked. ‘What does Aristotle have to do with it?’

‘Nothing,’ Henry shrugged. ‘To disguise its real nature perhaps?’

‘You’ll be the most favored book peddler on the Eastern seaboard, Henry,’ one said.

‘You’ll be tarred and feathered, more likely,’ said another.

‘There’s a man I know in Philadelphia who sells them,’ Thurman said.

‘Well, Philadelphia. There are more bawdy houses there than in France, I’m told,’ Jason said. ‘But how did you come to a bawdy house, being a betrothed man?’

‘The mistress had a horse to sell,’ Henry answered.

‘Right.’

‘Indeed.’

‘You needed a horse,’ sneered another, ‘or were you one yourself?’ A crude gesture brought gales of laughter.

Henry smiled and sat on his hands, hiding them. 'Indeed I was a horse.' He didn't tell them of pulling the cart after killing Paddy.

'But he does have a gelding in my barn,' the host reported. 'A fine one, no doubt for services rendered.'

Later, at their farewells, Chester Thurman pulled Henry aside. 'Why don't you join me for dinner tomorrow?' he said. 'I know a good place at the docks.'

'I'd be pleased.' Henry shook Chester's hand. Their eyes met briefly. So indeed, Henry thought, seeing the message in Chester's eyes, there was a secret society here as well.

They met the next evening in a tavern at the far end of the harbor. Around them were the sounds of Portuguese, French and a Jamaican pidgin. It was a mariners' tavern and the gentlemen in their fine coats provoked sidelong glances.

'Tell me about your Chjara,' Chester said. 'How does she like your bucolic existence up north?'

'It was a mistake,' Henry said plainly. 'My father despises her. He punishes her for all his disappointment in me. He won't speak civilly to her. And,' Henry glanced away and back, 'he's cut me out of my expectations.'

'Mine also,' Chester said.

Henry looked up. 'For what?'

Chester shrugged. 'We disagreed on everything. Now my father has a new wife, and she likes me even less.'

A horse whinnied outside.

'There's a market for books like *Aristotle's Masterpiece*,' Henry began.

'I've been thinking the same thing.'

'Have you?'

'Do you know the book *Fanny Hill*?'

'No.'

'It got passed hand to hand at Harvard, and the pages were falling out...'

Chester held up an imaginary book, shaking its pages out like leaves. 'First published fifty-odd years ago by a John Cleland: *Fanny Hill, or...*' he waited a beat, '*Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure.*'

Henry lifted his eyebrows.

'It's the story of a girl fallen into vice, told in exquisite detail.'

'Is that so?'

‘Someone ought to print it here. It’d be a public service.’

Henry laughed. ‘Hardly.’

‘I’m serious. We don’t import all our tea and molasses anymore, so why books?’

‘It takes money to print books,’ Henry began. Ever since the bawdy house, he’d been puzzling out how to sell the midwifery manual. ‘My father has a printing press,’ Henry said.

‘There, you see. Presses are not so rare any more.’

‘He’d never let me use it. Not for anything, least of all this.’

‘We should buy it off him.’

Henry noticed the ‘we’.

Chester continued. ‘Our fathers still think we should read only Franklin and all that claptrap about hell and damnation and a penny saved. The pastor of our church last Sunday railed against the novel. “What is this thing,” he said, “a novel?”’ Chester leaned forward conspiratorially. ‘I’ll bet he’s read one. I’ll bet he’s got his hands on a copy of *The Coquette*. How else could he know in such loving detail what there was to condemn in it?’ He laughed, derisively. ‘Hypocrites. From the pulpit it’s still — you’ll read our dull advice to you. You’ll read how we say you should run your lives.’

‘I admire Franklin,’ Henry said. ‘I rather wish I’d saved a few pennies when I had them.’

Chester watched him. Henry looked out the window. He hoped to find someone with the money to buy a press. ‘I might be able to arrange for my father to sell you the printing press.’

‘I could buy it,’ Chester said.

Henry focused on Chester’s eyes. ‘You would invest then?’

‘For a partnership. It seems most fortuitous that you own this bookseller’s carriage.’

Henry knew it was not fortuitous. He knew that when he’d struck the deal with Blake Howell, already in his heart there had been the thought that it could serve the purposes that he’d vowed to try to avoid.

‘You have money to invest?’ Henry pressed him.

‘Well, no,’ Chester admitted. ‘I understand there are banks that’ll write loans to entrepreneurs.’

‘My father will want to know your intentions for the press.’

‘If he doesn’t want to sell it, there are other printing presses in the land.’



We might have to wait a year, but... ’

‘I don’t have a year; I’ve had my year to dally about,’ Henry said.

‘I’ll get the money,’ Chester promised. He lifted his hands and shrugged. ‘We’ll solve the problems as they arise. My friend in Philadelphia — a lawyer — he has a private library. I could go see him in the spring.’

‘I can’t wait until spring.’

Chester studied him. ‘The rivers haven’t frozen yet. I can’t leave but I’d give you a letter of introduction. Tom Boone in Philadelphia could finance the start, I believe.’

‘I have to be back in Portsmouth by Christmas.’ Henry did not like the thought of returning home to Chjara a failure. He looked again out the window, and this time was startled to see a familiar face. It was one of the sailors from the *Magdalene*. ‘My God.’ He stood up. ‘Chester — pay the man. There’s... Follow me.’

Henry went after the sailor who immediately seemed to melt into the crowd of burly men and girls. But then the sailor climbed the stairs to a boarding house. Henry spied him, caught up with him, and found out that the *Magdalene* was in Boston.

He took Chester to see her. All the way there, Henry described how extraordinary it had been: a canvas cabin on a cargo ship, the private space he and Chjara had shared. And good air too through the portholes at night.

When they got to the ship and went below, they found crates cramming the entire hold except for a narrow alley of space. Rat leavings littered the floor. The place stank of a poisonous dew and tasted of urine.

‘It’s not the same ship.’ Henry looked at his friend then he turned away to hide his feelings. He thought, And I am not the same man.

The next morning, Henry wrote to Chjara.

*Dearest,*

*I vow to write you now and mail this letter without tearing it up and beginning again.*

*It is difficult to say this: I cannot return. I’ve earned a good amount but not enough. The debt to the bank preys on me. I must travel on or face debtors’ prison. You will say: return to me with my gold coin. Do not spend it on the glass harmonica. But I have done so already. The instrument awaits you here in Boston. It sits in the window of the glassworks on the Somerville Road.*

*I was wrong not to take you with me. Public shame is nothing compared to the agony of losing our 'mutual electricity', to use your felicitous phrase. I miss you as I would miss my hands if they were cut off. I don't know how to go about my life without you.*

*My darling, I must be responsible. We will not live, I swear to you, in the kind of darkness I have seen in farmhouse after farmhouse. You will have your glass harmonica.*

*Come to me with this money I enclose, which represents nearly the remaining half of the coin. Collect the glass harmonica and then come, come to me.*

*I depart for Philadelphia in the morning, where I will wait for you at the Ship's Tavern. The books and carriage go with me, as do the horses including the new one I bought when my own good and worthy stallion died at my own hand. I killed him, Chjara. I killed him twice; first, by asking so much of him, and then with a rifle.*

*I will establish our business in Philadelphia and wait for you there. Then we'll go on to Virginia where the weather is fine enough for travel all through January, February and March. I have been a fool. Blake sold me the business as winter was coming on and I didn't see the trick in it. It almost makes me want to send my father to him. Is this a good and just and fair way to treat a fellow man?*

*I aim to be independent of all but you, my love. Come to me and we'll make a country of two. We will rely on no others for our money or our morals.*

*In the greatest regard and with such longing as only your music can express, I am yours,*

*Henry Bertram Garland.*

The letter landed in Portsmouth the very same day it was written, since the winds from Boston were favorable. The letter was in the hands of a sailor who had strict instructions to deliver it directly to the home of Randall Garland. The sailor made his way to the house where the door was open. A woman swept the hallway.

It was Eugenie, the indentured servant who had been denied her freedom by Chjara's decision not to stay at the Jesuit mission to the Abenaki. Eugenie took the letter, felt the coins inside, and stole it.



On a day in December, Chjara walked to the sea. She watched the waves, and she refused to count the days. Henry was gone and he would return. She would not allow herself to experience the passage of time. She knew if she focused on the number of weeks, she would go mad. He was gone, he would return, and the waves lapped toward shore. Everything else was self-pity. She minded the present moment — here this dried starfish, here this odd carapace of some tailed sea creature.

She sang, and the melody that came from her mouth was a tune that her father had sung with other men after the old mayor of the village died. Nobody had liked this mayor. No one cried at his funeral mass. She'd seen people looking at each other or at their hands — one man plucked his nail. But then in the tavern afterward, they sang as if their hearts were broken — throats open, holding the notes a long time. Her hair had stood up at the melody she was now repeating. She asked her father afterwards why they had sung so well even though they didn't love the man who had died. She must have been about twelve years old.

'Because we bury ourselves,' he'd said. 'But you aren't dead. You aren't being buried today.'

'Yes, we are. Every day we die a little.'

'You do?' She'd asked him, as if she were asking for any fact, such as whether the clouds come from the sea or the sea from the clouds.

'We die,' he said, 'because we are not good enough, because we are not kind enough, because we do not love this man. We die because our children grow older and our wives grow sullen and our sons desert us. The grass tops turn gray in the fall, the sea turns cold, and the world drinks us because we are crooked and getting smaller like Jean Benoit.' Jean Benoit was an old man whose back curved like a fern in spring.

'But your back is still strong,' she persisted.

'Yes child, but appearances deceive. When I sing, I admit that I am not always a good and honorable man. I make amends to God.'

Walking along the rocks at the seashore, with the slippery air drawing everything in shades of gray, Chjara let the song take her. She held the notes long, and she knew Henry also would not always be a good and honorable man. Like anyone, Henry could be cruel, and she might be left alone. *'I am a lost undone creature.'* Chjara repeated the Puritan prayer that Anna had told her. She leapt over a rock. She'd been abandoned before and

survived. Even the people who loved her most had wanted her gone from Bastia. She too was selfish and proud and willful and self-satisfied, and she could not confess these sins to Curé Tumasgiu ever again. She would have to do this alone also. With the wind in her hair, she walked on a narrow rabbit path between sea roses, clutching her arms close to avoid being scraped by thorns. All affection was a ruse to cover loneliness, which was our true state in this world.



The Widow Hart invited Chjara to a tavern. The establishment was full and busy, and Chjara sat beside the widow on a bench next to the door. The Englishwoman had traveled north to Maine to observe The New American there. The Widow Hart wore Chjara's grand woolen cape that had been given to her by Marguerite.

'I've never had such a coat,' Katie Hart said. She stood and spun in it and sat again. 'But really, you can have it back — I don't like old Randy Garland and how he made you give it to me.'

'I gave it of my own free will,' Chjara said. 'He was right, you know. I was troubled about the rent that Henry and I owed you.'

'When Henry comes back with his fortune, you'll have it back,' Katie said. As she spoke, she petted the coat with obvious attachment and some wonder.

Chjara sagged, and looked around at the gathering crowd. The tavern was nearly as big as a barn. The tables had been arranged in a square around a small open space at the center. She counted four wood stoves. The place blistered with heat and conversation. She wished for Henry, for any word, for any sense that he was still alive in the world.

The widow greeted many people as they came in. She leaned toward Chjara to whisper, 'That one's a Quaker. They all come — from all the religions. It will start soon.'

'What will?'

'It's a surprise. You'll feel better and not so alone.'

'You're here. I'm not alone.'

'I know I'm not Henry. Or Marguerite. You look like someone who's

fallen through the earth.’ She smiled, and Chjara only felt worse for being understood.

‘Here he comes now,’ Katie Hart said, rising from the bench and looking out the window. ‘The singing-school master.’ She pulled Chjara up with her.

Chjara observed a man with a distinctly yellow face.

‘He has jaundice, poor man. Parker!’ Katie called. ‘Parker Goodwin—’ He entered then and she fairly grabbed him. ‘This is Chjara Vallé.’

‘Ah. Henry’s betrothed, the musician.’ He bowed.

Chjara felt herself straighten, both at being recognized as a musician and at Henry’s name. She was his betrothed and he would soon be home. She needed to have faith.

‘We’ve read about your music.’ Parker spoke and put his arm at that moment around a tiny woman — as small as Katie Hart, but with no flesh on her. ‘This is Abigail, my wife.’

‘I’m very glad to meet you,’ Abigail said.

‘Do you know the shape notes?’ Parker Goodwin said, though behind him the crowd of gathered people began to chant his name.

‘Shapes of notes?’

‘No, shape notes. They look like this...’ He held sheet music with shapes penned on the staves. ‘See?’ He pointed in turn to a triangle, an oval and a square, and sang the notes. ‘*Fa, sol, la.*’ Chjara recognized C, D and E. With his finger on the written notes, he sang the scale. ‘*Fa-sol-la-fa-sol-la-mi-fa.*’ He had a lovely tenor, and looked at her as he sang. He returned to the tune book. ‘These shapes allow the illiterates to run the gamut.’

‘Run the gamut?’

‘The gamut is this.’ He pointed to the notes running up across the parallel lines of the score.

‘Parker!’ shouted a member of the crowd. ‘You’re late! We’ll have more of you, not less!’

‘So this note...’ she said, touching the diamond shape and following him as he headed for the middle of the room. She sang a seventh note.

‘Yes!’ He turned back, and his eyes shone with nothing but electricity. ‘Mi to fa.’ Then he was gone to the front and the crowd pushed in behind her. She couldn’t return to Katie.

‘We’ll start with a plain tune — how about “Boston”?’

Some boys, hardly bearded yet, started the tune raucously from the

tavern door.

‘Wait, wait! How many of you have tune books?’ the singing master said. Only a few raised their hands. He sighed. ‘All right then, it’s the tune to “Mary, will you come wassailing?”’

*‘Mary, will you come wassailing?’* the raucous youth began in the corner.

‘Stop.’ Parked cried, but the exertion of shouting clearly hurt him.

‘Stop, boys,’ others shouted.

‘This is church music we’re singing here,’ said a tall burly man with a black beard covering his face. He was smiling broadly. ‘Not your bawdy tunes.’

The boys continued the melody, but humming instead.

Chjara turned to the front and saw Parker wipe his yellow brow. ‘Is there no drink for him?’ she asked the burly man next to her.

‘Send us ale for the master,’ he shouted above the crowd.

Many people filled the room. Chjara saw that they were organized into four parts on a square. Each part faced the center, where Parker and Abigail stood with barely room to stretch their arms out. ‘Where should I stand?’ Chjara asked. ‘I sing alto.’

‘Where you are,’ Parker said.

The people made way for a pitcher, passed over the heads. Chjara caught sight of Katie standing on the bench in the back row. Come, come, Chjara motioned.

‘I can’t. Enjoy yourself!’ Katie mouthed back.

‘What?’ Chjara said.

The burly man heard and shouted over the noise. ‘What’s that you say, Mrs. Katie You’re So Dandy Hart?’

The laughter overcame even the raucous singing, people trying out their voices.

‘Have fun!’ Katie shouted, squealing a little.

‘You’re to have fun,’ the big man repeated, his breath full of beer and his eyes shining.

‘We’re to sing this tune solemnly.’ Parker was speaking. ‘Do you understand me? It’s not about Mary and wassailing. “Methinks I see a heavenly host.” Abigail, would you line it out for us?’

Chjara touched the burly man on the shoulder. ‘What’s wassailing?’ she asked.

‘At Christmas, we go to the rich men’s doors and sing until they give us

a drink to go away,' he explained.

Meanwhile, the singing master's wife took to a stool. She climbed it. She balanced on top. And then in a voice that belied her tiny frame, she bellowed, *'Methinks I see a heavenly host of angels on the wing'*

Thunderously, the entire assembly sang the line back at her. And stopped. *'Methinks I hear their cheerful notes, so merrily they sing'*

Chjara shouted it out with them. Her whole body canted forward with longing.

'Women only!' Parker Goodwin interjected. And the second line of 'methinks' came quieter and lilting. The third line was like the first and sung loudly by all: *'Let all your fears be banished hence, glad tidings we proclaim.'*

The fourth was sung by the men only, in a kind of call and response. *'For there's a Savior born today, And Jesus is his Name.'*

There were six verses in the tune book, Chjara saw. Each one was sung a little louder. They sang without vibrato. They sang as if they were calling God down to them. So loud! Chjara's skull itself seemed to vibrate and her spirit soared. They were like the crickets of summer who could conquer a mountain with song.

'Let's do the "Fiddler's Bow",' called a woman before they were quite done with the last round of the song.

"'Happiness'," Parker corrected, 'to the tune of "Fiddler's Bow", page sixty-nine. You'll get me sacked if you don't stick to the words I've taught you. And what are those words, Goody Mason?' He singled out a woman in the front row.

'All I remember from that one is *Shout, be glad, rejoice. Thou shalt not see evil anymore.*'

'Abigail?' Parker said. She stood again atop the stool and led them:

*'Sing, oh daughters of Zion;*

*Shout, O Israel.*

*Be glad, Rejoice with all thy heart;*

*The Lord hath taken away thy judgment.*

*He hath cast out thine enemy.*

*The King of Hosts, Even the Lord is in the midst of thee;*

*Thou shalt not see evil anymore.'*

Parker made them sing it in parts like a fugue, and since the altos were faltering, Chjara turned to face them and lifted her voice louder in the notes, which she found simple enough to read in the tune book. The altos had to enter alone part-way through the song, with the first loud *rejoice* and on the second time through they hit it dead-on with Chjara's strong voice. Afterward, the room erupted in applause.

'Miss Chjara Vallé,' Parker said, stumbling on 'Chjara'.

'Rhymes with "tiara",' said several at once, provoking laughter. Everyone had read the reporter's description of the musical sensation of France. Chjara flushed, pleased and flattered. She didn't know she'd been talked about all these weeks while she read Calvin and waited, waited, at the Garland's large, private home.

'She's to be Henry Garland's wife,' Parker said.

'I thought the deed was done,' someone yelled.

The buzz of conversation perceptibly quieted.

'We're to be married when Henry gets back.' Chjara heard in her own voice a mix of guilt and boldness.

'But which church will take you, after the fact?' said the burly man with the grin.

She was full red now.

'Don't you let them tease you,' said Abigail from her perch on the stool. 'John Donaldson there married his girl, God rest her, exact the same way. The ministers know they're only putting the stamp on a letter already written between the two of you.'

'And mailed,' someone said.

There was raucous laughter, over which the poor jaundiced music master had to shout again. 'Let's work on our Christmas anthem, shall we?' He coughed terribly. They quieted at the sight of him nearly keeling over.

They sang until the wee hours. They sang until the tavern closed. They sang on the streets as they walked to their homes, and promised to see each other there tomorrow, and for the duration of the four-week singing school.

'It's been a long spring, summer and fall,' said John Donaldson, the burly man, who walked beside Katie Hart, every bit like a man going courting.

'I've missed singing, too,' Katie said to him.

'This singing — it is incredible!' Chjara was excited and spoke rapidly, mangling her new English. She told them about the experiment in electricity



at the park in Paris. 'I wonder, do you think it is the possible, does music perhaps carry also this substance, this invisible light? Do you not feel it? I shiver. I am dark when I am outside the music. I think only of Henry: will he come, when will he come? Melancholy afflicts me. We sing together and — *voilà!* It is the instant when the light appears between the negative and the positive poles. Just like that! Off. Then on! Is it not the same for you?'

They couldn't answer because she continued rapidly. 'I wonder if it is... if it is something excreted by our bodies like blood or like the piss.'

They interrupted with howls but she hurried on.

'We don't see what we know is there. I think your John Calvin said this, I think he understood this, your Puritan man. He repeats Corinthians: *We but see it through a glass, darkly*. Music. God. Love. It is all like this — through a glass darkly.' They approached the Garlands' house. 'Oh, I don't want to go to sleep.' But they were there, at the home of Henry's parents, and a candle burned in the window.

They could see the figure of Randall Garland, waiting. He was seated at the small writing desk in the parlor, and all three watched as his head bobbed. He was struggling to keep awake, and then he appeared to hear them snickering. He pulled himself upright and went to open the door.

Chjara embraced the Widow Hart, her small and favorite American friend, and kissed her on both cheeks. 'Thank you for the surprise.'

'Mr. Donaldson.' Henry's father made the name a greeting and a question.

'I'm accompanying the Widow Hart to her home. Good night, sir.'

Chjara entered the house, following Randall, and they both heard a sultry laugh as the couple walked down the lane.

Randall's face stiffened with a kind of tired dismay. So now the widows of the town fornicated as well. He led the way to the back of the house. 'Anna only just fell asleep. The front stairs will wake her.' Chjara lit a candle and went to the privy, taking her time, but found him waiting for her, seated with his candle halfway up the back stairs.

'Do you think I don't know what these appetites are? Do you think I'm too old?' He didn't look at her. 'I went to the almshouse today. Have you seen the pox on a woman your own age? There's one dying there — Katherine is her name. She has had the clap for two years and she will not live through the winter. That's what's happening to our young.' His face in the candlelight showed its wear.

‘Mr. Garland,’ she said softly. ‘I’m as healthy as when I was born.’

‘But my son?’ he said.

She could not reassure him with how clean and beautiful Henry was. And she thought, The old bastard; he’s trying to trap me again. If I tell him Henry’s fine in that way, he’ll use it against me.

She kept her silence. He seemed to be waiting. His jaw worked, tensing and releasing. But then he spoke — with obvious difficulty. ‘I have it on good authority that Henry stopped at a whore house in Beverly.’

She stood there, dumbfounded.

The elder Garland stood up and began to climb the stairs.

‘What do you accuse Henry of, you mean old bastard?’ Chjara said then. She said in French, *bâtard*, but he understood it surely enough. They were on the top landing now.

His nose twitched. His lips trembled; he controlled them. ‘My son is no better than a common sailor.’

He tried to block her path again, but she swept past, brushing against him. She shut her door firmly. Chjara sat on the bed, then she stood up and shouted silently at him — yelling with her hand clasped over her mouth. She wished him the clap. She hoped he fell over and died before his new child was born. She cursed him hotly in her mind and she listened to his footsteps retreat down the hall, then she lay on the bed with all the comfort of fury gone from her. She was hollowed out. Was Henry out debauching himself? Did Randall know where Henry was? Why didn’t Henry write, how could he not write? She curled in on herself. Was Henry lying to her? Had she let herself be fooled again? How often would she mistake affection for anything but what it was: temporary adoration. A sugary sweet that soon turns sour. No one would love her. She lay in the smallest possible shape on the bed. All around her was empty space. She wept, strangling the sound of her cries so that Randall, the bitter, dried-up old leaf of a man, could not think he’d been right all along.

## Chapter Ten

Another letter arrived, laden with coins.

*Dearest Chjara,*

*Where are you? Why haven't you come? I don't know the answer and, not knowing, I blame myself. Tonight, after a dinner with my new friend Tom Boone, who is an attorney here in Philadelphia, I feel more rational. There must be a reason you are delayed, and we will soon overcome it. Shame and the bitter habit of self-blame seem to me now like drink or any other secret obsession. I imbibed this habit of shame from my father and it does you no good. I orient myself now by what would do you good, because you are my wife and I marry thee every day in my mind. I should have returned to Portsmouth instead of coming here to Philadelphia, I realize now. Every decision I make, I see its counterpart, and doubt my choice.*

*I write with good news. I have struck a contract that I believe will secure our future. We will prosper after all. I see now that Blake did no crime, selling me the book business right before winter. Tom Boone gave me this example from the law last night: Say a man walks into a tavern and offers his cow for sale. Now, everyone in the tavern knows the man. He's dissolute and his wife and children are hungry out on their farm. The man wants whiskey. He asks one dollar for the cow, which is about what it's worth. No one offers to buy it. The dissolute man, desperate for drink, drops his price to seventy-five cents.*

*There's a wealthy farmer in the tavern. He knows that a bottle of whiskey costs a quarter dollar. He proposes to buy the cow for twenty-five cents, a fraction of the animal's worth. The desperate man, unable to resist the sight of whiskey, yields.*

*He drinks his bottle, his wife and children starve, while the wealthy merchant grows only wealthier. In my father's time, Tom Boone explained to me, such a contract could be overturned by the Puritan elders on the grounds of immorality. We owe each other, even in commerce, a sense of fairness. The just price — as the French say, the bon marché — is the right price. Today, the contract stands. Neither the poor man nor the wealthy owe anything to each other but what they choose to accept in a contract.*

*But isn't it immoral? I argued with my friend.*

*Of course — by your lights and mine, he replied. But the idea of the rule of law is that free men decide amongst themselves. There is no clergy above the law to judge what free men have chosen to do. There is no father who rules over his children. There are grown men. Citizens can buy what they want and sell what they want, at prices they set themselves without interference from the authorities.*

*We are not subjects of King George nor are we subject to judgments of the church of my father. We assume our own flaws, and our own virtues too. We make our peace with ourselves and with our own gods.*

*I have an idea: What if you give concerts on your glass harmonica as we travel from town to town with my books and sundry goods? Would that not make a fine life?*

*We will discuss all this when you come. For the moment, I have put all my cash into goods and books for the spring business. Tom Boone, being a good friend, has hired me as a secretary for a term of three months, beginning immediately. He has given me an advance, which I propose we divide into equal parts as follows:*

*One part enclosed for you, for your travel here.*

*The second part, enclosed, in relief of the mortgage on the books.*

*The third part for investment in books to be printed here in Philadelphia.*

*The fourth part for my maintenance.*

*If I do not hear from you in a fortnight's time, I will abandon all our plans I've made here. I promise to find you again and make good whatever stands between us. I will win you to love me again, I swear it with all the electricity and vitality of which we are capable together.*

*In perpetual grace with you, Henry Bertram Garland.*

This letter, too, disappeared in Eugenie's pocket.



'Are you all right?' Anna said on a bitter cold morning in mid December.

Chjara felt Anna look at her closely. It was early, at first light. Chjara hadn't slept well. Rain had fallen and then turned to snow. Woozy, she was hungry but couldn't eat.

‘I’m fine,’ Chjara lied. ‘I’ll go out for a walk.’ Before Anna could stop her, she took her cloak and fled.

She did not dare count the weeks. Outside, ice covered every branch tip, every windowsill and fence rail. On Bow Street, she stared at the skiff set in a bed of crystalline shapes. Soon the ships would stop coming. Mail would come more slowly, if at all. The roads would close.

She unlocked the Portsmouth Athenaeum. With Parker’s help, she’d arranged to practice playing the glasses there, out of sight from everyone. The Athenaeum’s four stories rose around a central atrium. Books lined the walls. Chjara climbed the circular stairs — the first ten slowly, the second ten slower still. The world rotated. The stairs wobbled. She closed her eyes and fought back vertigo. She pushed on to the top floor and collapsed in a chair by the window. Dawn pierced the row of icicles hanging from the roof, bursts of light exploding into prisms. She cursed God for making the world beautiful while she was caught here in a prison of light. Below in the streets, people moved about in their first errands of the day. She knew Randall’s people waited to see her fall into disgrace — waited with baited breath to know if she was really, truly a tart.

Nausea rose in her throat. She refused it. She roused herself, taking one of the crystal glasses from the windowsill. She ran her finger along the rim and kept it moving. Every time a doubt intruded, her finger forced a stronger sound from the glass. She demanded a spark to run up the nerves of her arm. The note echoed in the empty building.

She took the glass downstairs. Chjara stood in the middle of the first floor, looking up at the ceiling four stories above. Now the sound from the glass used the entire column of air. It circled round and round. She did not like this high, angelic pitch. She kept her finger moving but sang a note octaves lower, as low as she could. She scratched out a note. No one could hear her. She forced air in a groan, in an angry whisper, from deep below. She was so afraid. Let it not be true, please God, let it not be true. She cried out with a teeth-bared, wide-mouthed growl that used all the air in her body — and her voice changed. It divided. There was the plain note, which was her own familiar voice; but in the same way that the glass beneath her finger had a rasping undertone, her voice produced another sound which seemed to vibrate from another part of her throat. She kept at it until she was so out of breath she had to stop. She opened her mouth and sang again,

her finger on the glass, buzzing — and her own throat buzzed again. She'd never heard anything like it. She tried moving the note; she could manage a hint of a chant before she ran out of breath. She tried again before it could escape her — this strange divided sound.

She thought perhaps the singing-school master would know about it. She might talk confidentially to Abigail — the only woman who was not from here and would not stay, at least Chjara didn't think so, since the singing school was of limited duration. Chjara walked quickly to George Street where she'd heard that Parker and Abigail lodged. The boarding house was nearly out of town by the Hay Market and it looked shabby from the outside — not at all like the Widow Hart's. On the porch, men with hands stained brown from the nearby tannery stood smoking.

She knocked, her own heart knocking, because she felt the eyes of the men on her. Abigail came to the door. She ushered Chjara into the parlor.

'How come you live so poor?' Chjara blurted out.

Abigail smiled wanly, embarrassed.

'Oh, I should shove those words back in my mouth, I'm sorry' Chjara said. 'I only thought — so many people come every night to the singing school. I thought you'd be paid well.'

'Not everyone can pay. The Congregational Church gives us something.'

'I haven't paid,' Chjara realized, her face flushing. 'I've come every night.'

'Parker wouldn't ask you. Without your voice, he would be miserable.'

'How much is it?' Chjara said, sinking inside because she had nothing, no pennies even.

Parker appeared then at the top of the stairs. Even in the dark of the stairwell, she could perceive the yellowness of his skin.

'You're our guest,' Parker said.

'How much is it?' Chjara repeated.

'The singers pay a subscription of twenty-five cents for the four weeks.' Abigail sat down on the divan, looking down at her hands.

Chjara sat beside her. 'I'll find a way to pay you before the New Year,' she promised.

'We'll be gone,' Parker said, 'into the district of Maine, the day after Christmas.'

'Two weeks in York. Two weeks in Wells, two...'

Abigail shuddered. 'You can travel in the winter?'

‘We have to. We’re itinerants,’ Parker said.

‘Don’t you have family... children to go to?’

‘We weren’t lucky enough to have children.’ Abigail glanced at her husband.

‘Oh.’ Chjara’s mind worked quickly: even if Abigail was barren, she might know an herbalist.

‘You look stricken, dear,’ Abigail said.

‘Oh, I do?’ Chjara rose, unable to keep sitting. Her fingers shook. ‘I’m alone here — in America.’ She turned, facing the woman. ‘Without, um...’

‘Your Henry’s going to return at Christmas,’ Parker said, ‘didn’t you say?’

‘I doubt it.’ Her voice was flat. ‘I’ve had no letters. He may be dead. Maybe he’s ill. Or maybe,’ she spat, ‘he just doesn’t want to come.’ She was agitated, speaking aloud at last her deepest fears.

Parker only laughed. ‘He’s merely delayed, no doubt.’ He looked at his wife mischievously. ‘We should have her sing ‘Richmond’ at the Christmas Sabbath, Abigail.’

Abigail began to laugh too.

‘*My beloved,*’ Parker sang in his voice weakened by illness. He hummed a line and then continued, ‘*Sick of love for thee, I languish. Fails my soul at thy delay. Feels a dying lover’s anguish. Quickly quickly! Henry come!*’

Chjara laughed.

‘*Quickly, quickly, Jesus come,* are the correct words,’ he said.

Abigail explained, ‘Jesus is our lover, to whom at death we return with the most precious rapture. Jesus is greater than any lover here on earth. Imagine it.’

‘That is not a modest song,’ Chjara said.

‘No,’ Abigail said. She leaned over her sick husband. She sang saucily, ‘*Ev’ry moment seems an age, Till Thy presence shall... relieve me.*’

Parker flushed. Abigail opened her arms, and turning to Chjara, sang, ‘*While thou tarry’st, love, I die, Sighing, longing,*’ then she spoke the words, ‘*loving, weeping.*’

They taught her the tune and made her promise to sing it when Henry returned. The moment for a confidence with Abigail did not come.

Later, Chjara tried to repeat her buzzing voice for them. She described the two-tone note that came from inside her throat or perhaps even from the bone in her chest. But the sound didn’t reappear. Parker didn’t know

about such a thing.

She had to return to Henry's parents house. Anna watched her at dinner, always with a question in her eyes. Chjara excused herself early.

The next day, Chjara spent all her time with Parker and Abigail. Parker was ill and by nightfall he couldn't stand. He wouldn't be able to lead the singing school. Would she?

Chjara stood in the center of the four-square of benches at the tavern. When she was introduced as the guest singing master, a few people turned their backs on her and left. Most stayed, though, and at the end there was applause and celebration. The distraction carried her through. Afterwards, alone in her room, she vomited. She held the bucket in her hands and knew she was carrying Henry's child. The herbs hadn't prevented it this time.

She was pregnant and penniless — abandoned, just like the character in *The Coquette*, the book everyone was reading and which someone had slipped her. She took the bucket outside and washed it in the snow. She shoveled the sign of it under shrubbery. All the while, the ice in the branches clicked and clacked. Her mind worked coldly. She would not allow herself to become the object of ridicule. Of pity. She made a plan. Henry might still return by Christmas, but he hadn't written. There was no sign of him. She couldn't depend on him.

In the morning, she spoke to Anna and Randall.

'I would like to go to Rollinsford to live.'

Anna stared at her, shocked.

'Winter's come. It's too late,' Randall said.

'It's not too late. The river still flows. I want to spend some months there — and then return to France, afterward.' She did not meet Anna's searching look.

Randall said, 'Henry might yet come.'

'Now you think he will?' She looked at him boldly. 'He's not out debauching himself?'

'What does she mean?' Anna said, confused.

'Nothing,' Randall said. 'You can't go there now, to Rollinsford. Not right before Henry promised to be home. You can't do that.'

'Yes, I'll wait till Christmas. A week after, but then would you arrange passage for me at the new year?' She left them, trying not to run up the stairs. She held her head high. They were arguing. Anna accused Randall



of making Chjara feel unwelcome, of unchristian behavior and what was this about Henry? Chjara did not wait to hear what lie Henry's father would concoct.

She would have to borrow money from Randall. Marguerite could not send her help in time. She tried to think: was Rollinsford far enough that word of her condition wouldn't travel back? Could she reach Montreal before the ice closed her in completely? Chjara pawed through her things: how could she raise any funds? What a fool she'd been, to send her coin with Henry.

The next afternoon a letter came. Eugenie brought it in. Chjara and Anna stood in the parlor while Randall opened it.

Anna said brightly, 'He will make us laugh at how silly we were to be anxious.'

'It's not from him,' Randall said.

'Oh,' both women said at once. Anna looked at Chjara with such pity, Chjara quickly turned to the window, which Eugenie was dusting.

'But Chjara, isn't that your dress?' Anna said, seeing a woman pass by. 'Where is she going — that's Goody Parker.'

'It's the Freemason's ball this evening,' Randall rose in his seat to see, then sat again abruptly enough to show he was correcting himself.

'I don't understand how she could be wearing a dress so like yours.'

Oh! Have they copied it?'

'I sold it,' Chjara said. 'To pay for the singing school,' she lied.

'But you show — to the whole town — that you are in need, by selling your gown,' Anna said. 'Randall, will you not give her some little allowance?'

'Yes, all right,' he said, distracted. 'You taught the singing school last night?' He looked up from the letter at Chjara.

'Who is it from?' Anna asked.

'Elwyn Meacham. A town selectman.' He spoke to Chjara.

'What is a 'selectman?'

'Like a mayor,' Anna explained.

They converged on the contents of the letter, and none of them saw Eugenie leave the room, nor the bulge in her dress pocket.

The note summoned Chjara to a meeting ongoing at this very moment. The address was the almshouse, where a single room on the second floor

served as the town hall.

The three went together and found all the ministers of the town seated, wedged against each other in chairs around the desk of the selectman. The selectman had a face so pocked, it looked like wax scraped by a wire brush. The room smelled strongly of crammed bodies and Chjara had to control her nausea very carefully. She swallowed too hard. She wiped her forehead too often. She was certain everyone guessed her secret.

Parker and Abigail shared a small bench in the corner. Chjara went and perched on the end of it. The Garlands joined their respective ministers: Anna's Methodist minister wore a red wool cravat; Randall's Congregationalist pastor held a gray cap in his hand. Besides them was the Baptist minister, a florid man in a brown coat; and the Unitarian, younger by half than any save Chjara.

'I will go straight to the point,' Elwyn the selectman said. 'You know me to be a man who doesn't mince his words. I am elected to be direct. Won't you agree,' he said, speaking first to Randall, then to the others, 'that honesty serves us better than obfuscation?'

'Do get on with it,' said the Baptist. 'Or I will.'

'If you would like to begin,' Elwyn said genially.

'We will not have the singing school taught by Papists,' the Baptist said. There was a silence.

Chjara felt her heart constrict; it seemed to close on itself like bellows. If they knew she was a pregnant Papist tart, she would be driven out.

'I believe this school is still the Congregational singing school so I suggest we clear the meeting of all but those directly concerned.' Randall spoke to the Baptist with more heat than usual in his voice.

'The song books don't belong to the Congregationalists. They belong to God!' the Baptist said.

'We all sing the tunes,' the Methodist minister said.

'But you don't all pay for them, do you?' Randall said.

'Of course we do,' said the Unitarian but Randall continued.

'Congregational monies pay most of your salary, isn't that right, Parker?'

'About half,' said Parker. 'The rest is subscriptions.'

The Unitarian scoffed. 'The Congregational Church pays with money from all our pockets, from our taxes.'

'This is not the time to be waylaid by the thorny issue of disestablishment,'

Elwyn said.

‘We are the approved church of New Hampshire. The singing school is ours.’ The Congregationalist gestured with his gray hat that they should all go.

Chjara watched, bewildered, only following half the conversation.

They talked all at once until Randall Garland stood up and clapped his hands three times, demanding silence. ‘Chjara, may I tell them of your intention, as you told me of it in Rollinsford?’

‘What intention?’ Her voice was meek. She cleared her throat.

She had little breath.

‘Chjara Vallé intends to join our Congregational community.’

Anna gave a small gasp, before the Congregationalist minister blurted, ‘Good God, but will we have her?’ producing laughter from the others.

Standing, Randall looked down at his minister. ‘I see no objection.’

Anna asked, ‘Is it true, Chjara?’

Oh, Randall was shrewd. Everyone waited for her answer. It would certainly help not to be a Papist. She sent a quick prayer to God: she could take this religion or the Methodist religion or any other, what did it matter to Him? It was men she had to please or distract while on this earth. God knew her soul.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I will join the church that funds the singing school.’

‘Then this meeting is over. Except for those in the Congregational fold,’ Randall declared.

The Unitarian piped up. ‘Are you aware that Henry belongs to us?’ he said to Chjara.

‘Yes, he said so,’ Chjara answered. She didn’t say: but he has left me here and I don’t know if he’ll come back. ‘I must follow my own conscience.’

‘It’s decided then.’ The selectman shooed the other ministers out. When they were gone, he turned to Randall. ‘So now, we have a woman teaching singing school?’

Randall, who had been so loquacious, said nothing more. In fact, he seemed shocked at his own deeds. Anna, smiling, patted him on the knee.

Parker spoke: ‘I believe there’s a good reason to invite Chjara to lead the school when I’m gone. Remember...’ he turned to the

Congregationalist minister, ‘we are charged with changing the songbook. There’s been... instruction.’ He was choosing his words carefully. ‘We’re supposed to stop singing our ballads. We’re supposed to pick ones with

ancient European roots.'

'Yes,' the Congregational minister said. 'No more wassails, or fiddle or dance tunes. That's the idea. We need melodies that aren't so common and connected with the lower sentiments.'

'You know many such ancient tunes, don't you?' Parker said to Chjara. 'Your father's chants?'

But you can't,' Randall said, flushing, 'you can't imagine we'd use Papist chants.'

'Not the Fathers,' Chjara said. 'My own father. He sang the polyphonies.' They looked confused. 'In Corsica, he sang ancient melodies. I learned those songs — songs by shepherds of the Mediterranean — I learned them in childhood.'

'It could be a benefit,' Parker said. 'We could set an example. The leadership would take note.'

The Congregational minister nodded, considering.

'We would have to pay her,' Randall said.

They all looked at him.

'Parker is the master,' Chjara said. 'He should be paid.'

'It would be best to have both, our Parker and Chjara as his assistant.'

'Is there money for both?'

'I will contribute.' Randall leveled his eyes on her briefly.

She didn't understand. Anna didn't either. Only later, after they'd left, did Randall speak again: 'You can earn your passage home this way, perhaps. If Henry doesn't come.'

'Or you will stay. And enjoy your new church,' Anna countered, glaring at her husband.

That night, Chjara wondered if Randall had guessed her secret already. He was helping to send her away before her condition showed.



Henry stood at a corner in Philadelphia where five streets angled off from each other. Snow had not yet fallen but he could taste winter in the air. He was early for an appointment with Tom Boone — early because these nights he wasn't sleeping. He stood there looking at the people coming

and going in the busy first hours of the day. He wondered how many of them had had a single day or even an hour such as he'd spent with Chjara aboard the *Magdalene*. Had they ever known such happiness?

What if the answer was yes?

What if every third person — or even every thirtieth — had melded himself to another in the place that was more like a dream than the common experience of day?

He began to count, noting every thirtieth person as he walked the final fifteen blocks to Tom's office. He found a note on the door instructing him to go to the debtors' prison where Tom was meeting with clients. Henry walked fourteen more blocks along the busiest thoroughfare in Philadelphia. He'd seen more than 150 people in that short hour, and if every thirtieth knew a fraction of his happiness, he'd passed five who had tangled themselves inside the electricity of life. Oh God, why hadn't she come?

In the long hours of the night he'd been composing and recomposing the sentences he'd use to describe the business to Chjara. He had to say it in a way so she would see the sense of it. He'd tell her about the man at the hospital who'd said we must invent a science of madness. We must throw off superstition and begin to see ourselves more clearly — so we can also see what it is that makes us hunger for each other. What it is that creates mutual electricity. Could they talk about this?

He could tell her the idea of the business, but he also badly wanted to explain the profit in it. The fact was, the profit would be significant.

No. Extraordinary.

It could be done: the goods could be hidden among the books. Their secret would be kept by customers — or else the customers would be exposed as well.

She would ask him: Yes, but what if you are caught?

He worried about this constantly. There's no law against it, he could say truthfully. He could not add, no law as yet, as the lawyer Tom had said to him.

He and Tom had returned again and again to the subject of risk, and had reviewed the options. In the new United States, the old English laws still held sway. Because prisons like the one he was about to enter were rare, being expensive, crimes were fit either for hanging or for fines. In most cases, the law worked between these poles. For what they were about to do, the punishment would be fines. Therefore the size of their profit would protect them.

If not fines, Tom had added, a judge might impose physical punishment. He could be whipped with his hands in stocks.

His tongue could be bored through.

His hands could be branded.

Henry arrived at the debtors' prison. The prison door was open. He walked in, still consumed by his own thoughts. The sheriff waved him on and he found himself in the pit of the prison proper, which was one common room the size of a barn. Half the men were naked. They owned no clothes. Some had no teeth. Matted hair. Feet white with cold. He passed through the throng, tasting the foul air. Many of these men once had riches. Now they were debtors.

Suddenly it overcame him. He didn't know how much he'd been depending on some inner courage to hold him steady, until this moment when it fell away. A cramp seized his belly and coursed down to his heels. He thought he would die or explode as he ran for the common privy where he fell on one knee. Before he righted himself, he couldn't help seeing in the hole. Green slime and a bloody skin covered over the waste which shook and shimmied with his every movement on the wood floor. He vomited and defecated at once, all the pent-up nervousness of these last weeks tearing from him in painful bursts.

He was a long time composing himself. He covered his eyes and wished for Chjara. He wished for her arms around him. He wished for her sweet breath. If only they could escape onto a ship, riding around the world forever together without needing to make a living. He wanted so much to be away from all this, and safe.

He found Tom Boone working at a table in a room adjacent and open to the pit. Boone sat there, quill in hand, over a heap of documents. His client, a prisoner, wore a good coat that closed tight; shoes; and no leggings whatsoever. The bare ankles and bony knees looked like those of a scalded pig, and Henry stared at them.

'Why are so many naked?'

'We have to trade our clothes for food and drink,' the client said.

Henry frowned.

'We owe for every day we enjoy the favor...' the man swept his hand theatrically toward the pit, 'of being housed by the good citizens of the land. Therefore our debt which lands us here grows. Majestically.'

‘You’ll be out by Christmas,’ Tom Boone promised.

‘Ah,’ said the man, ‘but will I come out in only my boots? Otherwise bare as I was born?’ He opened his cloak and closed it.

Later, after the client left, Henry whispered hoarsely, ‘The risk is too high.’

Boone said, ‘Nonsense.’

Henry shook his head, speechless.

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ Boone said. ‘I know how to keep us out of this place.’

‘Do it yourself then. You find the printer, leaving the trail of your name and calling card for anyone to find. You sell *Fanny Hill*, come spring.’ Henry suddenly despised his benefactor. He was indebted to this man for the business capital. He was at his mercy. Boone need do nothing but rake in the profits.

‘Henry, Henry.’ Boone shook his head. He was an anvil of a man: square-chested, flat-shouldered, and his heart too was hard as iron. He never wavered. His best quality was that he could make decisions and hold to them.

‘You’ve made your choice. Don’t go back. Go forward.’ Boone tried to keep the impatience from his voice. ‘You found a printer then?’

‘I got him to agree to finish the first books by March first, not June first.’

‘Excellent. He’ll use the covers we choose?’

‘He agreed to all. But good God, Tom, I could not end up here.’ Henry turned and stared again at the pit. Again his belly squeezed.

‘You wouldn’t.’ Boone got up. ‘And if you did, I’d get you out.’

Henry stared at him.

Boone grinned. ‘You’ll not get in in the first place. C’mon man.’ He put his arm around Henry, keeping on his face the smile that was a shade away from anger. He needed a man, not a boy. Boone’s favorite proverb was, ‘Where there’s a will, there’s a way.’

‘If you are caught, Henry, you’ll be caught in some bucolic town on a byway. The men of the village will take you out back of the tavern and beat you senseless.’ Boone still wore the shadow of a smile as he shrugged. ‘You’ll get up, soothe your wounds, and never go back to that place. That’s all, my friend. That’s all.’

## *Chapter Eleven*

Randall Garland woke on Christmas morning with a feeling of dread as clear and sharp as a taste of strong cheese. Bad news would come today. As he quickly dressed, he looked back at the form in the bed. He suffered a twist of the heart because there she was, his Anna, with her gray hair and a child in her belly. In her fifth month, she showed her state clearly, despite her broad skirts. The knowledge they'd kept private was now a subject of gossip in the town.

Would she manage it? Would she survive a labor at this age? He prayed, please God, save her. While he chopped wood outside for the morning fire, God answered him: he should expect no special privileges. He suddenly had a picture of Anna in the ground and he himself alone, utterly alone. He grasped his axe and swung. He missed and nearly cut himself and leaned over. He wished with all he had that God's grace would fall on her. He could withstand the fires of hell if only he knew Anna was in God's love.

'Henry will surprise us today,' Anna said at breakfast. 'He will come in his carriage while we are at church. I sense it.'

Randall turned his attention to his cereal. Again, the presentiment of doom rose in his gullet. She must have seen his grim expression because she laughed at him.

'He's a good boy,' Anna said. 'He'll come as soon as he can.'

Randall would have liked to spill out the secret that Henry was last seen in a whorehouse, but the thought only tightened his lips more. He fixed his stare on Chjara, who knew it as well.

She ate her cereal, famished, hungry all the time now. She slowed herself down lest they guess her condition from her appetite. 'It tastes so good,' Chjara said to Anna. 'What is this?'

'Just ordinary corn mush,' Anna leaned forward, 'with a great deal of maple syrup.'

She had to explain what maple syrup was. Randall watched Chjara roll the taste around in her mouth with an expression like a cat pushing her back-end against a bedpost. She all but purred with satisfaction and



Randall wondered if she was bewitching him. How could he have agreed to let her convert to his church? Surely she only feigned belief.

Later that day, Randall waited for Anna outside the Methodist meeting house like a man courting. It did not escape him that the final hymn, which he could hear though the meeting-house door was closed, was the same one he and Chjara had just sung at the Congregational assembly, even to the same harmony. Even to the same zest for the song.

Anna came out and quickened her step, seeing them. Randall bought his wife some Boston baked beans from a charcoal vendor on the street corner, and she jostled the hot nuts in her hand — so hot that he had to take them from her and juggle them in the air to cool them off before spilling them back into her hands. She seemed so pleased by that.

They went to bed that night again with no word or sign of Henry. Still the premonition haunted Randall.



Chjara slept lightly. She slept with a leg sprawled out from the hot covers. Henry reappeared to her on stilts. He embraced her, the wooden legs dangling beneath them, still attached. *Fire!* he shouted. *Fire, fire...* His face was frantic.

Heat flowed in all her veins. It was as if her whole body was near to tears: swollen, hot and aching. She spun around in the bed, escaping him, escaping Henry. Fire, he growled in her ear. She slapped him. *I can't put it out. I can't stop it,* she cried, *I can't, I can't.*

'Fire on Market Street!'

The shout came from the real world. Chjara sprang out of bed, the dream vanishing.

She looked out the window at bright red embers flying past. She dressed with her heart overturned. She yelled the warning to the rest of the house and she was outside first with a water bucket in her right hand and the axe in her left.

Everywhere the air was thick with resin smell, as if all the wood had liquefied. Randall Garland caught up to her along with Eugenie and the two black servants who seemed to move with an alacrity impossible for such

old, crooked bones. Anna came too, her belly huge in her nightdress, no petticoats to hide it.

Around the corner, two houses burned and as they arrived a third alongside erupted in a single gasp. The flames were sucked up into the sky and pointed like an arrow to the heavens. The leader of the fire brigade shouted that they had to tear down the Widow Hart's boarding house, which was next by one. They had to tear down the fuel in the fire's path.

It was while they were all turned toward the boarding house door that the widow emerged in her nightshirt with John Donaldson half-dressed behind her. They carried her good china in their hands — and seeing so many turned to look at her, she dropped her stack.

'Fornicators and adulterers and liars,' Randall hissed, pulling at the porch timbers with a hammer.

As Chjara looked at Randall, he gave her the same fearful stare that he'd fixed on her at breakfast. Did he know?

'We bring His judgment down upon us,' Randall said. 'We've done it to ourselves. We've betrayed Him. Even I...' He looked to where Anna lifted a bucket.

Chjara saw him look at his wife, his face in the flickering light consumed by anguish and regret.

'No,' she said. 'God is not furious with us for loving. It is a foretaste.' She grasped his arm. 'We join Him in our embrace.'

He shrugged off her hand. He bared his teeth: 'You lawless wench. You tell me what God wishes?' He looked at her as if she could contaminate him. Contaminate all of them.

She stood, paralyzed. So their rapprochement was thin and could vanish at any moment. People glanced at her, having heard his words. Chjara joined the line of people passing water buckets, her face painted with a calm expression. Inside, her heart was rearing like a frightened horse.

Water sloshed as she hoisted a bucket to the woman in front of her. Chjara felt her mouth dry. She remembered her mother telling her one day that there were no fish again for supper because God was punishing the village for the adulterers in their midst. Chjara didn't know then what adultery was. She felt only her mother's disgust. She didn't know that her mother accused the curé of sin and adultery against God. Instead she thought her own sins kept the fish away; she was full of pride. Even then,

the audiences tempted her. The men applauding her in the taverns made her feel treasured above all others, and her mother often berated her for her arrogance.

She had gone to the curé. With a streaming face, she asked him if it was her fault.

‘The fish swim deeper out of reach of the hooks because it is so hot this week,’ the curé said, lifting her. ‘You are not the cause.’ He stroked her head. ‘God does not pick the nits from your hair. You are his favored child.’

‘My mother doesn’t think so,’ she said.

‘She too is his favored child,’ the curé responded.

Now Chjara looked around to see Randall scrambling up the side of the boarding house on a rope. He moved as if the hellfire burned around them, which it did. But fire was the result of kindling and a spark. In her fear, Chjara had let reason go. Henry was a good man, a favored child — as best he could be. Doubt was contagious.

Randall’s poisonous expectations were too convincing. Henry was delayed: this was as reasonable an explanation as all the others; it was helpful to believe this. For Anna, too, and anyone who loved him. If he was truly gone, she should at least remember him without stain. She should not let herself be pulled along by Randall’s panicked thoughts. Sweat slicked her ribs under her dress; smoke made her throat raw.

On the roof, Randall and several other men clawed away the wood shingles. The nails squealed. They threw down heaps of timber to a crew who piled the smoking wood into a waiting carriage. The frightened horses could hardly be made to stand still.

Fire licked the porch. It would find the firewood heaped there, Chjara saw. She and Eugenie piled it into a wheelbarrow. They ran with the wood away from the fire. By the time they returned, flames had engulfed the boarding house anyway.

All around them the fire burned. It took dozens of houses for its skirt, and rose into the sky with flying arms of sparks. It performed a lascivious dance and in the light of it, Chjara felt herself watched. Glances like embers landed on her. Someone would have to be blamed for this. The heat of the air matched the heat of fear inside her. She thought of the witches burned. Would she be one of them?

Chjara and Eugenie were on the team of neighbors pulling down the

houses on Penhallow Street when word came: fire had taken the Garlands' house. Whatever she had left in this world was gone, burned.

'Mother Mary,' wailed Eugenie.

Chjara felt the hot looks from those around them.

'Call to Jesus, not Mary,' Chjara hissed.

'Mary, Mother of God,' Eugenie cried out only louder.

Chjara pulled her by the ear. She dragged the girl behind the nearby privy. 'Don't you understand? They already think we are spies for the Devil.'

'But I've lost everything I have!'

'What do you have?' Chjara scoffed.

Eugenie's dark eyes flashed with triumph that quickly turned again to despair. She put her fists to her face and whispered, 'I am punished. I'm a thief and God knows it.'

'Who did you steal from?' Chjara said.

A man wheeled a cart full of piglets out from the burning barn behind them.

'You. I stole from you.'

'Me?' Chjara scoffed again. 'What did you find, a pair of stockings?'

Eugenie's face was wide with terror. 'Mary, Mary,' she whimpered.

Chjara grasped her by the shoulders. 'Jesus, not Mary.' She whispered hoarsely: 'You have to gather your wits, girl. They'll blame you. And you're not at fault.' She took the girl's chin in her hand and held it firmly, firmly enough to leave a thumb print. 'You are not at fault, so don't say so.'

'But I am,' she cried.

'God is not so foolish,' Chjara said. 'God is good. There is no sense in thinking that any Being so great picks the nits from your hair.'

Three girls in nightgowns ran crying up the street, holding hands.

Eugenie was confused. 'What is a nit?'

'The lice. Cooties,' Chjara said. 'A fire begins with fire. With embers. With carelessness perhaps. Whatever your sin, it's forgiven.'

Eugenie, startled, looked at Chjara. 'How can you forgive me?'

'All right, I can't. Go to the priest on Saturday. He'll absolve you.'

'But you would?'

'I don't forgive you — not if you won't work. We have to work with everyone else, right now. And not be silly.'

'You forgive me?' Eugenie repeated, following Chjara who hurried back

to their place by the house.

‘I forgive you, God forgives you. Lift up the damn logs.’



Two days later, the town smoldered still. Charred timbers braced the sky. Smoke thick as fog hung in the air, and Chjara stood among the devastation, parched. Her eyes stung. The ground itself was hot as a skillet. She'd been left unpunished, allowed to help during the blaze, but even the most cheerful singers in the school had shot her sideways glances. She didn't know what she was going to do, or where she would be welcome. Whispers of 'papist' followed her. She was afraid, and tried not to show it.

She returned through the rubble to where Randall and Anna now shared a room with her in the house of Phillip Jameson, a house that had survived unscathed. Entering, she saw Anna folding clothes with a face as falsely bright as her own. Randall sat with his head in his hands.

‘It's interesting to observe,’ said Anna, ‘that God spared the house of a Jeffersonian.’

Chjara wondered that Anna dared to tease Randall. He seemed so stricken as to be nearly catatonic.

‘We have nothing,’ he said. ‘Not even the printing press is left. The Penhallow Street building still stands but inside, it's as if the fire chewed out the timbers. You can't even enter.’

‘We will start again,’ Anna said.

‘There's the land in Dover. It's all clay. There will be a run on clay,’ he said dully, ‘to make brick houses. Will anyone buy from me, I wonder?’

‘Of course they will,’ Anna said. ‘Why would they not?’

He glanced at Chjara, and quickly away again.

‘I'll leave,’ Chjara said.

Anna crossed over to her. ‘Your home is now here. With us, until Henry returns.’

‘I heard in town that ships are coming with blankets and food. Send me away on the first of them. Send me to safety, please.’

‘She's right,’ Randall said.

‘No. We are not such a bad people.’ Anna grasped her hand. ‘It will pass,

Chjara. Have patience. Opinions change.'

Chjara knew it was true that opinions change, and quickly. She wondered if she might be driven from town.

'The wind changes. Be patient,' Anna told her.



The next day, a notice came from one of the many ships that began to crowd Portsmouth Harbor. It said there was a coffin aboard addressed to the family of Henry Garland. Hearing, Chjara ran down the stairs. *Not Henry, please God.* The hem of the dress she wore, borrowed from a daughter of the house, clung to the stairs. She ran down the street, stumbling. She felt as if her mind had been ripped from out of her skull. He was dead. He hadn't written because he was killed by savages. *Henry, oh no.*

Randall sent Eugenie after her. Eugenie caught Chjara at the waist and lifted her off the ground. Chjara fought, but the maid's arms were very strong.

Randall forced Chjara to wait with them in the sitting room where he and Anna sat on stiff chairs. She didn't understand how her heart still fit in her chest. When the coffin arrived, the sailors gave it to the household servants, who wore gloves. The door closed on the crowd gathering in the street outside.

Anna said, 'Open it.' She directed the servants to fetch crowbars. 'We have to know if it's really him.' Anna put her hand on the coffin which seemed to sweat. 'It's wet, Randall,' she said.

He lifted his head.

'Shipped in ice,' he said. His face was lime; his voice was weak.

Don't be you, Chjara implored silently. Don't let it be you. In her breast, a hummingbird drilled its beak where she should breathe.

'He has been ill somewhere. That is why we had no letters.' Anna wrung her hands.

'There were many letters,' Eugenie blurted.

This information, delivered in French, was like cold water thrown at Chjara's face.

'Where were the letters?' Chjara spoke English unconsciously for the first

time. 'I received letters, from Henry?'

Eugenie nodded. 'I took them.'

'You took my letters?' Chjara turned on the servant as if she would fling her to the wall. 'Where are they? Where are these letters?'

'You said you would forgive me.'

'I did not.'

'You did. In the fire.'

'Where are they, you *puta*?'

'Silence,' Anna said.

Randall sat frozen.

'Tell me what's going on,' Anna said. 'One minute you're speaking French and the next English.'

There was a knock at the door and immediately the face of the host. He carried two crowbars.

'I've had letters from Henry,' Chjara explained to Anna.

'Yes, I understood that. She took them. Where are they now?'

'They burned in the fire. All the money too,' Eugenie said.

There was a long silence.

'You will burn in hell,' Chjara hissed in French.

'Do you pick the nits from my hair?' Eugenie said, confused and frightened.

'I want to know if my son is dead,' Randall said.

Chjara turned to the box. In her ears was a roar like the worst of the fire, when the flame-driven wind sucked all other sound with it.

'So this is all we have of him.' Anna took a pry bar from Randall's hand. 'Come, husband. We do this together. We made him together. Let us see now if he is gone from us.'

The nails squalled as they left the green pine wood. Eugenie whimpered in the corner. Anna stopped. She said furiously, 'Be quiet.'

Eugenie started to leave the room.

'You may not leave. You will bear this too.'

So they opened the lid. Inside was first a layer of straw. Randall's brow furrowed. 'This isn't usual,' he said.

Chjara stepped forward. She parted the straw gently with her fingertips. The straw went deep and she began to fling it away until her hand struck something. Something hard and not flesh, not even cold, stiffened flesh, but

real wood. They scrambled together now, throwing out the straw packing.

A smaller coffin-like box rested there: narrow, darker, of finished, glossy wood. Beside it, on each side, were lathe-turned legs.

‘Oh!’ Chjara began to laugh. She began to shake with laughter and to cry, both. She tried to explain but was overcome. Anna saw paper, buried in the straw. It was a letter. She read aloud:

*Boxing Day, 1802.*

*Dear Henry Garland,*

*Every day I am put into the way of temptation as passersby seek to purchase the glass harmonica that you ordered. No one has come to collect it for you so, in the name of my soul, I ship it now before I take payment for it twice. I sent it to the only address I have, though you departed for Philadelphia. To those who receive it, if it is not yours, God bless you. Sincerely, Benjamin Waldstone, Glassmaker.*

Chjara took Anna in one arm and pulled Randall with the other, telling them, ‘It is a glass harmonica. It is my wedding gift. He’s in... Philadelphia.’ She repeated the unfamiliar name. ‘He’s alive.’



‘Distressing Conflagration Unparalleled in America! (of late) For the Size of the Place’

Henry saw the headline while eating breakfast in his lodgings in Philadelphia. He rose from the table, knocking over the pitcher of water. He snatched a few things from his room and ran to the barn to saddle the new horse, which might possibly make the trip to New England over the deep snow. The landlady came and interrupted his preparations. A ship docked in the Delaware was leaving to take blankets and food to New Hampshire where — praise God — no one had died although most of the small city lay in shambles.

Henry arrived a week after the New Year on a day when new snow covered all the world. The blackened timbers from the fire stuck out like spires against the white. He ran to his parents’ house, found it burned. A friend sent



him running to the Jamesons'. When he knocked at the door, his father was on the other side.

His father embraced him as if he'd been lost to the blaze. When Henry started to pull away, his father still clung. Henry realized the old man was weeping. Here in the hallway there was the sweet smell of apples. He had never held his father in his arms in his life, and Henry felt the bones of his skinny back and the heat of his father's tears, and he had to fight not to cry himself. In this world there was nothing but sorrow alternating with the caprice of fortune. Then his mother appeared in the hall, swollen now with her pregnancy, and Henry saw them as he'd seen the farmers in their dark kitchens, buying Webster's. All his life, his parents had been two small souls trying to protect themselves and their son. The hell of pure need could open up at anyone's feet at any time. In this, his father's Puritan faith had got it right. Call it God's judgment or nature's fickle provision, the bitter truth was that their souls were bare before fire or hunger or untimely death or even untimely fertility.

It was for this reason that men created commerce: to protect home and family.

'We have failed Him,' his father whispered hoarsely.

'We have,' Henry agreed. It didn't matter with what words a man conveyed that he understood the desperate hell of need.

Henry was still in the embrace of his parents when Chjara appeared at the top of the stairs. In that moment, all the vows he'd made on the ship to tell her the truth of his contraband venture seemed a spoiled boy's vanity.

He would provide.

He would keep them safe.

She descended the stairs regally, her eyes on him, her shoulders square, her breasts strong and bold. She arrived at the foyer. He kept his look on her and he approached. He took her firmly in his arms. He pulled her head back and kissed her hard on the mouth, feeling her fingers dig into him in response. They held each other there. They felt the flow of life between them, hot as a midday summer sun, before they let go and turned to face his parents.

That was the moment, they decided later, when they were wed. The next Sunday, the world would marry them in Randall's Congregational Church, and later again they would make vows to each other before Henry's attorney friend in the landlady's garden in Philadelphia. But the deed was

done when Anna, flushed with the shock of seeing them embrace, turned to Randall for guidance, and Randall was silent, his tear-tracked face stricken with confusion. Henry simply announced: ‘We accept your blessing.’



Chjara and Henry returned to Henry’s employment in Philadelphia, traveling on one of the charity ships. Before leaving Portsmouth, Chjara gave a concert on her glass harmonica. She wore the red dress which the woman who’d bought it presented back to her as a wedding gift. Opinion changed. Now she was a wife and Protestant, and no matter if they knew she was still the same underneath, they welcomed her. She felt like the elephant, entering the Portsmouth Athenaeum on the night of the performance with everyone gawking. People lined the stairs and stood against the walls.

This audience would be more difficult than Napoleon. She was determined to give them all she knew — all she could feel when she opened her full self to the world. She waited until everyone was still. Until no one even coughed. She could sense anticipation roll through the crowd with her intake of breath. Then she struck a minor chord, allowing the glass tones to strengthen and strengthen, until the vibration crawled up her hands, then sped up her arms to touch her neck. The music circled in the atrium. She took the root note, the A, the scale’s center, and sang it with her throat open. The sound split. Vaguely, she heard gasps in the audience. She closed her eyes and continued. The divide held. Matching her voice to the sound of the glasses, she sang the melody of her father, the plaint borne among shepherds of the southern Mediterranean and traders from the Arabic peninsula. The notes yearned for union with all they could express and not name. ‘*Every moment seems an age, Till Thy presence shall relieve me,*’ she sang. She turned the notes in her mouth so they could be heard from all sides — the flat in them, the sharp; up and down she led them. In her voice was her doubt of Henry and her love for him. Tears burned, and she sang sweetly, ‘*Till Thy presence shall relieve me.*’ She was not abandoned.

In the audience, children gaped. Was there a bird in the lady’s mouth? Or a snake? Or both? No one had heard anything like it, except one fur

trader in the back who whispered, 'It's like the Eskimos — their women sing this way.'

A woman in the front row wearing an ivory gown recoiled as if she'd been spat on. At the start of the third verse, she couldn't bear it anymore. She crossed in front of the others and fled.

Four women on the other side of the athenaeum held hands and leaned closer, all together, as if they were preparing to leap into some future.

Randall Garland prayed. He prayed in hoarse whispers that matched, after a while, the rhythm of the song. It made a sound of quiet affirmation — an echo almost — of the music. He rocked back and forth. His neighbors in the row deduced from this coincidence that he approved, and they opened more readily to the sound. They rocked on their feet to the undulating notes of the glass harmonica which Chjara deployed so it sounded like both drum and hum, as her voice drummed and hummed in keeping with it.

Anna Garland smiled stiffly as she looked around. She knew her neighbors might hear the Devil in this music. She felt the keen edge of their suspended judgment. She caught glances tossed from one to another in the audience, checking to see how they were supposed to react. At the final verse, Anna held her hands up, ready to clap, ready to lead the applause.

But the last note of Chjara's voice was not the end. She continued the melody on the glass harmonica alone. It was a sweeter and more gentle lament. The whole audience seemed to relax and some on tiptoes sank back down. The girls who'd leaned forward took a simultaneous breath then sighed it out. The final notes were two glass tones in pleasing harmony.

And then silence.

They had heard something terrible. Something wonderful. Which was it?

Then Anna clapped. So did the once-leaning girls, and all joined in because everyone else was.

Chjara bowed and paused low in her bow.

When she left, she was visibly exhausted but also radiant. If anyone had been close enough to her eyes, they would have seen something wild there and foreign as with any shaman or mystic who is still in ecstasy.

Still, a reporter covered the event. Numerous members of the audience felt themselves in the morning to suffer from some contagion. The headline read, 'Music of the Spheres Eases (or Sickens!) Fire-Stricken Town.' He quoted the

town poet who called her music ‘celestial ravishment’. The phrase would run in newspapers from Maine to Georgia.

## *Part III*

### *Chapter Twelve*

Henry lay awake in a tavern loft with Chjara beside him also not sleeping. The air was as brackish as the river below. Mosquitoes singed their shoulders, their chins, their exposed fingertips and now, as well, the other itinerants were returning from their night escapades. They made enough noise for an army, lugging their goods indoors. A blanket hung from a rafter separated Henry's and Chjara's tick bed from sleeping quarters on the other side. Eventually the men settled. Eventually they snored. The waterwheel outside sloshed and sloshed.

'I'll never sleep again.' Chjara's smile was exhausted, pitiful. 'Ever.'

'Let's go,' he whispered.

'Where?'

He didn't know. 'Let's just go.'

She sighed. She cantilevered herself up. The blanket fell from her and he saw the roundness of her belly and breasts and the roundness of her face in the moonlight, and he wanted to remember this, his woman, his wife, the mother of his coming child, and he wanted to give her sleep.

They were in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, in the middle of summer. Henry's father was dead — suddenly gone — and his mother widowed.

They were traveling north to fetch Anna and Henry's newborn brother Peter.

At the docks at Valley Forge, he'd picked up three new crates of secret goods. Chjara had insisted on this diversion to Ephrata because the name reminded her of her Mediterranean home, a distant strange connection, but he conceded. She was willful in her pregnancy. He would not know until later her real purpose.

Now in the middle of the night, she led the way. They tiptoed out. They

stepped over sleeping men. The loft smelled of sour mash and digestion and sweat, and the darkness was wool-thick. Henry went first down the ladder, holding Chjara's ankles to the rungs. She was so big she had to lean out to make room for her belly. It was a son, she'd told him. Nearing the bottom, she looked over his shoulder and gasped.

He turned and sensed a huge man. Unmoving. Pulse enraged, he flung his arms over Chjara.

'Don't break my man.' Above, a bearded itinerant with a hastily lit candle leaned over the top of the ladder.

Henry saw then that it was not a man at all. It was a wax version of Henrik the Iroquois chief. All along the hall, wax men had been tipped against the wall for safe-keeping overnight: George Washington; the beheaded Louis XVI holding his own head by wax hair. Henry bent to light their lantern and smiled ruefully at Chjara. She curtsied to Washington. Wax-works were one of the most popular entertainments — those and dance lessons which promised 'instant gentility' with the country minuet, the cotillion, and 'lessons in manners' thrown in for free. These popular entertainments paid nothing compared to Henry's books, though.

Outside, he saw his carriage with the crates stacked on top. He had a sudden idea of how he could stack them inside instead, to form a bed between the benches.

'Go. Sit by the river.'

The glass harmonica's case fit exactly on the carriage floor with six boxes on top, and then he felt her watching him.

Her hands hung at her sides. 'The sky is not open,' she said. 'We're steaming under a lid. This country has no wind, Henry. None.'

She was so small and round, standing there with her big belly in the center of the courtyard. He hugged her; her skin was sticky.

'I can't breathe.' She wept in his arms. He felt his son kicking through her body to him.

'I'll find wind.'

'There is no wind,' she wailed.

'Ssshhh.' He stroked her hair. He had never before heard her complain.

The horses, Betsy and Banana, complained too, arching their necks against the harness. But they let him move them forward. Chjara refused

the bed he'd made; she sat beside him on the driver's bench and they rode in the moonlight up a slight incline at the edge of town. There was no wind at the top. A waterfall tumbled over granite boulders and Henry asked the horses to pull them closer, then a little closer still. Chjara tipped her head back, feeling the slight spray of cool water. He watched her face, his heart quickening as she let out a long and satisfied sigh. 'Oh Henry, you are a marvelous man.'

He washed her hair in the water. He watched her walk naked among the rocks. He cleaned her toes with a brush and rubbed the chill from her hands after her bath. Then finally she agreed to try the bed, though the wilderness was all around them, though any man could ride up at any moment and take them hostage, though the spirits of the river could rise up and find her there.

'Shhh.' He stroked with soft fingers down the length of her back.

Her breath began to slow.

She turned over, then over again. 'I don't want to be superstitious.'

'No,' he agreed.

'I was almost asleep and now I'm awake again.'

'No. This is sleep.'

'It is?'

'You're dreaming.'

'I'm dreaming.'

'Yes. We're together and you cannot tell if this is my fingers touching your back or your back touching my fingers.'

'Hmmm.'

'You cannot tell if this is my heart or your heart.'

'My toes,' she said, 'or your toes. Or his toes.'

His hand cupped her belly and their boy was kicking.

'Or his toes, or his bottom, or your bottom or my...'

He whispered all the parts and her breath lengthened. She let herself fall. Almost. He heard her come back from the softness of sleep again, trying to hide it but still breathing as if she was awake.

'When you fall asleep,' he whispered, 'I'll go up top. I'll make sure no one comes.'

'No. Stay.'

'Until you sleep.' He breathed slower, she breathed with him, and he

thought it was the best thing he'd ever done — to be a husband — and he would have liked to tell his father about it. Had his father felt this also? Had his father loved? Chjara twitched in his arms as if her entire body resisted, then gave in all at once. He could hear her relax, he could feel her spirit spread out instead of perching beside him, and it began to engulf him, the sleep of their joined bodies. He let it come over him to help her along.

Did you and my mother share the same cave; were you ever one soul? he asked his father in his mind. Did this happen to you? He was trying to sleep and not sleep at the same time. His father was dead and he, Henry, was becoming a father. Why didn't we know each other? Why did you see all the weakness in me and none of the strength?

He wanted to tell his father what his own life had taught him, but his father was gone forever and how could he ever have explained what he was doing now? He would have liked to show his father the face of the woman who'd approached the carriage last week. Nervous, hand flying to her mouth and away again, eyes dark. Waiting for the other customers to go away. *He stays away from me, my husband.* Her loneliness broke through her voice. *He won't come near me. We have enough children already, he says.* He sold her French letters. At a quarter of the usual price, she bought *Aristotle's Masterpiece*. He showed her the illustrations, and he could sense her wonder and her arousal and he knew she would go home to her husband with this feeling. As he pictured them, he felt his own stiffening. Here is your fornicator, he told his father. How is it that sexual knowledge ruins us? Do you really believe it?

He heard his father quote him, mocking: Electric root of vitality?

He told his father, You are the sophist now. You avoid the truth. You hold to what you are already convinced of. You aren't listening.

Henry got up carefully. He took his rifle, slipped out of the carriage and climbed to the driver's bench, all without waking Chjara. He listened to the silence; even the horses were sleeping. The memory of his father came to him, the last time they saw each other: thin, bony, their embrace at his homecoming. He didn't know his own father, didn't know what was under the noise of his father's being — the noise every man made in the world, under which was the secret of his life, the cave of his solitary experience. It was the glimpse beyond the wall of privacy that Henry wanted. He crossed that wall when he sold people his goods, and under the gaze of his father's



invisible questioning, he admitted it was good to see others, to be a voyeur of their lives. But was this his only drive, this desire to watch, to see what should be private? Wasn't his desire also to admit something of the truth of life? Couldn't his father see that?

Henry spent the night arguing, and he slept as the horses did, his body in the shape of someone awake: sitting, ready, with his rifle across his lap.



They were in the worship house at Ephrata: white walls, dark ceiling beams, the scent of orange oil in the pews. Henry sat beside her, the black wool of his pants dusty, and her own frock pale with the chalk dust of seventy miles' travel in less than a week. Their hosts entered from the door at the back. They were celibates: three women, two men, identical in their featureless bodies. From the front, from the back, they were plain and thin. Chjara didn't know how they did it. At lunch they had eaten so little. She had felt like a glutton, consuming a whole potato thick with creamy salted butter.

During the lunch, pouring cool water into her cup, one of them had said, 'We've heard of your celestial ravishment.'

'Even here?' She could not help being pleased.

'We practice it also,' the woman said.

'You do?'

'We are known for it.' There was a hint of aggrieved pride in her voice.

'Greta,' one of the other women scolded. 'We *were* known for it.' She was nearly bald, her hair gone so thin, and her bare scalp was strangely beautiful. Her eyes softened at her colleague. 'Many people came to hear our songs. When our community was still whole.'

'I thought you were known for your medicine,' Chjara said. 'That's how I heard of you. In Valley Forge, they said your community took care of all of Washington's soldiers during the siege.'

'Yes. Disease took many of them, the poor boys.'

'Many of us, too,' Greta said. 'We used to be hundreds.'

'I'm sorry.' Chjara could feel Henry watching her. She hadn't told him the real reason she'd wanted to come here. She kept her expression bright. 'Would you sing for us?'

‘We sing for God. What you can hear is up to you,’ one of the men said quietly.

Now the three women and two men took opposite pews at the front of the worship house. They tilted their heads back at an extreme angle, so far that their necks pointed to the ceiling. It looked terribly uncomfortable. Chjara could see the lump of a swallow travel up and down Greta’s throat. They maintained their silence for several minutes. Then the bald woman began — one note, no words — immediately joined by the four other voices. The sound filled the empty air in the worship house. They lengthened their throats by leaning back. Chjara saw how the flute-like effect was made. It vibrated through her bones and organs and into her fingers. Five voices from old bodies emaciated by self-restraint and abstinence, and yet they were able to call down the heavens.

Chjara remembered the story her father told, of how he’d sung her awake in the womb, and she thought that maybe now, with this singing, her own child would turn to face the world. He seemed stuck, pressed against her ribs. Beneath her skirt, she let her legs fall open. She leaned back. She told the child to listen and she willed the music to wash over him like the waterfall, and help him to turn around.

Henry put his hand on her knee. He looked to see if she was all right. She smiled at him even as she thought that if the child didn’t turn, she might die.

After the music, Henry told her he wanted to travel on that night. ‘We can sleep again along the road.’

She was sitting on the cot in the large communal house where the celibates had slept. Fifteen cots spaced a foot apart ran from window to window. ‘My music is not celibate.’

‘No, it’s not,’ he agreed. Their hosts’ music had given him a crick in his neck, just watching.

‘It’s not celibate but it’s still holy, don’t you think?’ She gave him her pretty look, but then she tried to erase it. She didn’t want to be coquettish with him. What if she died in childbirth today? She understood something about herself. Since she was six years old and heard applause crash all around her, she had loved the sound of it. She did like earthly praise. ‘What do you think, Henry — can things that are not celibate still be holy?’

He stared at her.

‘What? Husband, have I embarrassed you?’

‘You mean, does sexual knowledge contaminate us?’ Henry’s tongue thickened. He thought he would tell her.

She looked up, startled. He had not used this phrase ‘sexual knowledge’ before. His face was full red. ‘Did Randall say it did? I can just picture him, your old father, saying *ssssexual*.’ She laughed.

Henry looked out the window. ‘Not Randall, no.’

‘He would have had us arrested for fornicating.’

‘We didn’t know my father, really. I didn’t know him.’ He would have added, you don’t know me, either. Maybe he would confess to her now, maybe he could tell his secret in this moment presenting itself.

Mistaking his mood, Chjara rose, wanting to comfort him. ‘Randall loved you with a tremendous passion. When he kidnapped me to Rollinsford, he vomited over the side of the boat.’

‘What?’

She told him the story then. She laughed, describing the cunning with which Randall had tried to protect his only son from her influence, and Henry was surprised to learn the depth of his father’s emotion. While he listened he knew the moment was going away. He let it go. He didn’t tell her — his pregnant wife.



They slept, after all, upstairs in cots in the little-used communal building. They woke in the morning to find blood in her sheets. Henry stared, confused. Chjara’s face was white. She urged him to ride for a midwife. He didn’t want to leave her side. ‘What can celibates know about bringing a child into the world?’ she said, to convince him. She did not want him present while they helped her. ‘Ask the old woman to come sit by me,’ she said.

He rode off at a gallop and she didn’t notice that he had not stopped to tell the woman to come.

She was alone, surrounded by nothing but cots and white sheets. Birds sang with the dawn and a cow pissed loudly outside the window. Her blood had stopped flowing.

She spoke to her child. ‘Now listen, you boy. You can’t come out feet

first. You've got to turn around.' Tucking her hand under her ribs, she pressed hard, as hard as she could against his head, forcing it and praying to God, Please don't let me hurt him. Nothing changed. She could feel her inner door opening. She felt the muscles pull her wide, the spasms grabbing her from the inside.

She tried again. She drew a deep breath but this only tightened the space in which his head was crammed. She let out every ounce of breath from her body and she shoved with all her might. 'Move,' she cried.

He did. He moved a little. Just a little. She praised him, she said, *good boy*, crying, her tears like acid on her cheeks. She arched back with the next spasm, and his head popped back under her ribs. She wailed — *no don't* — and she stuffed a fist into her mouth. She did it once; she could do it again. She breathed in. She breathed out. She pushed his head; it didn't move. She got up to empty her bladder and she emptied her bowels and when she turned and saw the bedpan, it was filled with blood. Where were the women?

She shouldn't have sent Henry away. Would she die alone here, so far, far from home? The terrible pain of her body washed together with the pain of this barbarous fortune; the old words in Corse came back to her, filling her mouth, and letting the tears flow. She stopped them. She wiped away the sound and the tears. She would not be superstitious. Destiny did not exist. Marguerite's letter came back to her: *None of us may relinquish our wills to fate. Will you be strong or will you be weak?*

Chjara stood up on a cot. She jumped from one to the next. The boy jumped with her. She willed him to sink with each bounce. She jumped to the next bed. She jumped across the entire row and at the window, she saw the bald one working in the garden in the distance.

'Help,' Chjara called. Not loud enough. 'Help me,' she shouted. Blood burst between her legs. The bald one looked up.

Chjara fainted. They came. Chjara woke. She tried to tell them all she'd learned from the curé's woman about how a child is born. She could hear her own words garbled, the English spilling into Latin, as if the priest were there and listening.

'We've had many children born here,' the bald one said.

'From celibates?'

'This was the married house. We had twice as many married as celibate.'

The bald one spoke calmly. She had a book beside her. 'I'm going to reach inside you and turn the child.'

'You're a midwife.'

'I have the midwife's manual.' She held out a book with illustrations.

Chjara leaned back and relaxed. Her opening widened.

The woman's hand slid in. 'See the babe is half turned. I just have to...' She grunted.

He was half turned? Chjara looked down and saw he'd done it, he'd got out from under ribs; he was sideways. The jumping had worked. She let out a long, long breath, and then something happened; it was wet, sticky, bloody everywhere and she could no longer hold on to where or what she was. She fell away. Henry was in her dream. He was on stilts again. He cried the way he sometimes cried out in his sleep. Fear filled his eyes. They reached for each other but then the dream stopped and nothing took its place; she was nowhere and she was nothing.

When Henry came, he could hear the child bawling. He ran into the house. At the foot of the stairs, a knee-high stack of bloody sheets made his stomach turn. The bald one came down the stairs with his swaddled son. She blocked him. 'Your wife is in God's hands.'

'She's dead.'

'She's fighting. Your best help is your prayers.'

'No.' He pushed past her. 'I can do better.'

He found her tied to the corners of the cot, legs splayed and sheets binding her middle, tight, holding back the blood. Her eyes were rolled back.

He did pray. But he prayed to Chjara. He prayed to the goodness inside her. He sang one of her songs. He prayed and he sang and the night passed and morning came and every hour the bald one changed the sheets between her legs because the blood still flowed.

And then it stopped. And Chjara awoke.



Two years later, Henry stood outside his carriage at the town green in Millerstown, New York, on the Hudson River. The day was fine. A breeze came off the river and a wide-winged osprey dived and came up with a

bass tucked into its claws. Three men leaned dusty against the carriage, reading from one of his books. Good people from the village passed by without knowing what the men read.

‘When I bend wood for a hoop for one of my barrels, I wet it down. I wet it down. I wet it down.’ The Dutchman spoke the word *wet* with his lips spraying spit.

The other men laughed.

‘My wife is stiff as wood, I can tell you that,’ one answered.

‘Boys,’ Henry said. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Chjara push open the doors of the Masonic Hall. ‘Hush boys.’ He indicated his approaching wife.

The man with *Fanny Hill* froze with the book still open to the page that discussed the readying of fair Polly for the King Member, the red-headed champion. He held the novel out, like a preacher with his Bible. Henry reached across, taking the book. He closed it and set it on the stack of identical others with the spine reading *Gulliver’s Travels*.

‘Are you keeping these gentlemen from attending my concert?’ Chjara’s voice was teasing.

The men stared at her, their cheeks flushed, and Henry knew that their hearts moved in them like a herd of deer because of the secret in the air. He felt it too — still — the thrill and taste of a secret.

‘Why aren’t you playing?’ Henry said to Chjara. ‘I thought I heard you start.’

‘The water’s wrong. The hall’s cold. I wanted you to come inspire me.’

Henry looked in her eyes — don’t look down, don’t look away, it’s the look of guilt that’ll give you away — and he saw that she sparkled. She wasn’t nursing anymore, she slept well again, she was full of the glory of her life. In fact, she was looking at him now with the expression she had when she wanted him to bed her.

‘How can I inspire you now?’ he asked.

‘By watching me play.’

‘You want me to close up shop and come inside?’ Chjara knew he made most of his income when she played, though she didn’t know it was because of the different sort of goods he sold while she distracted the townspeople.

‘Come inside. You too,’ she commanded the three young men.

The young men obeyed, following as if on an invisible leash. Henry had

to hurry, and only partially covered the open box of books. His mother was at their host's a half mile up the road, minding Simon and Peter. He slipped the padlock closed on the carriage door.

Inside the Masonic Hall, he stood beside the Dutchmen, in a row with their backs against the wall. Henry could sense them respond to the music of the glasses. They had inside them the new knowledge from the explicitness of *Fanny Hill*. The man next to him listened with half-closed eyes; the one on his other side pressed against the wood wall with enough force for Henry to feel the slight bend in it. The third, who seemed frozen, frowned with brooding concentration.

Chjara leaned over her spinning glasses, and she opened her mouth to sing. Out came her lowest note. It vibrated with the lowest of the glass tones, and together the two notes curved and swung in the air like the rhythm of a woman's hips. By now Henry knew every note she ever played, but still he felt the heat. The Dutchmen did too.

She ended her concert early. 'Take me for a ride, Henry,' she said. 'Anna's waiting.' His mother would be tired.

Chjara gave him a look that fired his loins. She whispered in his ear. 'I want to be ridden, Henry.'

He drove her out into the country barely a mile. He turned onto a farmer's lane among the flickering birch trees. She demanded he satisfy her — there in daylight, with the horses nickering, and they in the carriage sprawled on the piles of books he had not yet stacked away. The wrong books were on top. She reached in her passion for something to hold. Her hand found the seat bench, but knocked open a *Gulliver's*. If she opened her eyes, she would see the book and its incongruous contents. His heart beat with the fear of discovery and the urgency of his passion, together; and he could not, did not, stop; he gave her what he had to give her.

When he was still leaping for breath, he reached out to close the book. Her hand was there, her head turned toward the pages.

'Henry?' she said.

He tried to kiss her for distraction but she would have none of it.

'Henry?' Her voice was low, her eyes glazed. 'My husband. Did I inspire the Dutchmen?'

He pulled her chin toward him. Henry whispered, 'Did you arouse them? Is that what you're asking?'

Her cheeks were still hot from love, and yet they burned redder. He moved to whisper in her ear. 'Do you want more worship than mine...?' Lightly he bit her earlobe. 'Don't I worship you well enough?'

'All men should worship me,' she said, her eyes half closed, and he agreed by bedding her again.

Later, arriving at the house of their host, a widower and Masonic brother named Jackson, Henry saw a line of horses tied to the front fence. When he drove into the courtyard, more horses stood at the barn trough. The stableman looked at him and then quickly away. The sense of danger sent little needles into his skin.

'Wait outside,' Henry said.

'I'm not going to wait outside.'

The brooding Dutchman stood at the window in the parlor. Beside him, a narrow-faced woman in a dark dress glared as Henry entered with Chjara close behind. At least fourteen other men filled the room. Anna held the two boys, Simon and Peter, on her lap in a chair by the hearth. Her face was hot from the fire, or from the hidden heat of the atmosphere. Jackson shot Henry a warning look from the hallway.

'The concerts aren't wholesome,' the brooding Dutchman declared.

'That's right,' another man echoed.

'We want you to travel on, tonight,' the Dutchman said.

'We want you gone,' his wife added.

Anna, Henry's mother, spoke. 'You'll want the singing school. My daughter-in-law has the best singing school in all New England. Your young people will be inspired.'

The Dutchman coughed into his hand, the sound nearly a guffaw which everyone heard. 'There's nothing wholesome in this family.'

'We'll go.' Henry looked at his innocent son and his baby brother. What would happen to them if he were taken and jailed tonight? Who would care for his family?

'We will not go,' Chjara said.

'You can't control that one,' the Dutchman told Henry.

'He can't.' Chjara laughed. 'I'll play a more wholesome concert tomorrow,' she promised the man. He did not return her smile.

The Dutchman looked at Henry. The message in his eyes was clear: he would expose the contraband.



‘Where are your brothers tonight?’ Henry asked. ‘They seemed to enjoy the concert.’

‘They aren’t his brothers,’ said the wife. ‘They’re cousins. They left for Manhattan. By the grace of God we won’t have their bad manners in our house again for some months.’

‘Petra,’ the Dutchman said sharply. ‘Don’t speak of them that way.’

‘Seems you don’t control your wife’s tongue either,’ Chjara said.

The woman flushed.

‘I’ll not be insulted by the likes of you,’ the Dutchman told Chjara.

‘Go pack.’ Henry barked at Chjara, urgency spurring him to action. He had to stay calm.

The room fell silent. By the fireplace, Anna rose with the boys one on each hip, the two-year-olds kicking. Chjara rushed to help her. When Chjara turned around with Simon in her arms, Henry saw that her nostrils flared with fury, but thank God, her mouth was seamed shut.

‘We’ll talk about this later,’ he said.

‘We’ve done nothing wrong.’

The Dutchman harrumphed.

She gave him her blackest look. ‘Do you think God in His heavens sits around all day, pious and still, and doesn’t ever dance in His fields of glory? You don’t think God loves the music of the spheres?’ To leave, she had to pass close by the Dutchman. Henry saw the struggle on her face. ‘We are made in His image,’ she said. ‘He would be bored by the likes of you.’

‘Arrest her,’ the Dutchman’s wife cried, as Chjara slammed the door behind herself. ‘Arrest the Devil’s harlot.’

‘It’s him we should arrest.’ The Dutchman nodded at Henry.

‘We’ll be gone by nightfall.’

‘It’s already nightfall,’ the wife said.

‘We’ll be gone in an instant.’ Henry had the Dutchman by the arm. He whispered in his ear. ‘I’ll speak against your cousins if you stop us from going on.’

The Dutchman let him go.

It was a narrow miss, but worse still was Chjara’s ire that night. They had made camp, settling the boys in the tent with Anna, and immediately she commanded he walk with her. They were not yet out of earshot of his mother and the boys when she said, ‘You didn’t argue. You just gave in! You

make me look guilty.’

‘I don’t.’ He put his arm in hers, and propelled her further out toward a boulder he could see in the moonlight.

‘How can you say that? They’re resting in comfortable beds in town and we’re out here...’ she gestured at the forest, ‘without even time to make a proper camp, and you want me to go to sleep quietly? We have done nothing wrong.’

‘Nothing?’ Henry said, not looking at her. ‘We didn’t *inspire* anyone?’

Chjara paused. ‘You think my passion taints my music.’ Her tone was flat. ‘You’ve not said so before.’ Her voice changed. Suddenly it was filled with doubt, the fury washed away as quickly as a flood. ‘Celibate music isn’t — it isn’t possible for me.’

‘I don’t mean you should be celibate.’ He pulled her to sit down on the boulder.

‘I’ve tried.’ She flashed a hesitant smile. ‘I’ve tried to be plain and spare with the notes but Henry, my music is best when I play from my most alive place.’

‘I know.’

‘My most alive place.’ She shrugged, looking embarrassed.

There was a moment of silence. She was waiting for him.

‘From *sexual knowledge*.’ She spat the phrase as if it came from his father, not him.

She was reacting with fear, not wonder. This was the price of his secrecy. He couldn’t look at her.

‘Maybe I should stop.’

Still he said nothing. They looked at the moon. It was low in the sky and bright; they could see the pocks on its surface.

‘So you think I should stop?’ Her voice cracked. ‘Do I put us in danger?’

‘I’ll protect you. I am protecting you,’ he said.

‘Could we live without my concerts?’

Should he tell her, now, that her income was nothing compared to his? That he’d puffed up her amounts to hide his? She’d be angry and hurt. He wanted to tell her and he would tell her, when he’d saved enough. He had to pay off the debt to Boone who’d purchased the press, and to Thurman who still claimed a share though Thurman did nothing. Soon enough, he’d pay off the loans and he’d show her the figures. Here is how we do it. Here

is how we live: from my income and from yours, together. We can go on doing so, or I can stop this, with what I have saved. We can choose.

‘Maybe you should only play the glasses and not sing with your divided voice.’ He hated himself, saying the words.

‘It’s the singing that is devilish,’ she agreed. ‘That’s what they think. But Henry, Henry, it’s not true. What’s true is that they think what they are told to think. They believe what everyone around them tells them: this is good; this is bad. It is convention. Not science. Not reason. Not goodness. If we don’t stand up for what we know, no one speaks against their superstition.’

‘I know.’

Her eyes pleaded with him. ‘You understand?’

‘I do. But even my mother fears your singing. How it riles people.’

‘I only match the sound of the glasses,’ she objected, but not strongly.

Henry rubbed his hands. He blew into them.

‘All right,’ she said. ‘I won’t sing. But husband, let’s not run again. Please. Don’t let them drive me out. Let me stand up for myself.’

‘All right,’ he said.

‘All right.’ Her voice was resigned, and he felt like a lesser man again, in his own sight.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

‘Where are you going?’

‘Resupplying.’

‘You are always resupplying.’ Chjara leaned against the carriage, blocking him from loading his kit. Dawn was beginning far in the east.

‘Chjara, get out of my way.’

‘No,’ she teased, sidling up to him in her nightdress.

‘Stop it.’

‘No, I won’t stop it.’ Her frustration showed.

‘Chjara,’ he sighed. He was a million times exhausted.

‘We are like brother and sister, Henry.’

‘That’s not true.’ He pulled the harness strap tight on his horse. He didn’t look at her. The children still slept. Even his horse was still half asleep.

It was midsummer and they were in upstate New York on their way back to New England. They’d been underway for a decade, one year merging into the next. They’d had a second child, a girl, and they traveled now in a large caravan: their family including Anna and Peter plus a hired man; five horses, two carriages, and army tents.

‘You leave us alone too often,’ Chjara said. This was cruel, she knew it. He feared leaving them alone. Joe, whom he’d hired to protect them, tended to sleep all day long with his rusted rifle across his belly. The children liked to tickle him with straw, competing for how long they could peck at him before he awoke.

‘Chjara, we’ll be free soon, I promise you.’

She couldn’t help a sigh of disgust. She had heard this from him before.

‘You don’t believe me,’ he said.

‘What is free, Henry? We are free — look, no one is around.’ She pointed to their camp: the gray tents with their sloping shoulders; the empty table where the children rarely studied their books; the sheets strung up between trees to create their privy. ‘We are free to roam. We’re not free to stay. Stay here with us, Henry. Stay for a fortnight, and let’s not perform,

let's not sell, let's not leave this place for the next one as if we had coals in our heels.' Again she blocked his path.

He swiveled around her. He had a plan, a good strong plan, but this was not the time to tell her about it.

She watched him continue to prepare his horses. He was unshaven and hasty. Early light filtered through the pine trees. There was the smell of breakfast which Anna was cooking; the thousandth meal in a row of corn mush.

'Please take me with you.'

'I can't.'

'You can.'

'Who would watch the children?' he said.

'Your mother. Joe. As they do when I practice all day.' She got in his way as he loaded book crates into his carriage.

'Already people write to the newspapers that our children are endangered.'

'But that's ridiculous. My glass harmonica doesn't harm them.'

'Yes, it's ridiculous but do you want to make it worse?'

'How would I be making it worse?' she cried.

He ground his jaw. There was so much he could not say.

She could sense how much he wanted to escape this conversation.

'Where do you go?' she whispered.

'You know where I go. I've shown you.'

'To the docks. To the river docks. You stay in an inn. You sleep in a bed. Why can't I go with you?'

He looked up to the sky. 'Soon.'

She watched him go and she walked after him, trailing after his carriage while he rode away, and she wanted to cry out, but the children would hear. As always, there was no air. As always, even at dawn, the sweltering American atmosphere weighed down like a wetted blanket and she thought she would drown. The river would be a relief from this. Coming to a standstill in Henry's dust, Chjara looked through the still-dim woods but she couldn't see the Hudson. She could hear it, and she followed the sound, crashing through the woods, not caring if there was poison ivy, not caring if Anna would disapprove.

Cool water lapped at a sandy shoal, and she was barefoot, then naked,

then in the water, swimming. She rolled and dived, she felt the water between her legs, she ran her fingers along her arms against the lacework of bubbles. The river sifted her hair. Only when she stepped back on shore, putting on the nightdress, did she notice the amber candlelight in a window. Someone else was awake. A man moved on his porch. He'd been watching her. She started back to camp, the nightdress clinging to her wet body. Her hips swung



Two years later, they were back, camping at the same bend in the river, only this time at a hunting cabin with a long dock stretching into the Hudson River. Henry had left for Kingston in the morning. Anna was helping Peter with his studying in one of the tents. Chjara was practicing the glass harmonica inside her carriage. It was a perfectly ordinary day: it had rained and now the sky was clear, the air sweet from the wet grass.

The children were allowed to go 500 giant steps in any direction from a carriage, which turned their wandering into a game of hide and seek with their parents. The girl knew they had found a particularly good hiding place this afternoon: a moss-covered boulder risen out of the ground like a giant, behind which was a hole like a cave only not as scary. They made a village of twig houses, perched like ships on the sea of moss. People got to stay and live their whole lives there without moving away, the girl said. She lay down, looking up to the spires in the sky. She was blond and stick-shaped and had one wandering eye. She was called Etta, short for Margaret, after her mother's friend the duchess whom she had never met and maybe never would, no one could say.

'I have a surprise for you,' her brother Simon said.

'What is it?'

'If I tell you, it won't be a surprise.'

'When will I get it?'

'Now.' He corrected himself, 'I mean when I get back from Rex.'

Simon got up, solemnly circled the pond of moss, and zigzagged in the direction of the horse, touching first a tree on the right, then one on the left, as he went. He was twelve and lanky with knobby shoulder blades and marionette legs. He sang as he went.

Back at the rock, the girl listened and let her crossed knees wag from side to side. She lay with her forearm over her eyes, and didn't move when a squirrel tossed down a pinecone nearby. She didn't move to see which bird's wings swooshed open, closed, open, in the air right over her head. Probably it was a crow anyway, which was black and made her feel nervous like her mother did before their caravan arrived in a new town. 'I don't know what's going to happen. Will they adore me or...' she'd lean down, smiling, 'or de-spice me.' She meant 'despise'. Her mother still spoke with an accent because she couldn't help it. Her mother said the people who despised them made her concerts even more famous so she didn't mind not everyone loving her enormously.

Her brother's footsteps returned and she didn't open her eyes when he unwrapped some crinkly wax paper.

'But I know you brought potatoes,' she said. 'That's no surprise.'

'Look. Something else.'

'I won't look. Let me feel it.' She raised herself and sat cross-legged with her eyes closed and hands out.

He gave her first a cloth, which he'd wiped on the damp moss. 'Clean your hands,' he commanded.

She almost opened her eyes then — just a slit, before squinting again. 'Did you bring Mama's book?' she whispered.

'Maybe,' he said.

Her eyes widened even while she kept the lids shut. Simon held out a book about the shape of an atlas. It was as thick as a Bible, but soft and pliable, with sleeves of starched linen.

Etta reached out and Simon guided her fingers until she carefully picked out a flat wreath of brown lace from its linen sleeve. She pressed it between her palms.

'Is this my baby hair?' Etta guessed.

'Feel it.'

'I'm feeling it.'

'So how could it be your baby hair? Were you born a gorilla?'

Etta giggled. 'It's too thick for a baby's.'

'Exactly.'

'Is it Grandpa Randall...' Etta whispered, leaning forward, 'who's deader than a doornail?'

‘Who died on the day Uncle Peter was born,’ Simon recited. ‘He died of fear, because he loved Grandma so much. He was so scared she would die, pushing Peter out, that he had a heart attack.’

‘Poor, poor Grandpa,’ Etta said. ‘But Grandma still talks to Grandpa.’  
‘She does?’

‘She can see him beyond the veil. The veil is like the mosquito net over our bed, only much, much bigger. It covers *everything*.’ Etta’s closed eyes were stretched wide, her eyebrows raised. ‘Grandma can still see him.’

‘He’s deader than a doornail,’ Simon whispered, reminding her. ‘Grandma can’t see him.’

Etta sighed. She never knew what was make-believe. She never got it right.

‘I don’t want to play,’ she said. ‘I don’t really like guessing.’

‘What do you want to play?’ His sister didn’t answer. ‘Do you want me to go get Peter?’ She always felt better when the three of them were together. They’d left Peter at camp because he had to catch up with his studying.

‘I want to hear my baby story.’ Etta lay back down. She wished camp wasn’t so far away. ‘What happened first?’ she said. ‘Did my feet come out first like yours?’

‘We have to start when Mama felt the first pang... right here.’ Simon poked her in the belly.

‘Don’t tickle me,’ she squealed.

‘I’m not.’ Simon tickled some more.

She giggled. ‘Stop. Don’t.’

From further down in the woods, Chjara heard her daughter’s laughter. She’d been hunting for them for more than an hour, the red ants of worry scabbling in her veins. She crept up to the boulder, and leaned back against the warmth of it, listening.

‘You were born under a harvest moon in Woodstock, New York,’ Simon said.

‘Harvest moons are orange and they only come once in a very rare while. Just like me,’ Etta recited.

‘Mama felt the first pangs in the morning before we broke camp, but she didn’t tell Papa. She sat down to wait in the carriage and crossed her legs so you wouldn’t come out.’

Behind the rock, Chjara put her hand to her mouth. Did she ever say



that she'd crossed her legs? Could she have said that? Henry often accused her of exaggerating.

'Papa hitched up the horses.'

'Which were still Betsy and Banana.' Etta's voice was tired.

'You can go to sleep. Go ahead.' Simon continued the story: 'Which were still Betsy and Banana because Betsy stayed to live in Woodstock after you were born and you don't remember her. Papa took his time. He packed all the books into the carriage. He made my bed in the middle.'

'Which was on top of the glass harmonica,' Etta said.

'Yes.'

'It was just like now only without my bed and the other carriage.'

'Yes. They traveled all day along the Schohariekill Road.'

'Show-harry-kill,' whispered Etta.

'Then they came to a tavern. By now, Mama had the birth pangs pretty fast and hard and Papa thought they should stay. She said no. He said yes.'

'She wanted me to be born in Woodstock.'

'Because there was a midwife there.'

'Mama got her way,' Etta said, 'because she usually gets her way.'

'That's right.'

Chjara shook her head behind the rock; is that how she had told the story to them?

Simon lowered his voice to a whisper. He was settling his sister down for her nap. 'Now the moon was full. It was September the ninth, eighteen hundred and nine. Nine, nine, naught nine,' Simon sang. 'Betsy and Banana climbed the hill to the Woodstock Glass Manufacturing Society and if the fires were burning, we would've seen them from where we stopped on Schohariekill Road but they weren't burning so we couldn't. Instead, there was this gigantic orange moon. Mama listened to the horses, who were breathing hard just like she was breathing hard with the birth pangs. She listened to Papa urging them on.'

There was no sound from Etta.

Simon continued. 'There weren't any bad Indians anymore. Most of the killing Indians in Woodstock were Tories, anyway. Tories were white people fighting for King George in the Revolution. They dressed up like Indians to kill the Whigs. Do you know who the Whigs are, Etta?'

There was no answer.

‘You’re asleep now,’ Simon said.

He got up and walked out from behind the boulder toward a copse of birch trees, his back to Chjara. He continued. “‘I will have my baby here,” Mama said. She got out of the carriage and took hold of a tree by the waist and began to bear down. That means pushing the baby out.’ Simon demonstrated at the narrow birch, pulling it down with his weight. He swung for a while. ‘Mama hardly bled at all with you. With me, she bled very, very, very much.’ He repeated ‘very very very’, hanging from the tree. He made of it a macabre song. *‘Blood, blood everywhere. Just don’t get it in your hair.’*

Chjara rose from her hiding place and joined him. She followed his tune, humming softly.

‘I knew you were there,’ he said.

‘Did you?’

‘I did.’

She took him in her arms. She rocked him as if he were still small, and not already becoming a man, his voice cracking sometimes.

He continued in his storytelling voice, imitating her accent. ‘Simon, he stomped on the door. He *wanted* to come out feet first.’

‘Babies sometimes do come out feet first,’ Chjara whispered. Her heart tightened: she’d made poor Simon believe it was his own choice that caused her to bleed. ‘Babies dance in there, you know.’

‘Do they?’ Simon pulled away, blinking hard.

‘They dance in the womb. You can feel them going whoop, swoop, whoop.’

‘Stop it, Mama. I’m not a baby anymore,’ Simon said. ‘You can’t tell me stories.’

‘Yes I can.’ She pulled him back. ‘Here’s what it feels like.’ She rubbed her hand across his belly. ‘It will be a little hard to show you because you haven’t swallowed a barrel.’

He giggled a little. She smelled his neck.

‘I think it is possible that you were the size of two barrels. I was so big with you. I knew you would be healthy. You did pirouettes in there. You did somersaults. When I was ready to open the door of the world for you, you were still dancing, that’s all.’

‘But I almost killed you.’

‘Am I dead?’

He giggled because she tickled him.

‘Do I look dead, Simon?’

‘Of course not.’

‘Of course not, because I am beautiful.’

‘You are beautiful and you are getting a little bit fat.’ He looked at her, impish.

‘I am exactly the right size.’

‘For a schooner,’ he said and then he ran and made her catch him — which woke Etta and ended the story.

That evening, Chjara went to Simon at the campfire while the others were occupied. He fed the flames with sticks to which dry leaves still clung, and the fire crackled and spat. He was as tall as she was and he let her put her arm around him. Unlike this afternoon, there was nothing of the boy in him. He stood with his shoulders firm, his legs planted wide.

‘Do you understand what I said this afternoon?’

He nodded.

‘What?’ she said. ‘Explain it to me.’

‘It’s not my fault that you nearly died, giving birth to me.’ He flashed her a self-deprecating smile. ‘I can reason it out.’

‘But you feel you were born wrong.’

‘I suppose.’ With his toe, he flicked back a branch that had broken free of the fire. The red of the flames glowed on his face. ‘Do you ever believe that Etta was born wrong?’ In every town, Etta’s wandering eye made her the object of superstition. He scoffed. ‘Of course not.’

‘I sometimes think I was born wrong,’ she said. He looked at her, surprised.

‘I think Calvin gave us the prayer, *I am a vile creature, made more vile by practice.*’

‘You don’t believe that slop.’

‘I don’t. But I do. Every day, I’ve got to decide again that I am good instead of vile.’

‘You are never vile.’

‘Never. I am the perfect creature, adored by multitudes.’

‘You are.’

She looked at him, and she missed Henry who hadn’t returned yet from

Kingston. He wasn't there to see their son with the firelight showing how his shoulders had broadened, how his eyes conveyed his intelligence.

'All of us have plenty we could repent. Every one of us. We lead our own children to believe they chose to come out feet first—'

'You didn't do that,' he interrupted.

'You see? You want to protect me. You don't want me to believe the worst about myself.'

He paused.

'I am proud and willful, and my husband leaves me alone too much, and some day, my adoring fans will exile me. Just as my family in Corsica did. This is my barbarous destiny, if I choose to believe it.'

She knew his eyes followed as she turned her face away. She surprised herself, feeling so wounded.

'Papa will be back tomorrow.'

She nodded. 'Tomorrow or the next.' She smiled, and she let him see her sorrow. His expression said he would go to the ends of the earth for her.

'I think we are good, Simon, but we forget it, every day again. Music helps me remember. How will you remember? I have an idea that I stop you from remembering.'

'No, Mama,' he said. 'It's not your fault.'

'Of course it's not. But I've been too afraid of how you like to wander in the wild. Henry thinks the world where we travel is pretty safe now. Shouldn't I be sure that you love me enough to wander... carefully? To leave me a cairn. To protect yourself so I don't lose you, ever, my sweet boy of boys.' She took his hand, clasped it, kissed it quickly.

'I can go off like a wild Indian?' His eyebrows were raised. 'Anywhere I want?'

'You have to tell me or Papa before you go. You have to take a compass.' She counted off on her fingers, one, two. 'And you have to give me some of your hair.'

'Again?'

'Again,' she said.



On the road to Kingston, Henry drove his horses as if he could speed up time by going faster. When the cool shadows of maples brushed over him, and the racket of insects in the fields surrounded him, he didn't notice. The years had thickened Henry's shoulders, put heft on his muscles, and made him skilled at assuming the bland composure a man needed even when his heart galloped inside. In the third of eight crates of books behind him in the carriage, in the fourth book down, there was a Webster's with a rectangular pocket razored into its deep pages. Inside the pocket was a gold bar.

It was 1815. He'd been in business for thirteen years, and he had finally reached the point he'd hoped to achieve near the very beginning: the debts wiped away and now this extra with which he would build a ghost show. He urged the horses forward. No highwayman would stop him. He carried only books. If some thief lurked in the hills, Henry kept a sack of coins under the bench — enough to send a common thief on his way without suspecting the true hoard. His destination was a boatyard, ten miles south of New York's capitol city.

Arriving in Kingston, he found the county fair filling the streets. Several people hailed him, stopping his carriage to buy books. People had money to spend. The second war with Britain had ended over the winter. That the British had burned the White House to the ground was forgotten in the flush of realization that the American states were not conquered. Again, they were not conquered. Everyone felt that boom times were ahead.

Henry wanted to travel on to the shipyard but his horses needed rest. The sun was hot and he had pushed them hard. He willed himself to slow down. What was one more day? The Boar's Inn could be trusted with his carriage in the barn. He brushed down the horses, gave them a good ration of oats, looked his old horse Banana in the eye and got a blink in return. He loaded a shoulder bag with a few books to hide the heavy gold bar inside.

The sky was cloudless and at the fair the hawkers were full of their own glory: 'Get your seed here. They don't call me Jack in the Beanstalk for nothing. Buy my seed for big and juicy beans.' One walked a boar the size of a small fishing vessel, holding the leash with no effort at all. A crowd followed them.

A man stopped Henry: 'Oats, man. Fine oats. Eat them and be relieved of any bowel strain.' He escaped the oat man's grasp and wandered on.

The horses might be all right with just a few hours' rest, he thought. It would be a full moon tonight, and ahead lay a well-traveled road with no hazards. The late afternoon sun burned on his shoulders. When you hurry, he reminded himself, you make mistakes; he shouldn't push on tonight though in all his body he wanted to. He saw a poster for a Harlequin Theater show at the entertainment tent. That would pass the time, though the children would be so disappointed! They'd been hearing about these men in their showy costumes of black-and-white diamonds. The Harlequins acted out plays like the Shakespeare troupes performing across the land, only the Harlequins clowned. They sang silly tunes and dressed up as all the characters in their love stories, sometimes in women's dresses bulging with pillows.

At the ticket gate, Henry felt a hand on his sleeve. It was the oat man again. 'I've seen you,' he said, 'in Biddeford, Maine.'

In that town the local authorities had nearly discovered Henry's contraband business many years ago.

'You're the one who's got the ungodly books.'

Henry stepped out of the ticket queue. He led the man away from the ears of others. 'How much are your oats?'

'Not as much as your books.'

'You've mistaken me for someone else, my friend.'

'I don't think so. You've got the wife who sings as if an animal lives inside her, and she plays the round glasses.' He twitched his fingers against cups in the air, an obscene gesture. Henry felt his scalp sweat. He looked away, trying to calm himself. He heard Chjara remind him: my music is not obscene and those who say that it is only help to increase our audience.

'I've got no need for oats—' Henry began.

'Do you have a story with pirates and girls?'

'Yes,' Henry said, opening his bag. 'It's a fine book, written by an English lady caught captive and held on an island off New

Hampshire. She tells of the comfort of prayer in her distress.'

The man narrowed his eyes. 'That's not the kind of book I mean.'

'I don't know your meaning, my friend,' Henry said genially. 'There's a lot of other fine literature with captives in it — stories of pioneer children held by Indians, or—'

'I want the kind with pirates and little girls. Beelzebub's little angels.'

Henry offered the man smoking tobacco. ‘I’ve never heard of such a book,’ he said honestly.

‘I’ve dreamt of it. I know they exist — his little angels.’ The man leaned close. ‘And they serve him well.’

Henry reached into his bag and pulled out a *Gulliver’s Travels*. He flipped open the cover to the secret page inside. ‘Can you make that out in the dark here?’ It was hardly dusk but this way the man could indicate whether he could read.

The man sounded out, ‘*Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*. This is the one — with the English captive?’

‘No, you can get that book from any seller anywhere. This is a special book only for discreet gentlemen.’

‘How much is it? Are there little girls in it?’

‘No.’ Henry’s voice was clipped. ‘No little girls.’

They made their transaction. As he folded his wallet, Henry’s heart was an anchor. He pictured Chjara hearing the oat man. Soon he planned to tell her all. How would he do it? She would see he was a merchant to the worst of men. He had been, and he would be, and it was his choice. If only she could see the whole of it. What he did was new. Before, elite men sold to elite men; sailors to the riffraff. He was neither, and he had understood this the day he saw the Hottentot Venus in Philadelphia.

‘The Venus has come here?’ Henry had asked Boone, dumbfounded. Boone had arranged the showing for his gentlemen’s club. Thurman, whom Henry hadn’t seen since their original meeting in the bar so many years before, came from Boston for a business meeting between the three of them. The show was an extra and Boone had kept the star attraction secret from all of them.

The affair was similar to Tourneau’s event in Paris. Boone’s secret society met in a lodge under the guise of a Masonic event. All who attended were men in business and science. No laborers or farmers stood among them. Only refined people. Listening to the lecture by the Hottentot’s new keeper, Henry waited with dread for the curtain to part. The lecturer was an American and a slave trader. Henry felt his heart shrink as the man sounded the usual themes: ‘We observe the animal nature, from whence we come.’

‘From whence, my ass,’ Henry thought. We are animal nature — gentlemen

as much as laborers. He listened to the speaker build to the moment when he would show the Hottentot, show her most private parts under the guise of science. Why not know lust for what it was?

When the curtain opened, no woman was there.

There was a jar. In it were the pickled remains of the Hottentot's genitalia.

The men stood up. They took turns walking around the jar. Peering into it. Commenting on the extensive layers of flesh. The corpulence of the vulva. Disgust overcame Henry. Disguising desire with scientific inquiry did not wash it clean. It made it worse. Why shouldn't they be animals? Were animals more undignified in their coupling than this absurd show?

Henry left that night with his mind made up. Let the long tradition of private goods 'for gentlemen only' come to end with him. He would sell to anyone who wanted them. He would sell at a price the poorest could afford. He would accept that each person had to choose for him or her self, between the electric root and the evil one.

At the Kingston fair, back at the center tent, Henry returned to the queue for the theater show. The oat seller had disappeared, clutching his copy of *Gulliver's Travels*.

'You met our Mr. Ridge,' said the girl at the booth. 'Tell me how you got rid of him. He's such a pest. He's followed me around too.'

Henry wondered what else she might have heard, but she only gave him a grateful look.

Henry found himself in the front row, where one seat remained. Three men on stilts rocked across the stage, entertaining the audience before the show began. One stood directly in front of Henry. He wore a ruffled shirt, singular leggings of indigo lace and a yellow codpiece. The man tipped back on his stilts, leaning so far that the audience leaned with him, holding their breaths. Waving his arms, he pulled himself back upright — but then he was tipping toward Henry, closer and closer. He grinned at Henry who glanced at the bottom of the stilts and saw a round, rubber ball on the foot of each; one of the balls was splitting. Henry opened his arms theatrically, as if welcoming a lover, and the actor fell into his embrace.

It seemed planned. The crowd roared. The actor patted Henry on the back and gave him a wink. 'Good work, man,' he said.

The show featured a simple story of lovers kept apart by an evil lord. Henry wouldn't recall later what made it so funny. He laughed at the mock



crooning of the ruffle-shirted man and at the 'lady' swinging her lumpy hips. The story made a comedy of man's desire. Afterward, Henry was almost the last to leave the tent because of the crowd in front of him. The ruffle-shirted man called out, encouraging him to join them instead. Henry thought, soon. Soon I can do other than work.

At the Boar's Inn, the horses were calm and well-tended. Henry could bear it no longer. He put them back in their traces. He could not wait another night.



Phineas Brock, the shipbuilder, wiped his hands on a napkin as he walked to Henry's approaching carriage. 'I expected you in the morning,' Brock said. Behind him, his wife watched from the kitchen window.

Henry leaned down and handed him the gold bar. He was exhausted.

The man laughed. 'You haven't even seen her yet.'

'I want to board her tonight.'

'Well, why not?' Brock said, and Henry felt as if his skin were a hollow shell containing nothing but his breath.

Phineas Brock stole glances at this strangest of customers as they rode together in the carriage the rest of the way to the docks. The man had appeared with gold, paid twice what a shrewder man would have, and demanded secret compartments in the hold of his ship. Brock's helpers speculated that he was a pirate; a merchant of slaves, or perhaps a transporter of slave fugitives. Brock had quietly made inquiries. He found nothing except a history of itinerant bookselling and musical entertainment, hardly a rich man's game. However, here had been a wealthy father. No wonder the son could indulge his fantasy of a personal kingdom on the water.

Henry clicked the reins, asking the horses to head toward the water. They were too tired to object to walking the loose planks of the dock. They hobbled straight to the ship. Henry stared, seeing the newfangled steamboat with its strange onboard water wheel. She was massive, as broad as three river barges, and he imagined an audience of a hundred, sitting on the expanse of deck. Chjara would be up there, on the pilot house whose roof would double as a stage. He did not quite believe it. The ship was real. She

was real and she was ready, and tomorrow he would travel the twenty miles back upriver in less than an hour.

The shipbuilder kept talking for ages in the full moon's light, Henry only nodding: yes, the galley looked fine; yes, the canvas compartments belowdecks matched his specifications. Henry smiled some more until finally, Brock showed him how to raise the wide, ribbed planks that were strong enough to hold horse and carriage. Brock spoke from abovedecks, pointing to the pulleys right and left — as if Henry couldn't see for himself the simple mechanics of the thing that he himself had designed. As tired as the horses were, they simply walked down into the ship's hold.

Henry waved goodnight and thanks, and drew the gangplank up, cranking at the opening to the world above until it closed like a ceiling over him. Brock shouted, 'All's well?'

'Yes.'

The shipbuilder's footsteps receded. The horses snorted, uneasy. Water lapped the sides of the boat in a steady and quieting rhythm. It was cool and clean and private and he had done it.

Henry sank to his knees. He let the smile fall from his face, and he smelled the fresh varnish. He felt the darkness like a balm. He lay down, the planks smooth and even beneath him; he curled on his side. If he could not bear Chjara's disgust now, with the ship to dazzle her, he should stop imagining he would ever tell her. He should stop fooling himself.

He wanted to tell her. He wanted only for her to understand him. He didn't know what was right and what was wrong. Men sold each other these goods. They always had. Evil men bought them and good men bought them. Refined gentlemen were as much animals as anyone else. Refined *gentlewomen* were animals, too — their fingers trembled, reaching for the goods, parting readily with their coins, throwing heaps of coins — just to get their hands on something hidden in his books. There was a taste to the forbidden: a taste like salt. Once it was on your tongue, how could you not want salt again?

Where was the sophism and where the truth in this mess, he didn't know. The ship rocked softly and the horses snuffled. He wished, he wished he had never begun it without first telling Chjara. If only he had started on the right foot. But he hadn't. The lie had grown out of the soil of his life like a thistle, a stubborn weed he couldn't rid himself of, because if he confessed

it, not just one lie brushed against her soft skin, but all of them, all the seasons of lies. The habit of secrecy had become like the habit of dressing each day. A man put on his clothes. That was all.

He would no longer be a coward. He would tell her. She would join him in the decisions he'd borne for them both since they'd stepped off the *Magdalene*. He rolled on his back and hummed one of the oldest hymns from the psalmbook: a tune whose name he didn't even know anymore. He heard himself humming in the hollow of their own private ship, and hot tears of relief and long-held sorrow escaped from him in the dark.

## Chapter Fourteen

At camp, Chjara wandered around as quietly as she could. She tried not to recall the man from two years ago who'd watch her swimming. Anna and Etta slept soundly. Grandmother and granddaughter wore matching sleep caps, and Etta's hand was draped off her cot, out of the mosquito net that Anna had fashioned from discarded lace. The hunting hut had wax-paper windows and an earthen floor, with the smell of deer hides and men's sweat seeped into it. Outside, beside the campfire, Simon and Peter sprawled in bed rolls. As tall as men, they still slept like boys, their arms flung out and their mouths wide open.

All around her were the slow and steady breaths of her sleeping family. The man lived in a cottage around the bend. She felt awake and she felt the world to be awake, the frogs roaring and the river moving. She took one of her spare glass bowls all the way to the end of the dock. The bowl had a cork-lined hole in the bottom where the harmonica's axle would go. She pushed a nail up through the cork, closing the hole. Chjara dipped her hand in the silty river. She ran a finger around the rim of the bowl until it began to ring. Slowly the sound began to loop, around and around. She loved the way her fingertip almost didn't touch the bowl. She had to leave a little air between flesh and glass — just as all around, there was a little air between the self and the solid world. A person was a fraction of an inch from the invisible force that made the river flow to the sea, or that split the horizon as the earth turned toward the sky. In ordinary time, the gap between the flesh and the world hung still and lifeless as a window pane. When she lifted the ringing tone out of the glass rim, the gap came alive. It hummed. A current flowed between her finger and the bowl's rim. She was made of the same stuff as this place: of this rock and this wide moonlit river, and this air thick with crickets and the *wohm-wohm-wohm* of the glass's vibration.

She wanted to match the glass's note. She sang the pitch of it. But she could sense no connection between the simple, straightforward note — a B flat — and the instrument of her body. Just once, she'd let herself feel it fully again, singing in her split voice. If the man in the cottage around

the bend heard her, let him. He'd already seen her nearly naked. This was who she was. She drew a deep breath. She sang the note and let it halve itself, so now there was the obvious, the ordinary, but also the raw and uncomfortable tone beside it. The second note, an overtone, wound around the ring of the bowl's music like the nimbus around the moon, and nothing separated her from the world.

'Mama, what are you doing?'

Chjara let go of the glass, her finger jolting away. She swallowed air. She coughed.

Etta stood in her nightdress, her face as white as the gown. 'Are you possessed?' she whispered.

'Come here.' Chjara opened her arms. Her daughter did not come. Chjara pushed her body up heavily. She crossed over the rocks between them.

Her daughter looked up at her with tears streaming down her face. 'You're scaring me.'

'I'm sorry, sweetheart.' Chjara closed her arms around the girl. She lifted Etta and whispered into her ear. 'I'm queer, aren't I?'

'Yes, you are.' Etta struck with a fist on her back. 'Why Mama? Why do you do that?'

'I'm singing like the world around us. We are trees,' she said, taking Etta's hand and pressing it against bark. She whispered. 'Look. The roots go down into the earth and pull water all the way...' she swung her hand up, 'all the way to the top of the branches, and if we could hear that, it would sound like my music. Do you understand that?'

'But why, Mama? Why do we have to hear it?' Etta whispered. On her pale temple a thin vein beat. 'Why can't it just be quiet?' She pressed two fingers against her mother's mouth. 'Shhhh. Shush, Mama.' She opened her eyes wide. 'No one can find us if we're really, really, really quiet.'

Her own daughter feared her. They were not bold enough. They lived afraid.

'Shhh,' Chjara whispered back to her. 'We'll sneak back to bed. We'll be so quiet, nobody will wake up.' She carried Etta, whose legs were wrapped around her waist, back through the woods to camp. Peter still snored but Simon lay with eyes open and hands clasped behind his neck. She winked at him over Etta's shoulder, and pushed open the door to the little camp building.

Inside Henry's mother lay quietly, eyes closed but — Chjara could sense it — feigning sleep. So, everyone had heard Chjara's strange voice. Etta crawled into the bed next to her grandmother. The mosquito net veiled them both.

'Come inside.' Etta beckoned to Chjara. 'Come inside and be quiet.'

Chjara did as her daughter commanded. She lay quietly until Etta stopped trembling from cold and excitement. She lay listening to her mother-in-law give up the breath of false sleep and begin to snort.

He would have heard her too. She scolded herself for wishing it, but the idea only came back stronger. Didn't people look at her enough? Did she not have enough attention thrown on her? Every time, at every concert, scores of people looked at her. But who saw the woman who swam naked in the water? No one. Not Henry any more. Where was the Henry who had tried to break open the phantascope box as soon as the showman Tourneau was out of sight? He was always nervous, tense.

She'd let him convince her to give up the throat singing for being too queer. She had promised herself she would give it up only until Anna died, but Anna wasn't dying any time soon, God forgive her for wishing it. Chjara didn't wish it, she took it back. Anna was only a worrywart. Worrywart, worrywart. No one had been able to explain to Chjara why *worrywart* was a sensible word.

Between her back and the bed, there was the same space as between her aroused finger and the glass bowl. She was on the edge of propriety. That was where she was. There was so much life here, on the edge. Music could bring her here still. Here, where life was found, the rules of men faded and she was allowed, like any common flower, to vibrate.



In the morning, the glass bowl she'd left on the dock had vanished.

Chjara made a game of finding the bowl, which a wave must have taken. She watched the children leap into the river and swim with their pale arms flying, the blue water glistening. They climbed onto the dock and raced to jump off the end again, competing to leap the farthest.

'They'll break their necks,' said Anna. 'Look how slippery the wood is.'

‘They are strong and able.’ Chjara held the older woman gently by the elbow.

They did not find the bowl in the water.

‘The woods’ fairies stole it,’ said Etta.

‘For their supper pot,’ Peter said. His black, wet hair stuck up in a sheaf and his long lashes were dewy. Simon and Etta were pale like birches beside his browner skin.

‘They’ll cook frogs in it,’ Simon said.

‘I fear someone else heard you sing,’ Anna, who had curved and narrowed to bone these last years, offered Chjara her worried, tired expression. ‘There’s one house around the bend.’

‘I’ll go see if they’ve got the bowl.’ Chjara’s heart banged.

‘Take Peter with you,’ Anna said.

‘Mama,’ Peter objected.

‘I’ll go,’ said Simon, ‘if you need me.’

‘We could go visiting,’ Chjara said, relieved, but she saw Etta’s crestfallen face. With her crooked eye, Etta longed for less exposure to strangers, with the sidelong glances and stares that always greeted her. ‘You can all keep swimming. Anna will watch you.’

‘Be careful,’ Anna said.

Walking toward the cottage, her skirts dragging in the knee-high timothy, Chjara thought God would have been better served if He’d left clearer instructions. Were they supposed to enjoy the world or not? Anna, in particular, never seemed certain, and her uncertainty infected their household.

The cottage door opened. In its gap was the man, and he seemed suddenly exactly like the baker, square shouldered and firm, his head bald and his eyes mischievous. To dispel the image, Chjara shook her head, as if an insect buzzed her ear. In fact, this man had crooked teeth. One front tooth folded over the other.

‘You are the musician, Chjara Garland.’

Be careful, pride, she warned herself. ‘I am.’ She knew her smile was pleased.

‘Come in. Would you play a tune for me?’

‘You have an instrument?’

‘I have a bowl.’

‘You are a thief.’

‘I am.’

‘We spent the morning looking for it.’ She knew her voice was teasing.

‘Now you’ve found it.’ He led the way into the house which was one room, neatly appointed. She saw a ladder to a sleeping loft, and a back door open to the river bank.

‘I planned to return it,’ he said.

‘Why did you take it?’ She stood, trembling with what she told herself was the sudden cool of the house. Outside, the leaves of a broad sycamore hung like curtains over a small table in the garden.

‘I wanted to see what made it sing. I couldn’t find the magic in it though.’ With an apologetic grin, he handed her the bowl. ‘I’m a jeweler, not a musician.’

She peered into the bowl. The nail was missing. ‘Do you have a threepenny nail?’

‘A nail?’ He was incredulous.

She laughed. ‘Yes, a nail.’

He went outside. She followed, cradling the bowl in her hands. She let herself see his compact shape, muscular beneath his clothes. What if they could swim naked as children for an hour in the sun? Of course they couldn’t. The thought of it was on her face when he turned. He was in the doorway of his shop, a small hutch of a building banked with firewood, a black stovepipe sticking from the roof. ‘A nail?’ he said again, shaking his head. ‘To make glass sing?’ He disappeared inside.

She followed, though she knew she shouldn’t.

Neat as the inside of his house, the shop had a high bench set next to a window that looked out on the wood. Black cloth covered the bench, and beneath it was a locked box, bolted into the floor.

She was looking at his shop. He was looking at her. In his open palm was a threepenny nail.

‘What’s in the box?’

He shrugged.

‘Jewels?’ she said. ‘Would you show me?’

‘Are you discreet?’

She flushed. Did he know her thoughts?

‘If thieves knew this place, I’d have to move again.’



‘You work here *incognito*.’

‘No one knows the contents of my vault. It’s safer that way.’

‘But you will show me. We move on. My husband returns tomorrow, and we travel west to Albany, and I wouldn’t tell anyone anyway.’ She pleaded with him like a girl who wants her way, and his eyes seemed to ask her: did she mean to invite such confidence?

He bent down and unlocked the latch. With a rough grab, he reached in and rose, spilling his goods on the black cloth of the counter.

Silver ovals like coins, only fatter. She took one and turned it over. The silver cupped a pool of robin’s egg blue. On the blue was the ivory silhouette of a woman’s face.

‘What is the nail for?’

She could feel him behind her. She could hear him breathing. She did not think. She felt his urgency, quick, rising, while he waited for her to answer.

She didn’t answer.

He moved closer. His breath was on her neck. Then his hand touched the back of her waist. He whispered in her ear. ‘What’s it for, dear lady?’ and she was flush with feeling, from her toes to the top of her head. She was radiant with sensation. She hadn’t felt this way in such a very long time. He would make love to her. She knew he would. All she needed to do was say anything, or nothing, and turn around; he waited for her move. He was waiting for her but not passively. His hand on her waist began to rise as he took in the shape of her; his hand sought the round flesh of her breasts and she looked out the window over his work bench into God’s green woods. She felt a terrible longing to let the sap flow in her, to release it into the world. She heard herself sigh.

He took her by the neck. He pressed his mouth onto her neck, more bite than kiss, the bristles of his beard chafing her with the demand he had for her. She could stop him. She had only to raise a hand or her voice in protest but instead, she took hold of the bench so she could push back into him. She arched back. He did her the favor of lifting her skirts; there was suddenly air on her legs, and he flared into her, hot and full, and she wept with the pleasure of it.



Henry slept long and well and when he emerged from the safety of his house on the water, he did not react angrily when Brock met him with the news that reporters and townspeople would arrive at two for the formal launch.

‘I told you I preferred to slip away quietly.’ Henry scolded without rancor.

‘It’s good for business.’ Brock looked at Henry quizzically. ‘Yours and mine.’

Henry agreed to allow the press onto the boat; he decided to announce that he’d kept the boat a secret from his famous wife. A newsman could come with him, and record her expression of surprise for all her fans.

A noisy caravan arrived, clanking up the docks. Brock explained he’d engaged a Harlequin troupe to draw people from the fair to the shipbuilding grounds. Henry saw it was the same troupe that he’d encountered yesterday. They greeted him like old friends. The lead man, in the costume of the fair Columbine, the female character of the stock dramas, approached Henry with a lady’s wig on his head but no face powder yet to cover his grizzled beard.

‘We could set up our show beside the boat.’ He gestured at the manure-bespattered field next to the docks. ‘Or join you on your first voyage, performing on the stage.’

‘But this ship is for my family.’

‘I am also a captain.’

‘You are?’ Henry had pre-arranged with another captain, but the man had not shown up. He liked this man, who introduced himself as David Rodin.

‘We travel days and days to get to one stinking village. You’ll close that distance in hours. It only makes sense with all the space you have here, to let out some to another troupe.’

‘I’d need you to pay me a portion of your ticket sales, in exchange for passage.’

‘Agreed,’ Rodin said.

Henry looked at him and thought how useful it would be to have the three Harlequin men onboard by way of distraction. Everyone was waiting

to see them these days. He could keep Simon and Peter innocent of the contraband business. They could help pilot the ship instead.



From the dock near their camp, Chjara saw the boat first. She called the children. ‘Look,’ she said, ‘it’s one of the new steamboats.’ The boat veered away from the center of the river. It was aimed directly for them. Chjara adjusted the shawl she’d wound around her neck. It was hot, brutally so, but she needed to hide the chafing on her neck that had come from the jeweler’s beard.

At first, Chjara held the children back. Who were these strangers on a boat heading straight for them? Perhaps they were coming for the jeweler, or they knew the merchant to whom the dock belonged. The men threw the ropes to Simon and Peter, and shouted how to tie them. As soon as the ship was safely moored, the children asked to board.

‘Not yet,’ the lead man said. There was a moment when all the men disappeared belowdecks. A long moment. Chjara held her children’s hands, and Anna held Peter by the shoulders; Anna hadn’t looked Chjara in the eye since she’d returned from the jeweler. It seemed to Chjara that her feeling had stained her all over and not just on the neck.

A ladder burst out of the hold of the ship. Balanced on the top of it was a man in diamond tights.

‘A Harlequin!’ Etta shouted.

Then it was a melee: the man leaping over the deck; Henry emerging on the shoulders of another man. The children squealed. Henry was on the boat! The man who carried him was dressed as a woman, with pillows ballooning his chest and a full beard beneath his curly wig. The children laughed at the sheer folly of it. Henry had brought them a Harlequin show. Chjara saw her good husband there, clowning, smiling, bringing this treat by boat, just for them — and the vow she’d made to tell him all, to confess and make a clean slate of it, vanished in the air. What had she done? What if he found out? Now he was coming toward her, still atop the shoulders of the man-dressed-as-woman, and his eyes reached for her — wasn’t this marvelous? Was she pleased with him? The mark on her neck burned. She

could hardly think for the suddenness of it all, and he was watching her. Henry's eyes locked onto her face as he came closer, and she didn't dare look down or away with the shame that swelled inside her. She tried to smile as if no wrong had ever been done by her or anyone in the world. But he could see her color; he knew her as no one else did, and he must have known something because his smile clouded.

He bent down from the man's shoulders, nearly falling as he reached for her. He kissed her — there, in front of the children, in front of his mother, and with her shawl falling off and exposing the red marks to Anna's suspicious eyes. Henry dropped to the ground. A young, blond-haired man appeared from the ship.

'Welcome to the *Magdalene II*,' Henry whispered in Chjara's ear.

'Oh, Henry.' Her eyes filled. She stared now at the ship. 'It's ours?'

'This is Bill Duncan, a reporter from the *Times*.' Henry indicated the man behind him.

'I understand you crossed from France on a ship called the *Magdalene*,' the reporter said. 'What do you think of having your own vessel?'

'It's ours?' she repeated, dumbfounded.

Henry lifted Etta into his arms. 'I've got you a house on the water,' he said.

'But it's not a house,' the girl cried, broken-hearted.

'Etta!' Chjara said.

'Come see it,' Henry said. 'See if you don't like it.'

'Where are the horses?' asked Simon.

'Come on.' Henry put his arms around Simon and Etta, then he stopped and reached back for his brother Peter. 'You'll be my captains. You'll be the lords of the ship, what do you say?'

With the reporter beside her, Chjara followed her family, heart racing. She glanced to the west, and there was the jeweler, standing on the bank of the river.

'You really had no idea?' Bill Duncan said.

'I have never been so surprised in my life.'

'Does your husband routinely keep secrets from you?'

Chjara laughed, astonished. 'I suppose he does. Henry, how did you plan all this, without me knowing?'

'A man has got to keep his mind occupied while his wife entertains the

country,' Henry said. 'Up here is your new stage.' He pointed to the roof of the pilot house.

She stared in amazement. Henry had done all this?

'We'll have our own country,' Henry said. 'On the water.'

She saw his pride. She turned to the reporter. 'We'll call it the *Henry G.*'

'Not the *Madgelene II*?'

'The *Henry G.*'

They toured the boat; they looked at the horses and carriage in the enormous hold; they studied the workings of the steam-powered water wheel. The reporter watched Chjara's every expression, making notes as he went. In all the commotion, she was able to avoid showing any of her secret guilt. Henry's mother, too, lost her tinge of worry, thanks to the boat and Henry's excitement over it.

That night, the children and Anna stayed in the camp house, and the men camped outdoors. Henry led Chjara to his ship like a groom taking his bride over the threshold. Across the water, the jeweler's house gleamed in the moonlight.

Henry wanted to tell her everything. He lit the oil lamps in the hold. He had with him a copy of *Gulliver's Travels*, inside of which was *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, which he thought he might read aloud to her. He found he was shaking.

'You've not asked me how we could pay for this,' he began.

'You saved more from my concerts than you let on,' she guessed. 'I always thought we should not have to live so meanly. But you've been saving, you good man.'

'I have.' He wanted to steer the conversation back, but he also didn't want to insult her by pointing out how little the concerts earned in comparison to the contraband. He hesitated.

'Henry,' Chjara said. 'It's warm in here.'

'Is it?'

'As warm as it was on the *Magdalene*.' She approached him. 'I am not innocent, as I was on the *Magdalene*.' She spoke softly. 'We were innocent then, weren't we?'

He felt her touch him on the chest. He knew his heart worked hard, and he looked away over her head. He thought of the secret purchases he'd made from the sailors, outside of her knowledge. Could he start there? He

looked down into her face. 'Perhaps not so innocent,' he managed to say, though his voice was thick.

She mistook his meaning. She reached into his shirt. 'We were never innocent,' she said. 'You and I. We've lived differently than others.' Chjara found that she was not thinking of the jeweler, but of Henry. She was thinking of Henry with a passion she had not felt for a while. She forgot that she knew him, knew all of him, and she took off his shirt as if she had never before gazed upon the expanse of his chest.

Henry heard her breathing rise. He felt her heat, and he responded, closing his eyes for a moment, feeling her fingers run a half inch off the surface of him, where the hair on his chest ended. Her touch prickled.

'Chjara,' he began. 'I'm not innocent.'

'Of course you're not,' she said.

'I should tell you how.'

He felt her hesitate. He opened his eyes. She looked into his. She tilted her head. She studied him. 'Do you think I want an innocent man?' Her voice was raw. 'You knew even then, on the *Magdalene*, how to love me.'

'I did.' He smiled in spite of himself.

'Who taught you?' she whispered.

He swallowed.

'I was taught too,' she said in his ear.

He felt her breasts against him. He felt her touch him with her open lips pressed wet onto his neck. 'Who taught you?' he wanted to know.

'Who taught you?' she repeated, and she bit his neck. She wrapped her legs around him.

He could be still no longer. He lifted her skirt. He lifted her up to him. He found her ready, more ready than in a long time. He could not think. He could not return to what he'd vowed to say. 'You are a wicked woman,' he said.

'Not wicked,' she said. 'Alive. Alive for you, right now for you.'

'For who else?' He thrust into her. 'For the sailors too?' He reached into her. 'The sailors who listened to us?' And he found himself back on the *Magdalene*, with the men watching and seeing beautiful Chjara bare in her one silk, parading the deck. He pulled her down onto him. She cried out. She cried out loud enough to reach across the water. He thought of the men on shore who would hear them: the Harlequin troupe. The reporter.

He tried to quiet her, but not so much that he stopped pursuing her. He didn't want to lose her from his grasp, pressed as she was against the curved side of the ship.

She too thought of a man on shore who might hear them. She felt Henry split her open and her eyes released hot tears as her body rose and fell. She felt all of herself, as if they were young and on the *Magdalene* again, and she thought she would die for wanting this to be true, and for it not to be true: this fact that wickedness made her more alive than even music did. She met Henry as if he were a saddle of light. She blazed away on him, riding. Riding.



In the morning, Henry thought of sending everyone away. He needed another chance with Chjara. But the children would not go. Of course they would not leave the ship on the first day. And the reporter offered to travel with them to Albany. Could he document their first voyage? The Harlequins entertained them so well that the mood on the ship was celebratory, a revelation, and what had he been thinking, that he would spoil it not just for now but forever?

When the news article appeared, it began with the story of a man called John Chapman. Born the same year as Henry, Chapman was becoming legend, carrying apple trees to the frontier. Apples made a man healthy, but apples also made hard cider for hard drink. 'Meet now,' wrote Bill Duncan in the August 14, 1815, issue of *The New York Times*, 'the Johnny Appleseed of books.' Henry went cold, reading the article. How much did the newsman know of his stores?

Did he mean to imply that he, like Chapman, brought people both good books and ones that, like hard cider, led men astray? He never knew who knew his secret and who did not, and he slept that night in a vise of dreams. He kicked and called out and his arm struck Chjara in the face. When he awoke, she was beside him, her face worried and annoyed. 'What?' she said. 'What is it?'

## Chapter Fifteen

They were a long time returning to upstate New York, and a crowd blackened the streets all along the Hudson River shore as the *Henry G* approached Kingston for the first time since its launch. Henry saw Etta, who was thirteen, standing with her mother at the bow. From the back, Etta still looked boyish and lean, as if the woman she was becoming from the front was hidden deep inside her. Beyond Etta and Chjara, the blue of the Hudson glittered in the noonday heat. Later, Henry would recall this moment a hundred times: the sight of the noon sun on Etta's long hair as she leaned into her mother's embrace, her forehead against her mother's shoulder.

It was May, 1821, and in the intervening years, Henry had earned the title of showboat inventor. In New Orleans, on the other side of the country, men copied the design of his ship. Chjara's concerts still won a steady audience; the Harlequins had branched out into Shakespeare. Simon lectured. At eighteen, he already drew his own crowds.

Henry presided over this 'onboard entertainment extravaganza', and yet behind the public story, he still sold secret goods: books, sailors' handicrafts, herbs and French letters. He'd not been caught. The lawyer, Tom Boone, had. Boone had been fined for 'indecentcy' five years earlier, together with the five partners it had taken to replace Henry. The reporter obfuscated the reasons. No press could print the nature of their activities, and there was yet no name for it. The word *pornography* would arrive during the gold rush and the Civil War when legions of men roamed without families. What Henry knew was that the fine levied against Boone *et al* was nothing. A fraction of a month's earnings.

Henry noticed that the crowd gathered on the Kingston dock was unfriendly, which still happened often enough to keep their names in the newspapers. He went to the pilot house and took the helm from Peter. Peter had inherited their father Randall's fierce eyes. Crowds parted for Peter. He seemed a leader, though on the ship he preferred the quiet of the helm up in the pilot house. This was especially true since their mother, Anna, had died a year ago.



‘Go and help Simon get us docked,’ Henry said.

‘Aye, aye, my captain, my brother.’ Simon grinned and then swung from a rope full out over the end of the bow, over the heads of Etta and Chjara. They yelped and slapped at his feet. He swung back over them and dropped at the last moment to the deck.

Henry watched his family and crew go to their tasks on deck, and he felt pride in his achievement. They worked unhurried and at ease.

Chjara, meanwhile, worried that more glasses of the harmonica would break in the confusion of unpacking in such a crowd. She had only thirty-two bowls intact out of thirty-seven and she had had to compose a variation of her recent favorite tune around the missing teeth in the row of glasses. When the gangplanks could not be lowered against the protestors waving their pamphlets, Simon and Peter tried clowning. At eighteen, the young men looked nearly identical with their shirts off and their browned muscles gleaming. Simon’s hair was fair and Peter’s dark and together they could charm almost any crowd. Still, these protestors formed a phalanx.

From the other end of the quay, where taverns lined the dock, men had spilled out of the tavern doors. They shouted support to Peter and Simon, who turned the planks on their sides and parried with them like cumbersome swords. They caught sight of Chjara: ‘Rhymes with “tiara”,’ one called out. ‘Why’d you leave us so long?’ cried another.

Chjara waved from the railing. She thought the jeweler might be among them. Guilt flamed up in her, but also — she couldn’t help it; her skin was rosy, her breasts full — anticipation ignited a heat in her that seemed it could flow out over water and across to the cacophonous street, calling him to her. She worried one of the jeweler’s brooches in her hand. Her fingers traced the profile which was her own face, her neck and the curve of her breast. Hundreds of these brooches decorated women from Portland to Richmond. The jeweler had made a good fortune from her likeness, especially because of the almost scandalous sight of her bosom. Henry had purchased dozens himself to sell at concerts.

Etta pressed up close beside her, where the planks would soon go down. Etta rose on tiptoes and spoke in her ear, asking to be excused from unloading chores this once — she was desperate for land. ‘Stay with us,’ Chjara said. She patted Etta on the backside. ‘We’ll go soon enough.’

The Harlequin troupe burst up from the hold and onto the deck, where

they stood on one another's shoulders, then sent the top man flying the few feet from ship to shore. He landed amid the stunned and hurriedly parted crowd.

'We present,' shouted Scaramouch, "'The Tale of the Punchinello's Last Kiss", this Friday, Saturday and Sunday on the town green.'

'But we don't want any entertainments on the Sabbath,' complained the foremost pamphleteer in the crowd.

Oh no, thought Chjara. Before she could speak, Simon jumped on the gunnels, and leaning out, rope in hand — looking his handsomest, she thought with a mother's pride — called to the crowd.

'Believe ye that those who breach the Sabbath are blasphemers, adulterers and fornicators?'

'Yes,' answered someone in the crowd, unsuspecting.

'Then do you agree that the members of our Congress are blasphemers, adulterers and fornicators?' Simon said.

For a moment, no one in the crowd had an answer.

'Because if you believe the first,' Simon called, 'you must assert the second, as it is none other than your Congressmen who decree the mail must still flow on Sundays.'

The crowd interrupted him with shouts but he continued. 'So why should we not offer theater as well?'

There was a roar of denial. From the taverns, though, came an answering hurrah. The post office tradition of seven-day delivery, established early in the founding of the Republic, was a topic for fierce debate, especially as the drinkers and freethinkers had made the warm and welcoming post offices their Sunday gathering places.

'I will discourse on the subject of the freedom of religion at four in the afternoon *on Sunday* at the post office. Before the Harlequin entertainment.'

Chjara hid her smile with her hand. She looked up at Henry, who just then sought her glance as well. Simon had hoped for exactly this: a crowd who handed him the platform to broadcast his laboriously developed lecture on 'Following Our Senses to True Freedom: The False Quarrel between Entertainments and Religion'. As Chjara and Henry exchanged this look, neither of them noticed Etta slip through the gaps in the phalanx during the moment of distraction that her brother's announcement created.



The crowd swallowed Etta. She couldn't see well under normal circumstances but now she felt disoriented, pressed in from all sides. She wanted to be more like Simon, brave and independent, but she had to close her eyes because the noise and commotion made her dizzy. She heard the shrilling voice of her 'uncle' David Rodin, who was Scaramouch, and pushed in that direction. But then she heard Simon, now not far behind her on shore.

'Good Christians,' he said, 'let the cool light of reason pass through, please.'

'You mock only God.'

'Never God,' Simon said. 'Only fools.'

'Simon?' Etta called. He didn't hear her. 'Help me,' she called louder.

The person who turned at her call was a sharp-beaked woman with a livid complexion. Etta followed the woman to the town green where there was a bench. 'I have the sea legs,' Etta said, sitting abruptly. She breathed, and felt better soon enough. She observed the woman looking right and left, and left and right, like a bird on a fence post. Etta saw that the nostrils were extremely narrow in her extremely pointed nose. She decided to remember her as the bird-woman.

There had been a lion-woman at Richmond when she was a little girl. That one had bright orange, frizzy hair that stuck out as if she'd touched electricity. Her mother had told a story about people touching electricity. The lion-woman could open her mouth wide enough to put her whole fist inside.

The bird-woman spoke: 'You are the daughter of the Devil. Your eyes are the mark of it.'

Oh, not that again, her brother would have said. Etta smiled with the expression Simon showed her when she said something childish or endearing.

'Why do you smirk,' the bird-woman said, 'when your soul is at stake?'

'Because I wasn't born wrong. I was born exactly right. Under a harvest moon not twelve miles from here.' She pointed inland in the direction of Woodstock and the Schohariekill Road.

Etta looked back toward the river. Simon and Peter were leading the

crowd away from the boat, a crowd that already loved them. The uncles — the Harlequin players — pranced for an already full gathering of children and grown-ups. The sound of laughter carried all the way up to the village green. Etta sighed. What would be her talent? What would she practice? With these eyes, she couldn't sing before others, nor speak like Simon, nor dance and play the theater like her uncles. 'Write the book of your life,' her father had said. 'But I couldn't read it myself,' she'd complained, because her eyes wouldn't fix on the letters. 'I'll be your scribe,' he offered. 'But nothing happens to me,' she whined. Everything happened to everyone else, especially to her mother.

Etta hadn't noticed how purposeless her own life really was until Grandma Anna died. She'd taken care of her grandmother. At the end, Anna couldn't hear a single note of the glass harmonica. 'Which is a bit of a relief,' Grandma had whispered as they readied for sleep, making them both laugh out loud until her mother came and asked, 'What's so funny?'

Everyone was bored with the glass harmonica. Only her mother didn't know it.

Grandma Anna was deader than a doornail now. Etta didn't have any tears left for her, which was worse than crying because it meant she was already forgetting.

Now the bird-woman said, 'I could take you to the Sinners' Camp.'

'The Sinners' Camp?'

'Where you could bathe in the river and rise up clean and saved.'

'Where is this *Sinners' Camp*?' Etta mocked.

'It is on the Schoharick River. We camp on the banks tomorrow. Do you want to be saved?' The bird-woman held out her bird claw.

'No thank you.' But Etta hadn't known there was a Schoharick River, as well as a Schoharick Road. Was it near where she was born?

The bird claw landed on her arm. 'I go with my girls. They will keep you company.'

'Which girls?' Etta had no friends because they never stayed anywhere long enough.

'The daughters of my lost boy, Charles. Come. I'll bring you to the Reverend Broyden. You will be saved.'

The claw dug in to her arm. Etta's eyes widened. 'Do you mean to take me captive?'

The fingers released. ‘Captive?’ The woman seemed uncomprehending. ‘My mother was taken captive into the wilds,’ Etta said with pride. ‘My grandfather meant to save my father from her “terrible influence”.’ This was another story of her mother’s.

‘Tell your mother then that you want to join us.’ The bird-woman sounded triumphant.

‘But if I tell her, she won’t let me go. You have to take me captive.’ Etta held out her wrists to be tied.

‘No, no.’

‘I thought you wanted to save me.’

The bird-woman looked left and right. She looked right and left.

‘At least take me by the arm,’ Etta said practically. ‘I’ll go with you.’

The girls, who were the bird-woman’s granddaughters, proved more amenable. Etta was thirteen and they were ten, eight and six. They did her bidding at the bird-woman’s home. They tied up Etta’s hands and feet, and took turns feeding her supper with a spoon.



In the late afternoon, Chjara waited for Etta, looking out from the deck of the ship onto the peaceful burg of Kingston. There, in the distance of the village green, were the first torches lit around the stage of the Harlequin show. The troupe played at night, every night they could, and she performed now only in the day and never with the split voice. ‘Do you really want even more notoriety,’ Henry complained whenever she discussed it with him. Yes, she thought. If she had a hundred jewelers packed in around her while she courted them with song, she wouldn’t object. She laughed and scolded herself and shivered.

As the cool of evening settled down from the Catskills, the temperature itself seemed the color of the hillside’s blue. Chjara wrapped a shawl around her shoulders. Margaret AnnaMarieFiore Garland, you’re awfully late, Chjara thought, reprimanding her daughter softly with her full name, the names of both her grandmothers. Etta was a sensible girl, she’d always been sensible, and Chjara forgave her for disobeying just a little. Everything necessary had been done; no one had dawdled.

She could hear Henry sweeping the floor down below. Every time they arrived in a town, the whole kit and caboodle had to come undone: horses disembarked; carriage reassembled; books unpacked; theatre uncrated. The whole kit and caboodle, she repeated to herself. The sound of English words had become invisible to her except for such phrases. Henry swept in long stokes.

Downstairs, belowdecks, Henry heard Chjara coming. Quickly he buckled closed his secret trapdoor. He lifted the bed from its hinges on the wall, and let it drop over the hideaway just as she appeared. In the hold he had a full consignment of erotic books, since he'd stocked up in New York City.

'Good husband.'

Chjara lay down on the bed. It smelled of the fresh spring hay of the pallet. She stretched back and spread her arms against the sheets of new Southern cotton, purchased in New York. She ran her hands over the smooth fabric. 'You will be glad, good husband, for the end of the era of flax in our lives. This sheet is not like flax.'

'It cost ten times the flax.'

'More,' she said. 'Come see if it's worth the cost.'

She saw the way he watched her, keenly, for how she would begin it.

Afterward, they spooned, and Henry saw the pulse in Chjara's neck; he saw the ordinary fact of flesh, blood and bone. He didn't pine often for the lost dream of a secret ghost show in the boat's hold. Since leaving land, Chjara had been like a new wife to him. More unashamed. Saucier. He sucked her neck.

'We're late,' she groaned.

'Not so late.'

'Yes, so late.' She backed into him, but only briefly before she rose.

When they arrived at the village green, the Harlequin Show had already begun. Etta wasn't there either.

Chjara said, 'This is very unlike her.'

'It is,' Henry agreed.

'I'm a Fraid.' Chjara repeated the old joke of her bad English. A tick of fear upset the regular beat of her heart. The newspapers had been full recently of dire warnings about roving gangs of young men with 'dirks', knives that were easily concealed. They targeted mostly each other, these gangs, but the fear of them had been stoked in everyone by the news

reports that dwelled on every detail.

Henry didn't speak for a while. The crowd of protesters today had been larger than others in the past, but not different in tone. 'We are well liked in Kingston.' His voice was tentative.

'Maybe so,' she said. 'But where is she?'

'She's probably back at the boat already,' he said.

'Maybe, yes.'

'I'll go to the taverns and ask who's seen her. You go back to the boat and wait.'

'I will,' she said. Henry stared into the distance and his expression was uneasy. 'Husband,' she said, 'don't ask too quietly. It's already night.'



Simon didn't know yet that his sister was missing. He stood amidst a crowd in a tavern, beside him a minister from today's demonstration, called Tom Ridge, and a couple of sheriffs from the local constabulary. Across the room, Peter was engaged in a conversation with a milliner's daughter. The young woman wore an extraordinary hat with a lace bouquet that bounced and bobbed as Peter flirted with her.

Simon bought hard cider for the men, though the minister refused. It was always good, his father said, to make friends with the local police and the agitators.

'Do you go with your father on Sundays?' Ridge asked him.

'Where?' Simon was distracted by the milliner's daughter, whose dimples brightened the beautiful smiles she was giving to Peter.

'Where your father goes.'

'My father takes Sundays off,' Simon said, absently. 'He rests the horses and goes to the post office.' He looked at Tom Ridge. 'Will we see you there with the other freethinkers of the village?' He could not help provoking the man.

'I don't lollygag on the Lord's Day.'

'Lollygag?'

'Loll about. Lower myself to gossip and drink.'

'Our "gossip", you'd find, tends to be refined. We read the paper

and discuss the issues of the day. I'll speak this week about freedom of entertainments, about—'

'Your father doesn't sell his books on Sundays?' the minister interrupted.

'No,' Simon lied. His father kept quiet about the fact that he engaged in commerce on the Sabbath. 'We don't need more trouble than we've got with the Sunday shows and concerts,' he had told Simon.

One of the sheriffs spoke. 'It'd be best if you'd tell your parents to go out of town this Sunday. Enjoy the countryside.'

'Why's that?' Simon said, his dander rising.

The officer shrugged.

Ridge spoke. 'I'm the alderman for this area around the dock. We've put in a Ban on Indecent Entertainments.'

'There's nothing indecent about my mother's music.'

'We'll see,' Ridge warned. He looked square at Simon. 'It's your father's books that concern me.'

This was surprising. 'You cannot bear the excitement of words. Ideas.' Simon laughed, shaking his head in disbelief. 'Peter,' he called, 'let's leave these Philistines.'

'You're better than us common folk, aren't you?' Ridge said.

Simon ducked his head, pulling on his cap. 'Peter?'

Peter left the milliner's daughter with evident regret. They were on their way out when Henry appeared in the door. 'Is Etta with you?'

They hadn't seen her. Hearing that no one knew where she was, Simon blanched. At once he recalled her recent accusation: 'You don't even notice me anymore.' He didn't think she had meant it. 'I should have watched out for her.'

'She's probably nearby. Someone will have seen her.' Henry searched the faces in the tavern crowd. With the boys following, he pushed through to the bar. In a quiet voice, he asked the barkeep if Etta had been in.

Simon went back to the constables. The minister was still there.

'So now you're wanting to talk to the Philistines?' Tom Ridge sneered loudly.

Henry heard the raised voice and looked over, uneasy. The man's face was vaguely familiar but he couldn't place it. Simon and Peter in their white shirts appeared like musketeers or pirates, their strong chests showing tanned below their open collars.



‘I’m looking for my sister.’ Simon leaned toward the minister. ‘You’d remember her for her “devil’s eye”, which in scientific terms is a strabismus.’

Henry interposed himself between Simon and the minister. He introduced himself. ‘My son is quickly agitated when it comes to his sister. Would you ask among your congregation if anyone has seen her?’

The man looked at him as if he too recognized a face. ‘Tom Ridge.’ He extended his hand, which was broad like a farmer’s.

Unnerved by the knowing look and the silence, Henry turned to the constables. ‘Etta’s probably found her way back to the ship already.’ He smiled. Everything was fine, his expression said.

They dissipated then, the boys taking the taverns to the north of town, with Henry’s admonishment to keep their tempers cool. Henry circled south. Twice he returned to the boat to find Chjara pacing on the top deck, where normally she performed. He left her there, not stopping for long. He did not dare begin to talk about what could have gone wrong.

The midnight bells chimed. Henry sat on the bench in the village green where Etta had sat, and clasped his hands around his ears. The taverns were letting out. People approached. He sat up straight and nodded in greeting. In his stomach an army of worms piled up toward his gullet. What if one of his customers had taken her? Or white slavers.

He pictured his daughter, seeing her in the hold of some ship. He closed his eyes against it, and knew the reckoning was coming. How could he stop it in time to save his daughter from harm? He was the worst of men, intelligent enough only to fool himself all these years with excuses.

He had put them all in harm’s way.

The last of the tavern-goers disappeared into the night and still Henry sat, his legs empty, as if whatever substance made him had sifted down his bones to the ground. He should return to Chjara pacing on the boat; he should speak to her at last with honesty.

The world thrived on hypocrisy. This is what he wanted her to understand. Every fortune came from vice. From vice or from inheritance, which was only vice pushed out of sight into the past. Honest labor was uncertain labor: how could a farmer protect himself from need when the fields around him could be trampled in an hour by a loose herd or a hail storm, or could be lost by dint of some new mold creeping through the ground, wiping out all that noble labor undertaken from dawn to nightfall?

No. The truth could not be escaped, that real gain came from some cheat, some trick, some way of multiplying pennies to dollars to hundreds.

Absurd arguments rattled away in his mind while his daughter suffered and while he betrayed his wife in secret, again. He did not like himself, sitting there. He detested his cowardice. His mouth was dry as stones. His heart worked hard, as if he labored uphill but he only sat, and sat.



No one found Etta. All night she was gone. The next day, they searched the docks, the churches, the backstreets, the front yards. They found no one who could remember seeing her. They searched the wells. Then a reporter came to the ship. He was Bill Duncan of *The New York Times*, back to see them. Duncan's article about Etta's disappearance would be reprinted in newspapers all along the coast.

On May 3, a girl aged 13 was last seen departing the south wharf of Kingston. Her disappearance marks a catastrophic turn for her illustrious family, the Henry Garlands of Portsmouth NH, but also, no less, for the nation.

*For nearly 20 years, first by coach and then by showboat, the Henry Garlands have brought the world to large and small burghs alike with their famous — and some say infamous — entertainment enterprises. Their contribution coincides, in our opinion, with the second great declaration of independence in these United States. Where once the minds of men found only ideas and entertainments deemed edifying by their elders, now our young men and women may attend a lecture at the local lyceum; may arrange an outing to a Baptist revival in a camp, or may, indeed, find a varied intellectual feast under one mast: the traveling musicianship, readership and showmanship of the Henry G. In short, the pursuit of the soul's happiness is the religion of the land. Each may pursue it as he sees fit by his own conscience.*

*In this climate of new independence (some say licentiousness), we have seen the growing approbation, year after year, accorded the Henry G. What is approbation? What is the meaning of this word? Webster will tell you the dry facts: it is praise. It is commendation. It is, significantly, 'official approval'.*

*In a democracy, what constitutes official approval? It is the approval of the people. The public's vote regarding the Henry G was overwhelming. It was not, however, unanimous. So we turn now to the history of the Henry G's opprobrium. What is opprobrium? In short: it is disgrace.*

*Some take upon themselves the charge to judge their fellows. Such a party, now in Kingston, has enacted A Ban on Indecent Entertainments. What is such a ban but a ban on liberty? Are men not capable of choosing, based on their own sense of grace, what to welcome into their homes and hearts without interference from those who would judge others? The musician Chjara Garland draws especially the naysayers' venom.*

*Where is the daughter of Henry and Chjara Garland this morning, on the eve of the Sabbath, 3 May, 1821? We report, with regret filling our eyes, that she is missing. This news is made worse by the contemptible voices heard around this town, which say: it is the disgrace of the mother, being visited on this child. We report, with regret, the whispered voices that say: she has brought this calumny upon them. By what, we ask? By her freedom of expression?*

*We harken unto all citizens of the United States to join, like our militias, in voluntary association. Muster along your seaports, river wharfs, and the locks of your new canals. Look for this child, distinguishable by her wandering left eye, her long reddish hair, and a dress of brown cotton, embroidered at the hem with elephants. Look for her: look for innocence. Let us not say she is doomed. Let us instead hope. Let us put our feet, our eyes, our hearts, in the service of this hope.*

On Saturday, when Etta had been two nights gone and all the world talked of the disgraceful mother that she was, Chjara refused to stay put another hour on the ship. 'You are looking everywhere. So should I,' she cried to Henry. 'Any person can sit here and send word if she comes back.'

Henry did not want her exposed. He wanted her safe aboard ship. Wasn't it enough that the boys traveled, who knew where, looking for Etta? Would they all be scattered to the winds? She watched his mouth moving, talking at her, and she pretended to agree. She felt her own mouth twitching. His face was as white as new sailcloth, his eyes black pinpoints. She did not know why she had ever loved him. He would keep her from finding her own child. As soon as he was gone, she prepared her carriage. She was half a block away from the ship when David Rodin, without his Scaramouch ruffles, hurried up the street and leapt onto the carriage to join her. He took the reins and raised one eyebrow. 'People already talk enough,'

he said. 'You shouldn't go alone.' They left town on a road out of sight of the militia that had gathered to search.

Henry worked with the militia commander who was organizing the search, and so was among the first to hear the suggestion that a team go look in and around the *Henry G* 'with fresh eyes'. The family might have missed something, said one. Henry's immediate thought was that they would surely find the trapdoor. He should have done something earlier, but now he managed to leave ahead of the others.

He arrived at the ship which was deserted. He found a hastily scribbled note from David. A wave of relief swept over him, relief that at least Chjara wouldn't see this. He moved rapidly, as if his slow, impeded mind had no connection to his limbs. He flung the clothes out of his winter trunk and some from his summer trunk as well. He transferred his secret stores into the trunks. On top of the stacked boxes, which were wrapped in thin brown paper, he laid shirts and breeches.

Then he began on Chjara's winter trunk, dumping out her clothes and replacing them with the most salacious of the books. His hands were deliberate and efficient. His heart seemed the wrong size for his chest. He touched his wife's private winter undergarments which were slightly yellowed with age, tossing them to the floor with all the other clothes. He still had more to hide so he emptied the children's winter trunks. Books he put in Etta's, and in Simon's he stacked three chests the size of bread boxes, each one with a scrimshaw decal on top carved with the initials JDB.

He could hear the militia detachment arriving as he swept all their winter clothes into the hold under the trapdoor. He latched it shut. He dropped the bed, which was hinged up against the wall, and he sat on the end, looking dumbfounded.

'Henry?' It was Ebenezer Smith, a town councilor. Ebenezer was younger than Henry by a good decade and he bounded down the ladder into the family's quarters. He had long hair tied with a black ribbon and a ruddy face. He approached and laid both hands on Henry's shoulders. Henry responded by vomiting — suddenly — as if slapped on the back.

'We'll find her.' Ebenezer wiped the front of his trousers with a calm hand.

Henry let out an almost inhuman cry. Ebenezer knelt in front of him. 'Before nightfall,' he said, 'we'll find her.'

Henry shook his head. He felt washed through, as if a cloth had been scrubbed hard against the ridges of his inner body. ‘Sorry,’ he choked.

‘It’s nothing. Listen, Henry.’ Ebenezer drew closer, whispering,

‘Do you have any goods on the ship?’

‘What?’ Henry’s eyes focused.

‘There’s word about that we’ll find contraband.’

Henry looked into the face of the town councilor. Ebenezer Smith waited. When Henry said nothing, Ebenezer added, ‘There’s a Tom Ridge. Says he was a customer of yours before his salvation. Said something about...’

Henry interrupted. ‘I gave up that business years ago. It was a desperate young man’s gamble.’

‘That’s a relief then,’ Ebenezer said. ‘C’mon down,’ he said loudly, because there were others waiting — among them Tom Ridge.

Henry sat on the bed. He listened to the men move about the cabin. He heard how they whispered, as they would in the presence of a sick man. He stood up and cleaned himself. There was a splash then — from out the porthole — and then another.

‘Some of the lads have volunteered to dive down,’ Ebenezer said.

Henry said, his mouth dry, ‘If she’s drowned, she’d be downriver.’

‘If she’s been cast over, she’d be close by,’ a man said belligerently.

Henry looked up at Tom Ridge. ‘Who would cast her over from our own ship?’

‘She might have gone over with stones in her pockets,’ said Ebenezer quietly.

Henry was stunned. His skull felt cold, as if his pate had iced over. This ice melted down the back of his neck. He trembled.

‘We’ve had to think through every possibility.’ Ebenezer was apologetic.

‘There’s abominations common to men of your trade,’ said the man with the belligerent tone. ‘A girl in a family like yours, afflicted by your sins — a girl like this might fall into despair.’

Henry began to realize what the man implied. Then he remembered a lecture by his son. Simon had said that a man’s sense of sin afoot in the world was but a magic-lantern show of his own demons.

Ridge said, ‘I asked God where your girl was. I opened the Bible and this is the page that I opened to: Isaac’s sacrifice. Does Beelzebub also test your loyalty with a sacrifice?’

Henry suddenly recognized Tom Ridge as the oat man, the man at the Kingston state fair who'd wanted a book with pirates and Beelzebub's little angel girls.

Now he looked up at the farmer turned minister and his eyes flooded with rage. His shoulders were steel and in a flash he held the man's collar and lifted him off the ground, and spat in his face: 'What have you done with her?'

'Hold on there!' Ebenezer said.

'What have you...?' Henry had the oat man against the wall, and he looked into eyes that mocked him, that pretended to see into him with a smirk and a judgment, and Henry was about to haul into him when there was a shout.

They both turned and saw a man's feet protruding from under the bed. 'What's this?' said the searcher.

Henry let go of Tom Ridge. 'It's a hold for our winter clothes.'

'Hidden under the bed?' The searcher began to scrabble about and with his back inadvertently lifted the bed on its hinges. It tipped up — another man at the end grasped the foot of the bed and hoisted. 'You've made it easy to get to,' said Ebenezer.

'There's clothes in there?' Tom Ridge hissed.

'Nothing but,' Henry said.

Tom crossed over, unclasped the latch.

Ebenezer said, 'We ought to give the man some privacy, boys.'

The air was tense with the men's bated breath. In this stillness, the sound from outside of a swimmer splashing and diving again was like a slap on a drum.

Tom Ridge unclasped the trapdoor. He dropped down into the hold. Standing waist deep, he moved his arms in a circle. 'We'll see if there's not something hidden here, something foul.'

Ebenezer was watching Henry. Henry returned the inquiring look with a steady gaze.

Tom Ridge rose out of the clothes. A woolen, wide, white set of long johns trimmed with yellowed lace clung to his trousers.

'There it is — the contraband,' quipped one of the younger men, to guffaws. Henry did not take his eyes off Tom Ridge — not while Tom shook off Chjara's undergarments as if they were a snake; not while Tom

followed Ebenezer back to the ladder, passing the row of trunks in plain sight against the wall; not while Tom watched the water, when the young swimmers with their wet, upturned faces said, one after another, 'Nothing', 'Nothing', 'Nothing'.

Henry thought, It is in plain sight that we hide our misdeeds. Just as he'd hidden the contraband in the trunks, this man could have hidden Etta. 'Where is it that you live, Tom Ridge?'

Everyone turned. The question was loud and cut through the chatter. 'Do you live by the river bank, Tom Ridge?'

Ebenezer said, 'Careful now, men.'

'I'd like some men to help me search the banks by Tom Ridge's house.'

'A man of known ill repute,' said Tom Ridge, 'who brings the foulest temptation to our town—'

'Unless you've got a guilty conscience, boys,' Henry interrupted, 'why would you mind a search?'

'Fine,' Tom said, extending his arms.

'I believe we ought to concentrate on the ships that have docked since you arrived,' Ebenezer said.

Henry wanted with all his heart to shout out what Tom Ridge's sinful habit was. But if Henry breathed what he knew, he would be condemned himself. How could he know Tom's habit except by having sold goods that invited the worst in men? 'Will anyone help me search Tom Ridge's?'

There were two who stepped forward.

'Will you help me yourself, Tom Ridge?' Henry said. 'Is she still alive?'

'I'm a good Christian man now,' Tom said. 'You're welcome to look high and low. I'll open every door, and my heart to you as well. It's your own actions that come home to roost.'



All morning and into the noon hour, Chjara rode with David quiet beside her, the empty carriage clattering behind them. She told him to go left, go right; he obliged. They came to the tannery, where effluent poured into the river. The stench of hides and soured meat brought a legion of flies. The flies hissed. Chjara strode along the bank, which was

the color of carcasses. She imagined Etta dead: Etta's long hair floating in a river, face down; she saw it like a vision. There was mud in her throat and only a dry burning in her eyes instead of tears. She allowed herself to think that death might be preferable to other fates. Her teeth were air, nerves ringing as if a root were bare. Etta was more child than woman. Where Simon had always seemed older than his years, Etta always wanted to retreat back to childhood. Where had she gone? Who would take her and what had they done with her? She said to David, her voice shallow, 'Let's go north.'

She directed him to the hunting camp and the jeweler's cottage, without giving any reason for pulling up right here in front of the cottage door.

The jeweler answered. 'I hoped you'd come.' The smirk of desire was on his face.

Chjara had never in her life fainted but now she felt her knees go liquid. He grabbed her shoulders to hold her upright, and when she came clear, she was in this half-embrace with the jeweler, aware of the open door and David watching from the carriage seat.

'Restrain yourself,' the jeweler whispered, 'till I can get you out back.'

She slapped him.

'What?' He sprang back, surprised.

'Have you taken my daughter?'

His expression was uncomprehending.

'You have not kidnapped her?'

He was appalled. 'Woman, I'm no... I'm not... I'm a good man, for Christ's sake. Except when sorely tempted.'

'Who have you told about us?'

His jaw worked.

'Who did you brag to?' Her eyes misted, and she wiped furiously.

'I told no one.'

'You simply drew my image. For all to see.' She blinked. She didn't know why she accused him, and she treasured the brooch.

'I told no one.'

She spun around. She started for the carriage.

'I'll help you find her,' he called.

'Don't.' She turned. 'Please. Forget I've come.'



David watched from the carriage, and when she climbed up she didn't answer his questioning eyes. Many minutes passed.

'I would take everything back,' she cried out. She bit her lip.

David said nothing.

'I'm wrong. I've been wrong my whole life.'

'Perhaps on some things more than others.'

It was the gentlest reprimand under the circumstances, but she turned on him urgently. 'Do you think Etta will get my punishment? Do you?'

'No—'

'Do I contaminate those around me?' The question, which was sincere, was brittle in her mouth. 'Because I feel too much, because I dare to reach for what...' She grasped her fist to her belly. 'Because I have followed my electricity? Is she suffering because of me?' She thought it was true. Her passion misled her and put her children in danger.

David, who knew the secret of Henry's business, was tempted to tell her it was not all her doing.

She leaned forward as if over a bellyache and her words squeezed out raw. 'I've broken the rules. I always have. Since I was a girl. Oh, I should have listened and been modest. All my life I've known I shouldn't live so freely. Nothing is worth this.'

'You are not guilty. Chjara, don't succumb to this,' David said.

'You know I'm guilty.'

'You aren't the only one who's guilty,' he amended.

She stared at him. The red of her cheeks darkened. She looked down at her hands. 'Henry.' She remembered Randall accusing Henry of being no better than a common sailor, saying he'd frequented a Beverly whorehouse. 'Don't tell me what Henry has done.'

David wanted to. He thought she should know.

'We lived by our own rules. As best we could devise them.'

'Not just you.' He tried again. 'Henry has—'

'David, I've never wanted an innocent man.'

They rode a while in silence.

'I don't know what to do,' she cried. Her whole body trembled. 'I have to do something. What is it?' Her voice was frantic. 'This uncertainty — it's terrible! I finally understand. They are *uncertain* — those who accuse me. They don't know how to live. God, how awful this uncertainty is.' She

turned to David, her eyes wild. 'I don't know any more what's right. I can't trust myself. My feelings.'

David said, 'Let's rest here by the creek.' He slowed the horses.

'Maybe something will come to us.'

'I can't breathe. She's hurt. I know she is, I can feel it.'

'Maybe you shouldn't trust that feeling?' He sought her eyes, smiling.

She burst into tears. 'What should I do? Tell me what to do.' She wiped fiercely. 'No wonder everyone lives a mousy life. They're right to. We shouldn't live to the edge of our skin. The stakes are too high.'

'It will be all right,' he said.

'Don't be stupid.'

He laughed. He held her about the shoulders. 'If it were Etta or Simon or Peter who was afraid, you'd tell them to listen to the world, which hums with Life.' He only made her weep more.

'I have contaminated them.'

'No.'

'Yes.' She looked up at him. 'I was wrong. I know it now. The electricity in life can't lead us anywhere. It's a fantasy. We ease our suffering with it, but it's not a guide. God has left us alone. He tests us. We have to decide.'

'Still, we won't help anything by scurrying like rats after a rain,' David said. 'I'm going to walk a way into the woods. I need to think. Have a rest, Chjara. Sleep a little if you can.'

He took a trail off through the birches. From the carriage seat, Chjara looked at the Catskill Mountains in the distance. Of course they were beautiful. They had lost the blue of winter and glowed with the new green growth on the trees. Even in the bare patch beside the road, among the stumps of hemlocks, there were bluebells and cinquefoils; dandelions and lady slipper. Of course it was beautiful, but what did that matter now? She heard the creek flowing and the thousands of bird songs. It was a shimmer of sound like heat on a desert — the birds nesting and clucking, instructing their young. Once, in Woodstock, she had come upon a wild turkey hen that sang-hissed to her naughty brood. The chicks had wandered out of line, out of the safety of shadows and into the sun-filled open, where any hunting hawk could see them.

Chjara had failed to protect her young. This is what had come of

making herself into a musical instrument for God. She was as selfish as any nun or priest, living for her own soul's amusement in the state of ecstasy.

And not just for her soul's ecstasy. Would she lie to herself now? She played her glass harmonica to amuse and titillate men and young girls and all her audience who surrounded her with passion and adoration. A thousand jewelers. For this she had sacrificed her daughter's safety?

She couldn't stand to be out in the open. She climbed into the carriage, which was not entirely empty. The glass harmonica was strapped into its slot in the floor beneath the benches. The curtains held the scent of book musk. It was close and damp and dark, and she thought that her daughter might be in such a place. She stared into the dark and wished for an answer: Where was her darling girl?

But there was no answer.

There it was, underneath her feet: the Devil's plaything. She groped and felt the inlaid surface. She found the clasps and released it from the carriage floor. It sprang up a few inches, since Henry had installed springs beneath it to absorb the shock of travel and to make it easier for her to lift out its bulk. She stared at her instrument, which was lifeless and mechanical and innocent of crimes. She remembered the first time she'd seen one, and how in the catacombs it had seemed alive to her. A song came into her head. Horrified, she beat her ears. There should be no music until Etta was found.

But the tune was Etta's favorite song, and Chjara held her hands over the bowls without touching them. She let the song play in her mind. She heard Etta's song lift like a somber, ominous bird from a black pond, and she felt the comfort of the sound, which was company, a companionship, inside herself — not easily turned to words or knowledge or logic that could be conveyed to another person. But she heard it herself.

'From now on,' she vowed to David when he returned, 'no one will hear me play the glass harmonica. I quit it.'

'They win?' he said.

'No. I don't lose so much.' She would keep her music to herself. She would hold it inside her. Then, maybe, her children would be safer.

'We'll see.' He climbed aboard. They still had several hours of daylight left. 'Let's go up the Schohariekill Road.' He pointed across the stream at the road leading west.

'That's Schohariekill?'

‘Yes. Etta has told me the name of that road, I don’t know how many times. I think we should follow it.’

Chjara had been drawn down into a gaunt, severe inversion of herself. She shrugged. ‘I don’t know what to do. I don’t have any idea.’

## Chapter Sixteen

Etta stood in a circle of girls her own age holding hands around a campfire. They were all flushed red on the front side and chilled cold on the back. They were taking turns talking, with their eyes closed. In the distance, they could hear the minister calling people to the river. They heard the song begin: *Shall we gather by the river?*

The girls opened their eyes. 'Shouldn't we go?' said one of the smaller ones. The tallest, next to Etta in the circle, said, 'No, we each get a turn here. Then we'll go.'

So they closed their eyes again and the girl three away from Etta began to pray aloud but Etta didn't listen past 'Dear Jesus'. Instead, she listened to the hymn and she let the darkness behind her closed eyes envelope her. For the first time since her 'ordeal' had begun, she stopped pretending she had been taken captive. She had chosen to come here and the rest was play-acting. Please don't let my mother be mad at me, she thought for the thousandth time, and then she relaxed. She gripped the hands of Bonnie on her left and Carolyn on her right, and she got answering squeezes back. The girl who was praying said something about laying her burden down. Then the next girl prayed, saying her burden was that her hands weren't strong enough to knead dough. The other girls laughed. 'In earnest, dear God,' continued the girl praying, 'dear God, don't laugh at me like my sisters here because my mother says we are all a heap of trouble and a burden. I want to help her but she says my hands aren't even strong enough to knead dough. So God, I thank you for making me like this. I know I am perfect in your sight, especially once I name my burden and lay it down. Here is my burden, which I give up for your safekeeping. Amen.'

Now it was Carolyn's turn, who was beside Etta. Etta would have to go next. Carolyn prayed rapidly. She had an outbreak of scales on her hands and face and she thanked Jesus that no one here teased her about her ugliness. No one said anything about it, she told Jesus. Etta realized no one had teased her about her wandering eye, either, not one person. 'I am beautiful in Your eyes,' Carolyn was saying, 'I am beautiful in Your eyes, I

am beautiful.’ Then Carolyn took her hands away, pulling free of the circle. She lifted the sleeves of her shirt, and showed the pocked and oozing flesh, and she asked Jesus to heal her, please heal her. She cried as she prayed.

The girls grew quiet and most of them opened their eyes but not Etta. Etta reached without looking and, taking Carolyn’s hand back, sang the song from her mother’s singing-school lessons: *‘O give him praise. Sun and Moon bright. All stars of light. O give Him praise.’*

They knew the song and they sang it together. When they had finished, Etta left the circle, keeping her eyes closed. She crawled underneath the bellies of the horses all in a row. She had practiced being blind all her life because of the relief it gave her from her skewed vision, so she did not need to peek. From under the horses, she scooped mud with their urine in it, and carried it in the apron of her skirt. Then, still walking with her eyes closed, she returned to the warmth of the fire.

‘Carolyn, hold out your arms,’ she said.

With one hand, Etta held out the bowl of her skirt. Her other hand found Carolyn’s arms. She applied the poultice while Carolyn said, ‘Thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus.’

‘I’m not Jesus. This is a poultice I learned about in North Carolina when I was eight and had bee stings.’

‘Thank you, Jesus, for teaching Etta.’

Etta giggled. The other girls opened their eyes.

‘Don’t you believe, even a little?’ said Bonnie.

Now they were standing around the fire with their hands hanging. Disappointment was in their faces; Etta saw it.

‘I don’t know God.’ It was as honest as she’d been all weekend.

‘Would you like to meet Him?’ said Bonnie.

‘Sure,’ Etta said, half joking.

‘How do you meet anyone new?’ said Bonnie

Etta shrugged.

‘You call on Him. You open the door. You say, “Jesus, if you are there, come in.”’

‘Sounds reasonable,’ Etta admitted.

‘Will you go with me now to meet Jesus?’ Bonnie held out her hand.

Etta pretty much had to take Bonnie’s hand — and when she did, she was surprised to feel it trembling. The hand felt alive with current. ‘I ask the

Holy Spirit to come down for we are gathering in His name.’ Bonnie spoke evenly and clearly as if she had done this before. ‘I ask the Holy Spirit to fill me and overflow me and I ask for the sake of the soul of Etta. Dear sweet Jesus,’ Bonnie said, and her whole body was beginning to tremble like an animal that was cold. Etta watched, critically, and Bonnie opened her eyes. ‘It’s not going to work if you don’t try.’

‘I’m trying.’

‘You have to stop thinking.’

‘Really? Why would I want to do that?’ Etta was back to wanting to remember everything — to tell Simon later.

‘Do you think when you sing?’ Bonnie demanded.

Etta considered. ‘Not really.’

‘Close your eyes and say Jesus loves me.’

‘Jesus loves me,’ Etta parroted.

‘Say it a hundred times without thinking, like you’re singing it, only don’t sing. Just let your tongue move like this...’ Bonnie stuck out her tongue and wagged it, saying ‘lalalalalala’ very fast. ‘Just say “love”,’ she amended. ‘Go “love-love-love-love-love,” because Jesus is love. He loves you, and if you open your heart to Him He will come in. He will come in like a lover and fill you with Himself.’

Carolyn giggled. Etta flushed and the other girls wore expressions of understanding, though their eyes were full of questions.

‘Love-love-love-love,’ Carolyn began from Etta’s other side, then she gripped Etta’s hand tightly and whispered, ‘My arms don’t hurt at all. Thanks for helping me.’

‘You’re welcome.’ Etta swelled inside.

‘Love-love-love-love,’ Carolyn said, showing Etta her tongue. ‘Like that.’

Etta said, ‘Love-love-love-love...’ and kept her eyes open while the others closed theirs. Once again, they encircled the fire, this time chanting, ‘Love-love-love-love...’ and this time, Bonnie led them more directly still. ‘Come down Jesus.’ She said over the chorus of their la-la-la-loves, ‘Fill me with your spirit. Let me show Etta Your spirit is good. Fill me and let me speak for You. Father in heaven and Your Holy Son, come to me and be with me. I believe in You. I believe. I believe. I am Your servant. Let me be the voice of love.’

‘Lalalalalalalalalalove,’ Etta said, until she had no breath and then she

said it breathing in as well, drawing in the sound of love, the word, love. I lalalalalove my new friends, she thought. I don't care that they are Revivalists. I don't care that this is crazy. I lalalalove to lalalove; she said it faster, longer, and she said it until she couldn't breathe and still she said it again, sucking it in, sucking on the sound of her own voice and that's when it happened. She started saying something else that she never meant to say. She couldn't even hear herself properly. She just knew her tongue was moving with new, unpracticed sounds.

'Praise Jesus.' Bonnie was weeping.

Etta closed her eyes tighter, squeezing them shut, and heard the sounds of her friends. Each said a different word or a similar word and together the sound was beautiful. This was music not even her mother had yet discovered. Etta felt her voice vibrate on her tongue and she felt the sound go in her ears and rush down her spine.

Carolyn squeezed Etta's hand, which made Etta almost stop this thing, which pulled from above like the string of a kite. She shrugged off Carolyn's hand and lifted her arms, and she shook as Bonnie had, only more — and when she opened her eyes, looking up at the stars, she felt she was not human. She felt she was not on her feet. She felt she was spirit only and her eyes didn't hurt any more.



On Saturday night, all the search parties gathered at the post office for new instructions. Henry arrived alone. Simon and Peter were still gone. Chjara and David had not returned, for which Henry was secretly grateful. He would break open, were she to appear. They'd found nothing at Ridge's house, no sign at all. Henry realized how close he'd come to exposing himself. If it weren't for Ridge's wife following behind them wringing her hands, he and Ridge might have come to words — words that everyone could have heard.

Henry regarded the people milling about the yard of the post office and tried to guess how many knew about his contraband: ten? thirty? The yard was full, one end to the other. Torches burned around tables where volunteer organizers of the search hunched over maps. Night was



falling, Henry watched Tom Ridge circulate among the crowd. He felt the hot glances of people as they came and went. His daughter's name was unspoken or whispered, as at a funeral. He closed his eyes against a vision of her, shackled, dirty, alone. He would take a beating to death if only she could be brought back safe and whole. Henry looked up to the overhang of the building, the burn of sorrow and tiredness in his eyes. He could hardly contain his tears. He pressed his back against the wall and crossed his arms over his chest.

'You poor soul.' A matron approached him and patted his shoulder. She looked directly into his eyes, this stranger, and it was all he could do not to abuse her. Get away from me, he thought. Somewhere out there, Etta was receiving the full weight of the collective pity of the nation — she, who only wanted to avoid being seen, to live a quiet village life. He remembered the sight of Etta on the boat as they'd landed and he remembered his pride over 'his achievement'. The hubris of it now appalled him. He knew — he was not a fool — how precarious their happiness was. All of life was like skating over the thin black ice of a pond. Anyone could fall in through debt or disease or damnation — damnation being the judgment of others unleashed without mercy. How many people at this post office alone would like to punish him and his family? Of all the secret inclinations on this earth, he felt there was none more common than the desire to see a man brought low. Henry remembered the prison in Paris, and the guard licking his lips over the suffering he could inflict. Power was the greatest intoxicant and the people in this yard had their sails full of wind because they felt greater than the famous Garlands of Portsmouth.

A noise from up the road drew the crowd's attention. Henry hurried to the front. Had someone found his daughter? The question and its answer rippled through the crowd all in the same instant. No, she was not found.

Simon appeared. The crowd parted for him, and then for Peter and all the Harlequins except David. Henry saw that the men of the *Henry G* seemed to move as one, giving off a feeling like heat. Suppressed fury was on Simon's face. Henry tried to push through the crowd and join them down at the front of the yard. The smell of sweat and tension fouled the humid air and the torches crackled and snickered. He was halfway to Simon when he heard the crowd hush. Everyone strained to hear.

'What do you mean, *maybe she's gone to a better place?*'

It was Simon's voice, and he barely controlled his anger.

A woman answered. 'I didn't mean anything by it.'

'What would be a better place than with her family?'

'There's no need to get riled up.' Henry recognized the voice of the militia commander, John Ferguson.

'We should all get some rest now,' Ferguson said.

'Someone here knows something,' Simon shouted to the crowd.

Henry still couldn't reach the front, though he'd made some headway.

'Simon!' he called. He willed Simon to stop. *Don't you put yourself in danger now, too.*

'But we've all been trying to help you find her. Why do you accuse us?'

'Because I'm desperate,' Simon shouted. He cried, his voice breaking.

'I'm desperate enough to tell the truth. Someone here must be in league with the men who did this. Someone here knows something.'

'Maybe the Indians took her,' said someone.

'Maybe someone dressed as an Indian, like you did in the Revolution here — to do violence to your enemies. Why are we your enemies?'

'Son!' Henry called.

Hearing him, they all turned.

'That's the one, if there's anyone here to blame.' Tom Ridge rose

up out of the crowd. His voice carried as only a preacher's could.

Beside him were his sons, four scowling giants.

'Let me pass,' Henry said. The crowd made way for him.

Simon saw his father coming toward him. 'Why do you blame my father? Or my mother? Why do you blame my sister — because of her wandering eye? You disgust me with your superstitions.'

'Don't, Simon!' Henry called, but the crowd drowned him out, booing at Simon.

A young woman appeared from out of the crowd, the one who had said that everyone here had been helping. 'Why do you accuse us?' she repeated, angrily. 'We don't live like you. We don't...' her hand fluttered in the air, 'vagabond the world, a woman alone on a boat of men, giving entertainments. We live here. We raise our families, we plant our crops and we thank God for the strength to resist temptation.'

'But her "temptation" is music,' Simon cried, exasperated. 'We only believe that pleasure is not inimical to virtue. Is this so hard to bear?'

*Please*, Henry whispered, begging with his eyes. *Don't lecture now, Simon, stand away*. He sent his thoughts across the crowd, reaching out with them. *It's dangerous*.

The woman tilted up her chin. 'There's one kind of pleasure, and there's others. We have to be vigilant or we will fall and be like...'

'And be like us?'

'Yes. Loose. Untethered from society.'

'I don't care for your society.' Simon's voice shuddered with sadness. He seemed near to weeping. 'Why can't you leave us alone?'

'Why can't you leave *us* alone?' snapped Jack Ridge, Tom's oldest son. 'Leave us. Leave our town.'

'We won't.' Simon straightened. 'We'll give a concert tomorrow. We'll give entertainments on Sunday because that is what Etta would want.'

'I don't think you will,' Jack Ridge said.

Someone called from the back. 'The Ban is in effect on Sundays. You'll go to jail.'

Jack hissed at Simon, 'You're spawn of the Devil, you are.'

'You will *not* insult my mother, man.' Simon pushed Jack.

Jack struck Simon.

The woman in front of Henry blocked his view. He maneuvered past her but the crowd had closed around the brawl, leaning in to watch. Henry caught only glimpses. He couldn't reach his son. He saw a cane upraised in a fist. He saw Peter and the Harlequins pinned back by other men, while the giant Ridge sons attacked Simon. Henry crawled over the ground between legs, and when he finally reached the front, he saw Tom Ridge's boot smash down on Simon's groin.

Henry saw Simon's face as he cried out in pain. Henry rocketed forward, only to be hauled back. Someone had him by the feet. Simon's eyes flickered open and found Henry's. They were dark with pain and terror. Henry reached for him. He struggled over the ground, but someone was pinning his feet.

'Stop!' he roared. Peter was shouting too.

Then he saw Jack Ridge, the giant of the giant sons, kick Simon in the side, then again in the groin. The Ridge sons moved as one. They crouched over Simon, held him down, pummeled him, and Simon's eyes were on Henry. They widened and filled with tears. Blood trickled from his mouth

into the dirt. Henry couldn't reach him. He couldn't stop it and he watched his son slip into a faint and go white with shock. When he had him in his arms at last, he whispered in Simon's unhearing ears, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' pulling him closer. Henry felt hot blood against his shirt as he looked down into the bruised and broken face of his son.

Henry lifted Simon as if he were a child, and he looked in Tom Ridge's eyes with the promise of reckoning, Simon twitched like a man electrified and Henry thought his son was dead — but then Simon breathed. His neck was slippery with cold sweat.

'Get a doctor.'

'Send the doctor to the boat.' Peter pressed in close, his arms out to guard them.

Henry carried his unconscious son in his arms. Men tried to help him with his burden. He turned on them, his mouth wide as a bear's, snarling. His son was breathing. Henry clutched him closer, and walked step by step through the dark streets to the boat with his men around him, the crowd following like a pack of dogs, waiting to close in.



In the dark, too late to turn back to Kingston, Chjara and David stopped at a farmhouse on Saturday night. There, Chjara let herself be led to a bed. With her hair in a bun and her clothes as she'd worn them through the day, she lay under covers, bundled in the attic bed with four children. The children squirmed and farted. Exhausted by grief, Chjara slept.

David Rodin could not sleep. He passed a few dark hours on the moldy hay in the barn, then crept sneezing into the kitchen where he found the good farm wife. She could not sleep either, for imagining her own babes lost. The two passed the night hours with a deck of cards. The wife knew playing-cards could also be the Devil's playthings, just like the famous glass harmonica, but with her husband at the Revival meeting down at the river, she decided to overlook the rules this once. There at the wood table soaked black with years of butchered meat and spilled milk, she let herself be tricked again and again by a story that began with the cards all neat: the kings in one stack, the queens in another, and the jacks chaste, too. The story

had them sleeping in separate rooms at an inn but one king had to get up and go out to the privy. He came back into the wrong room. On and on the story went until the cards were a jumble, and queens were sleeping in beds with jacks. But then David picked up the stack, and even though she'd seen the jumble with her own eyes, he turned the cards over and everyone was back in the right place, as if nothing had ever happened.

When dawn came, an aged rooster croaked in the yard. Chjara creaked down the attic ladder, and came upon the farm wife playfully slapping the actor who defended himself, smiling: 'What? What? There's no trick.'

They stopped their game. The woman looked guilty and David had the bruised blue skin of exhaustion around his eyes.

'Let's go,' Chjara said.

When David had harnessed the horses, and Chjara was sitting on the carriage bench, the farm wife mentioned that her husband would be back from the Revival at the river that day. She cast a quick rueful glance at the handsome actor.

'What revival meeting?' Chjara said.

'They're camped on the Schohariekill River — off the road two miles.'

'When did this camp start?' Chjara asked.

'Thursday morning.'

'That's the first morning she was gone,' Chjara told David.

They hurried. They hardly talked; they only urged the horses on. With the early sky still glowing red, their carriage clattered down a primitive side road. Chjara saw the camp from the hill overlooking the river. People were standing in the water. She and David walked the last bit. They saw a man waist-deep, and with him a girl dressed in white.

The girl was Etta. And she was smiling. Her hair streamed as she came up from the water, and her face was radiant. Chjara ran and swept her child up in her arms. Etta clasped her tight in return. 'I have found my life, Mama,' she whispered. 'I have found it.'



Chjara and Etta rode back to town in the carriage, David driving them as fast as the horses could go. Chjara held Etta to her and Etta cried that

she was sorry for vanishing, that she was sorry for being a worry, that she wanted to be forgiven but *listen, listen* to what she had discovered. Chjara felt her daughter's warm skin against hers, and felt her happiness. The air was sweet. The wind through the windows of the carriage lifted their hair and Chjara kept Etta in her arms. God had seduced her daughter, and Chjara feared that Etta would be disappointed in Him in time. God didn't help people: He left them on their own, here in their 'freedom'. She held Etta close, and vowed again to protect her, to live quiet as a mouse and protect her children from now on. Chjara did not thank Mary; she did not thank God. She clutched Etta and thought, I refuse You. From now on, I do not vibrate. I love only mine and mine alone.

They arrived in Kingston before noon, the streets quiet on this Sunday. Henry met them, running down the dock toward them, and as he got closer, Chjara saw from his face that something was wrong. Cold ran down through her like hard drink.

Henry saw Etta and lifted her from the carriage in a hurried, desperate embrace. Over Etta's shoulder, he told Chjara, 'Simon is hurt.'

Etta cried, 'What? What's wrong with Simon?'

Everything stopped. 'Is he hurt badly?'" Chjara asked.

Henry turned his face away.

'Will he live?' she whispered.

'He's down below.'

Chjara flew to her son, and she could hear Henry keeping Etta from following. She found Simon in his hammock, his back toward her. Peter stood guard. She crawled underneath the hammock to get to Simon, to come up to his face against the wall, and she saw his eyes bruised shut, and yet one opened slightly.

'Etta?' he croaked. 'Do you have her?'

'She's fine, but Simon, oh Simon.' She pulled him to her. Peter left quietly. She rocked her boy in her arms, and stroked the hair that clung to his forehead. He was everywhere cut and bruised, and he had the sweat of the dying on him.

'Mama,' he said.

'Shhhh.'

He looked at her through the slit of one eye. 'Mama, I've worked it out.'

'What?' she said. 'Sleep, Simon. Don't talk.'

‘I’ve worked it out. Look.’ He lifted the blanket from himself.

She saw his manhood, the sac swollen to the size of a hen. It was sickly yellow and threaded with blue.

He saw the horror on her face. ‘They don’t want me to spawn. They don’t want our kind to live on.’

‘Oh Simon!’ she cried.

He looked at her, his smile thin. ‘I provoked them.’

‘No, I did — not you,’ she said.

‘I was proud, and I provoked them.’ His expression was dark with grief

‘It’s me they want to punish. All my life I have provoked them. It’s my fault. Simon, I wish I could take it back. I wish I could take it all back.’

‘Don’t say that.’ Tears rimmed his eyes. ‘Don’t you ever say that.’ He closed his eyes and tears flooded his cheeks. His dry mouth cracked open. ‘When I cry,’ he said so softly he almost breathed the words, ‘the tears burn everywhere. I burn everywhere that I’m cut. I have to not cry.’

Up above there were voices. The sound of the uncles’ reunion with Etta. The sound of whispering. Simon covered himself. Henry and Etta climbed down the ladder and Etta ran to her brother.

Chjara and Henry saw their children embrace. Etta wept and Simon cried aloud and then said, ‘Stop, I can’t cry, it hurts,’ which made Etta cry only louder.

Chjara couldn’t look at Henry, and Henry couldn’t look at Chjara. They were hardly breathing in the gloom of the ship’s hold. ‘I did this, Henry.’ Chjara’s words stopped in her throat. She turned and put her arms around him so she could hide her face in his shoulder. ‘Our son is dying because of me.’ She cried. ‘Henry, I’m so sorry.’

‘No. Nothing is because of you.’ He lifted her chin. He made her look at him. ‘Nothing is because of you. We’ll talk later, I promise.’

David came down, bringing fresh cold compresses. Henry gave them to his battered son.

Simon wanted to apply them himself. ‘Leave me a minute,’ he said.

‘Can I fetch you anything?’ Chjara had wiped the tears from her face and made her voice firm.

‘Get me my sweater, the one from Old Randall.’

‘All right.’

Old Randall, the Puritan, who had believed not in freedom but in

sacrifice and the common good.

Chjara led them out, and Henry took Etta up on deck. Chjara singled out Simon's winter trunk. She opened it and pushed aside the top layer of clothes, puzzled to see a box there. It had a scrimshaw decal with 'JDB' engraved in black curlicue. She opened the box.

Love daggers.

She closed it quickly. Where did Simon get love daggers?

'Henry?' she called.

Henry peered down into the hold, Etta and Peter behind him. Chjara heard him tell Peter to take Etta to town, and let the militia know. Henry came down.

Chjara counted a dozen love daggers in the top row. The rows went four deep.

'How does Simon need so many?' she said, covering her mouth and her puzzled smile — before the expression on Henry's face froze her to the core.

Henry closed the trunk. 'Simon doesn't know about them.'

But *he* knew about them, she realized.

He was returning the trunk to its slot, clamping it down. His back was to her.

'You do know about them,' she said. 'Why four dozen? We could not use so many in...'. His back was still to her. As if pushed by a force within, she found herself turning. She opened Etta's trunk. Under the clothes, she saw Webster's spelling books. Why were they in there? She opened one. The inside leaf said *Aristotle's Masterpiece*. She turned to a page that said 'Of Carnal Copulation'. She laughed but the sound was not her own laugh.

'I have a secret enterprise,' Henry said stiffly.

She stared at him. 'What kind of enterprise?' she whispered.

Simon called from his hammock, 'I'm cold.'

Henry's face was a stranger's face. A hard face. He turned from her and went to their bed, which he lifted. Chjara watched with amazement as the bed swung up on hinges. Below was a trapdoor which he opened.

'Secret from me?' she said.

He dug in the secret hold and he didn't look at her.

'Speak to me, Henry. What is this, what is all this? Do you sell these goods?' She whispered, knowing it in that moment.

Above them on the deck, Etta called down. 'They're taking down our stage!'



Henry rose from the secret hold with Randall's old sweater held out in his hand. Chjara did not recognize this man. He said, 'I'll tell you everything later.' He turned and slipped the bed back into position in one remarkable, swift motion.

'They're disassembling the stage,' David called from above. 'We're not to perform today.'

'We will.' Simon appeared, standing gaunt outside his curtained alcove, clinging to the post.

'Simon! Lie down.'

'I want you to play,' Simon croaked.

'No, I don't think so.' Chjara closed the trunk over the boxes of love daggers, hiding them from her son. She closed her own trunk, glimpsing — incongruously — a stack of books in it called *Gulliver's Travels*. But that was just a common and popular novel.

David had come down the ladder. 'You should let your mother decide if she wants to play again,' he said. 'There's the Ban in effect.'

Chjara remembered her vow in the wood; she would never, ever play again. She looked at Simon's crooked figure, bent with his hand covering his pain.

'You have to play today. You have to go out and play. Or they win.' He tried to straighten, wincing with the effort. 'Play your glass harmonica. Play until they see why we do it.'

'Simon, I can't.'

He looked at her. She thought she would break with the sight of him looking at her, pleading.

They were all looking at her, except Henry. Henry averted his face. He stared out of the porthole, looking like the same man she had known all these years, but he was not the same man. She realized the tinder they were sitting on, right here in the boat. It was like a cache of explosives, those books, those goods. They were all around her, and Henry had known this all along.

She looked up to David, leaning in from the hold, and she could see from his face that he knew, too.

'Let's go. Now. Let's just cast off right now,' she managed.

'Mama,' Simon said. 'Don't let them silence you. Not after what they've done to me.'

Still not looking at her, Henry spoke. 'We need to act as if everything is the same. If go now, we agree we are guilty of something.' Now he did look at her. Very quickly. His eyes were grim with fear.

David said, 'Let's at least stop to thank everyone who helped us look for Etta, let's at least...'

'No, I understand,' Chjara said. Her heart twitched fearfully inside her. She needed to be the focus of attention — not Henry, and not what was on the *Henry G*. All along, she had been a decoy. And she hadn't known it.

'All right,' she said to Simon. 'I'll play. Give me some time to prepare.'



Chjara could see from the dock that a crowd filled the village green. The day was yellow, with even the grass blades blaring wide in the bright light. People at the crowd's edge noticed her approach and whispered. Almost instantly, the insect buzz of conversation from here to the other end of the park stilled, as if a minister had raised a hand for quiet. She stepped between two young men who parted for her only at the last moment. A hiss from somewhere to her left made her pulse leap.

Peter appeared from behind her. 'Make way.'

She saw the dismantled stage, its lumber now stacked neatly into a narrow platform with the glass harmonica on top. Simon sat on her stool. His face, yellow-purple with bruises, was turned to her. His eyes were bright with pride. Henry and Etta and the uncles lined the front row.

Chjara smiled gamely at Simon. Alarm cramped her belly.

Simon rose from the stool and she took her place.

'Hurrah!' came a single shout. 'Liberty,' came another. There were a few paltry claps of applause.

Simon remained standing beside her.

'Go,' she whispered, but he crossed his arms and stood guard. He had to balance with his legs wide around his wound. She wanted to call this off and he saw it.

'Courage, Mama.'

Her mouth was dry as she dipped her fingers in the water bowl and started the treadle. Leaves rustled in a slight wind. A child cried. They were

waiting to see if she would really defy the Ban. She made the mistake of looking to Henry and seeing his bland, neutral expression, the disguise he'd worn all their married life. Her heart tore as her fingers descended onto the spinning bowls. All his life he'd been false.

The sound was a squawk. Not enough water, not enough pressure. Embarrassed, she lifted and dipped her fingers again. She saw the reporter, Bill Duncan. He smiled encouragingly. Every note would be broadcast in words to his readers everywhere; words of approval or of opprobrium.

Chjara concentrated. She pressed the pedals more firmly. When the glasses spun to a blur and the right amount of moisture coated the flats of her fingertips, she played a single, ringing chord out loud and the song began. She played without being there. Her hands moved. Her ears heard. An echo came back from the church bell, the curve of it amplifying a part of the brittle high note. She raised her head, her breath shallow. In the crowd behind Henry, a row of men watched her with interest and disgust. The music arrested them for this moment. From a thousand miles away, she observed one bearded face, a man with wild cowlicks raising his hair. *Did you? Did you buy goods from my husband? A love dagger?* She scanned from left to right. How many had done so? How many opened to the page, 'Of Carnal Copulation', before they came to listen to her? She opened her mouth and before she herself knew she would do it, her breath broke into two. It was her lowest note, a growl. The slow undulation went out from her like a wave.

The first egg arrived. It splattered at her feet. Henry rushed forward, his face full of warning. She shouldn't draw attention to herself like this? But wasn't that how it worked? She distracted everyone. That was the purpose of her concerts. She pictured him, closing up his wares at the end of every performance, his business done. That was his strategy, and how ingenious it was! The wound of betrayal opened inside her, and her agony bellowed out, raw, guttural and unpleasing.

'Devil!'

Chjara turned her neck stiffly, her voice moving with her like a beam. A group of girls stared, white faced. One fainted. Etta ran to them and consoled the fallen girl. Etta covered her friend's ears. She looked up at Chjara, accusing — *why do you have to be this way?* Chjara heard her own voice still coming from her mouth. She hadn't known she was still breathing.

She looked down at her hands moving over the glasses, at her feet pumping the treadle.

‘Demon!’ called another.

A sour turnip found her shoulder. Suddenly everyone had something to throw. Chjara tucked her head down; her shoulders shrank against the blows.

‘Stop!’ Simon held up his hands. A missile struck him in the chest and he buckled but stood again.

‘The boy’s already bruised. Don’t hit the boy!’ someone called out.

A rotted tomato splashed at his feet.

‘Hurt me, not her,’ Simon cried out. ‘I’m the one who told her to play. Strike me. Hit me.’

The crowd stilled, holding their fire at the sight of Simon’s injuries.

Then two constables appeared on the stage.

‘Chjara Garland, we’re arresting you on a charge of public indecency.’

Henry was behind them, his eyes seeking hers.

She looked down. Her hands had stopped playing. They were trembling. ‘I am indecent?’ she whispered. ‘I am the one?’

Henry was beside her, hissing into her ear. ‘Go with the constables. You’ll be safe in the prison. I’ve arranged everything. Go. Now.’

She looked at him as if she’d never seen him before. Who was this monster? This was her husband?

Simon grasped her hand. The crowd pressed in. The constables flanked her so closely, she could feel their breath on her cheeks. She heard glass breaking. Her harmonica. A wad of warm spit landed on the back of her neck. It dribbled underneath her collar. Simon saw it and his mouth twitched. Tears ran down his face. His warm hand clutched hers. She was walking as if on stilts. The dream came back. The dream was true. All love was false, Henry’s, hers. They had been wrong all along.



Henry let them take his wife to the town dungeon. He watched the same volunteers who had yesterday helped search for Etta cheer as Chjara ducked into the black hole of the dungeon door.

‘The stocks!’ someone called. ‘Put her in the stocks.’

‘Willful disrespect is what it is.’

Henry had paid the mayor. He had made arrangements with the help of the councilor, Ebenezer Smith, and the next morning they could leave town. Chjara would be kept one night in jail, but she would not be put in the town stocks as the Ban on Indecent Entertainments demanded. *Keep your side of the bargain*, he urged silently as the crowd took up the call: ‘Stocks — in the stocks!’

Simon climbed the prison stairs to challenge the sheriff. Henry’s shoulders sank. *No, Simon*. But the sheriff called out, ‘Who beat this man?’ He put his hands on Simon’s shoulder: ‘If we have stocks, we’ll have stocks for both.’

Grumbling rose from the crowd. Some began to leave and others followed. The sheriff spoke urgently to Simon, calming him.

Henry stared at the dungeon window. *Please look out*, he pleaded. He begged her, *Please look my way. I will make this right*.

She did not appear.

‘Etta left you of her own volition then.’ It was Bill Duncan, the reporter, standing in front of Henry. ‘She wasn’t coerced in any way?’

‘Right.’ Henry found it hard to speak.

The reporter was saying that he regretted his previous article. He had made all those grand statements, and meanwhile the girl was off — joining the Revival movement herself. ‘You will leave tomorrow when they let Chjara out?’ Duncan asked.

‘Tomorrow at noon she is to be freed.’ Henry wasn’t allowed to go to her. Ebenezer had warned him fiercely: ‘If you go, someone will smell the deal.’

‘Tell me, Henry, do you think this is unjust?’ The reporter looked at him earnestly. ‘She chose to play, despite the ban. And Etta chose to leave.’

‘Of course I think it is unjust.’

‘I see.’ The reporter scribbled.

The next day, the reporter’s account would land heavily on the people’s right to make laws as they saw fit, and to enforce them. This was an era of choice, the reporter concluded, which has its costs. He reported the brawl, but he did not know the extent of Simon’s injuries. Simon wanted no one to know. The reporter wrote, *High feelings on all sides led to a fight in a tavern. The son was injured but is expected to recover.*



When night was nearly over, Henry couldn't wait any longer. He crept through the deserted streets to the jail. There was no moon, but humid air filled the vague dark around him. Despite the warmth, Henry clutched a blanket to his chest, with extra clothing and a tumbler of wine. He thought of the chilly prisons he'd visited in his life, with his mother, in Paris, and with Tom Boone. He remembered the privy in the Philadelphia jail where he'd retched with nervousness over his fate, and now Chjara was the one in jail — the woman whom he should have protected from all harm — his wife, his marvelous wife — and his heart hurt as if it had been pounded with a fist.

He silently crossed the town green. He found the barred basement window of the town hall and bent down to it, undetected by the sleeping guards.

'Chjara?' he whispered.

She was there, in the nether light. She did not come to the window. He saw her face only dimly.

Then she did come. He gave her the blanket, which she took without a word. He knew the basement would be damp, stinking of effluent and crawling with bugs.

He put his hand through the bars and it hung there but she did not take it.

'You despise me.' Henry had no air, only a hot pain in his chest where air should be. 'You are right to despise me.'

She didn't speak.

Henry waited.

'You lied to me,' she said. 'Henry. Why did you?' He could hear how lost she felt.

'I didn't mean to,' he whispered.

'How did you not mean to lie to me?' Her voice mocked him, but feebly.

'I didn't want to lie to you. I wanted to keep us safe.'

'We've been in far, far more danger than I ever knew.'

'Yes.' He admitted it.

'Our children always — they were always in danger, Henry.' Her voice flared. 'No, Chjara...'

'Yes. They were.' She cursed him in Corsican, hissing out the words, but

her face sank in her hands and her body caved forward.

She wept then: coarse sobs from deep in her chest.

He wanted to speak. He could say nothing.

She cried and he couldn't reach her. He knelt at the window and all he could do was wait, his knees in the grass as he reached in.

'When did it start? How long has this been going on?'

'Since long ago.'

'How long? If you don't tell me the truth now, Henry, I'll...'

Her voice tailed off.

'The *Magdalene*.'

She was silent.

'Chjara, darling: Only money keeps people safe.' He pulled closer, talking through the bars. 'Only money would have kept you safe, kept us safe. Everything depends on it. Freedom depends on it. I had to earn. Earn, earn. I've seen it, in farmhouses, when there's always more to pay... pennies from a few eggs hoarded and sold to strangers — that won't pay for a life, Chjara. Only something with risk... only something with some dishonesty to it — that's what pays in this world.'

'Concerts don't pay.'

He hesitated.

'What a fool I've been.' She ground the words through clenched teeth.

'Concerts don't pay, but I wanted you to give them,' he choked. 'I wanted you... I wanted to hear you. I wanted to protect you. I wanted — '

'You didn't do this for me. Don't pretend that you did.'

'But I did, Chjara. Listen to me. There's always been a secret world. Everywhere. All around us. That's where my trade has been. And it's not always a bad trade. There are good reasons for it...'

'The brooches sold. They made your pennies, didn't they?'

He didn't reply.

'I wanted to be with you. *With*,' she cried. 'You never told me the truth. It was all a lie. All of it.'

'It wasn't.'

'What about our mutual electricity? Was that a lie too?'

'You can't believe it, Chjara. You know me.'

'You've left me so alone. You are a stranger to me. I hate you for this, Henry... I hate you for this.'

‘I knew you would hate me. If I told you before now, you would have hated me earlier.’

‘Coward,’ she spat. ‘Who do think I am? Do you think I’m an innocent little wife? A naïf? A silly girl who pales at the sight of a love dagger? No. I’m not like that. So why lie to me? You did not love me enough.’

‘I do love you.’ Henry could see her better now, pressing fists to her temples. He glanced behind him: dawn was coming, the horizon gone yellow and purple as a bruise. She wouldn’t believe him. Never again.

‘I’ve been unfaithful to you,’ she said.

‘What?’

‘I thought we were electric together, but no... Oh, it was all a lie. It was all untrue. I was also untrue. But I... I actually believed that when my feelings were strong, they brought me closer to you. Even if my feelings turned...’ she swallowed, ‘turned to wickedness, I found you. I went and found you. I brought my love to you with the new strength of my feelings. My a-rousal.’ Her accent made her growl the word.

‘Who?’ He was pummeled.

‘You knew,’ she hissed. ‘You knew I wanted to be worshiped. Often. Every day. By as many men as possible.’

‘Every day?’

‘A thousand times, Henry. A thousand times.’

He sat. She was lying; she was saying this to hurt him. ‘Chjara, please. Please let’s tell the truth now. Let’s start new. We have enough money. We’ll go West...’

‘No,’ she said, ‘we will not go West.’

Around Henry were the wakening birds, the changing scent of morning. There was dew on the grass. After a silence he asked, ‘Do you mean to leave then, Chjara?’

‘Where would I go?’

Henry put his hands to the cold bars. She was sitting erect, no tears, staring only at her hands. She had gone far away.

‘Where would I go, Henry? Where is my home?’

‘I will be a better home.’

‘Yes.’ She lifted her face. ‘Yes, Henry. You will be my home. That is what we’ll pretend. We’ll go on lying about our happiness.’

‘No.’



‘Yes, and we’ll go to Portsmouth, where Etta can go to her grandmother’s church. The children must never know. Never. We’ll live a modest, quiet, happy life.’

‘Chjara.’

‘I’ll never play another note.’

## Part IV

### Chapter Seventeen

They lived in a brick house on the lot where his parents' house had burned. They lived beside each other. They spoke about the children and little else. Small kindnesses covered over the chasm of stale hurt between them. After five years, a letter came from Marguerite. *'We're in America,'* it announced. The duchess summoned them to Boston, where she and her husband Vicente were staying. *'Come quickly,'* Marguerite wrote.

Henry and Chjara arrived on a Tuesday in October, a fine afternoon with the red trees reflected in the glass of the Charleston River. Henry drove the carriage, wearing the old cape: the dove-gray wool that had made him feel so dashing long ago. It didn't suit him now. He looked heavy with age; it made a balloon airship of him. But Chjara had asked him to wear it, and ever since Kingston, he had done everything she asked. Chjara fidgeted beside him in her cape.

She had been silent nearly the entire way from Portsmouth. She used to sing en route in a carriage. She hadn't touched her new glass harmonica which Henry bought to replace the one smashed in Kingston, though he would often come upon her with her hands silently moving over the glasses. The long hours together on this trip to Boston made it plain how the habit of silence over one topic had spread like a contagion into the rest of their lives. He flicked the reins, urging the horses among the traffic of the thoroughfare. *'You are stubborn, woman,'* he said, apropos of nothing.

She turned. He saw how the moss green of her cape matched her eyes. *'The cape still becomes you, at least.'* He heard the lilt of petulance in his voice.

*'You look fine, dear.'* She pressed her fingers on his knee, but returned her gaze to the road in front of them. As her smile faded, he noticed the sag of her jowls.

He clucked the horses on.

Then they were there, at the Brown Hotel. Grooms came to take the horses, and African porters collected their baggage. Chjara had seemed to pack the entire house, not knowing what to wear or bring. They'd brought several trunks and hat boxes, as well as the travel box of their dog Justice — named, fortuitously, for their memory of Marguerite's little pet. He was a dachshund with only half a tail. Now he wagged that stub, eyes bright as he leapt out, up the hotel stairs and directly into the skirts of a silver-haired woman. The woman seemed so slender as to be only a spine bundled in a white blouse. They knew her by her eyes, which flashed dark and amused.

Henry watched the two women embrace, his heart aching because they held each other as if all had been lost until that moment. Beside Marguerite, a small stout man, his hair cut close around his solid head, grinned at Henry.

'You must be Vicente.' Henry extended his hand to the Italian opera composer they had met during the concert for Napoleon.

'I am the consort to the duchess,' the man said, tipping forward, his eyes fixed on Henry's. He looked fiercely happy, as if he anticipated — or had just been served — a sumptuous meal. His hand was warm in Henry's and his breath smelled of mint.

'Tell me everything,' Marguerite said, looping her arm in Chjara's.

Chjara glanced back at Henry. *Would they tell everything?* the glance said.

The two women led the way into the hotel, Marguerite complaining about the lapse of years since Chjara's last letter. Henry heard Chjara tell about the children. 'Simon lectures and plans to go West. Etta married her minister, and they travel in the South, giving Bibles to the slaves.'

'They sell books like their parents?'

'They give away the Bible. Henry finances it.'

Vicente and Marguerite led them to a private dining room where the afternoon light dropped from tall windows onto a white tablecloth. Crystal glasses gleamed on the side table as if ready for a party of forty. Vicente ordered a meal from a servant while Marguerite lifted their dog to the dining table for a closer look.

'You named your dog "Justice". Are you already at a time in America when you have to mock the authorities this way?' Marguerite patted the dog behind his little ears. 'We must admit,' she spoke to the dog, 'that we don't

know any better how to treat each other than dog to dog, yes?’ She looked at Henry.

He found himself unable to *repartee*. He had all but forgotten the French word and certainly the act of it. Vicente and Marguerite, at first, seemed not to notice. They spoke in an animated way about American politics — the stolen presidential election of 1824, and how corruption chased every regime. ‘Will it last,’ said Vicente, ‘your experiment in liberty? In France, ours is...’ he waved with his hand, ‘vanquished. Completely...’ he whistled through his teeth, ‘gone. A memory, receding in the distance.’

Chjara too mostly nodded while Marguerite and Vicente talked. Henry could see from her blank expression that her thoughts were elsewhere, and he suspected she was still thinking about telling Marguerite ‘everything’. The conversation lulled, and the dog barked, as if he wanted to fill in the gap. They laughed.

‘Simon gave us this dog,’ Chjara said.

‘I’ve met Simon,’ Marguerite said.

‘What? You have?’ Henry at last contributed a word. ‘But how long have you been here, in these United States?’

‘How long, my darling?’ Marguerite cast her eyes to her husband, her consort, her lover — her glance radiating tenderness.

‘We have arrived on the second of September.’ Vicente spoke in English so garbled as to be almost unintelligible. Henry leaned forward to grasp the words.

Marguerite applauded Vicente’s effort. ‘Yes,’ she said in English. ‘We...’ Her eyes searched the room, as if the next word was written somewhere on the walls. She flung her arms up and spoke very rapidly in French: ‘Ah, we will practice some other time. We’ve come to live the end of our lives in these United States.’

‘The beginning,’ Vicente said, ‘of our new lives.’

‘But *why*?’ Chjara asked the question with a hundred questions behind it. Her longing for home and her regret were palpable in the long-held note of her ‘why?’

Marguerite patted Chjara’s hand on the table. ‘There is so much to tell you.’

‘How did you meet Simon?’ Henry said.

‘We asked for the *Henry G.*’

‘Ah,’ Henry said. Simon had traveled through Boston not two weeks ago.

‘Simon told us you don’t play music anymore,’ Marguerite said. ‘Not even at home. How could that be?’

Henry moved his hand under the table, finding Chjara’s.

‘Do you remember that madman, the German, Roellig?’ Chjara said.

‘He told us how a German town banned the instrument, do you remember?’

‘Of course.’

‘Well, here too I was often under suspicion. One of my reviewers called the music “celestial ravishment”. One must be very careful when one is ravishing,’ she said, smiling just a little wickedly.

‘What an excellent thought — celestial ravishment,’ Vicente said.

‘Yes,’ Chjara smiled, her eyes twinkling.

Henry felt a terrible longing for this Chjara who delighted in what she had done.

Her shoulders slumped. ‘We thought we were safe enough. I didn’t... Our children, they’re the ones who got hurt. We hurt them.’

‘Yes, that’s what Simon said you think.’

‘He told you?’

‘He only told a little. He said you prefer not to speak about any of these things. His own wounds, he said, have healed. But you still don’t play any music.’ Marguerite’s expression was direct and unflinching.

‘There were good reasons to stop,’ Chjara said.

‘What reasons?’ Marguerite asked.

The food arrived: four trays carried by four servants.

‘I’ll tell you later,’ Chjara murmured, taking advantage of the distraction.

‘But it’s a mistake to give in to those people,’ Marguerite persisted. ‘Isn’t it? Why would you stop playing and let them have the last word?’

A plate was put before Chjara; before Marguerite; before Vicente; and then Henry. A serving dish in the middle presented a single fish, blistered from a scorching, its silvery belly slit to receive a paste of herbs and dark-scented cheeses. Black bread — the sweet Boston bread with molasses — alternated with slices of French bread on the side. At each setting stood a miniature tureen of mustard with a tiny silver ladle.

‘We will have this snack,’ Vicente said in English, lifting his wine glass.

‘Later we will consume the main dinner at the house of our American friends, the Corbetts.’

Marguerite raised her glass. ‘So you will tell me the good reason later,’ she conceded.

‘Oh, maybe I’m just being stubborn,’ Chjara blurted. ‘I’m told I can be stubborn.’ Henry’s offhand comment on the ride down had stung.

‘Excellent.’ Marguerite smiled. ‘So you will play for us on Saturday. We need you to play in our opera.’

‘There will be an opera?’

‘There will be an opera,’ Vicente said, his eyes alive.

‘She can’t play,’ Henry said. ‘It’s been years.’

‘I can. You just can’t hear me practicing.’ Chjara didn’t look at him. She spoke to Marguerite. ‘But people don’t always have good reasons for what they do — or stop doing. Sometimes their reasons are very poor.’

‘Your reason to stop playing was good enough. You were angry with me.’ Henry said softly. ‘It was my fault she stopped playing.’

‘My husband would like to think he is the cause of everything that I do,’ Chjara countered. She picked at her fish, her fork trembling.

The French friends stiffened, noticing the argument between them.

Henry did not know what to say. Wasn’t it what she wanted, for their friends to know it wasn’t her fault but his?

‘Henry sold...’ Chjara began. She flashed a nervous smile. She sat erect. ‘Well, Henry was a merchant of contraband. While I performed concerts, he sold love daggers.’

Their faces were bland.

‘Made of whale bone. In the shape of a man’s sex.’

There was a second of complete silence and then a bark of laughter from Vicente.

‘He also sold books,’ Chjara said.

‘Yes, that’s what you wrote to us. Henry is a bookseller. With a carriage.’ Vicente said.

‘Books about acts of pleasure.’

‘Ah.’ Vicente smiled. In rapid Italian, he spoke to Marguerite who smiled in turn.

‘What did he say?’ Chjara asked.

Vicente attempted to translate. ‘A sex shop on cartwheels. Yes?’

Chjara flushed. ‘Yes.’

‘Once it began,’ Henry said, ‘I couldn’t stop it. There was so much demand.’

‘Of course,’ said Vicente.

‘I could have stopped it,’ Henry corrected himself. ‘Only I didn’t.’

He was trying to explain himself. He was trying to confess in a way that Chjara would forgive him.

She was not looking at him.

Marguerite watched Chjara. ‘This is why your marriage — it suffers?’

‘No,’ Chjara said hotly. ‘We have suffered, Henry and I, because it came as a surprise to me when I found out. It was the day Simon was attacked.’

‘Because of me.’

Chjara sighed, aggravated. ‘Henry blames himself but I don’t feel any better when he blames himself. He is my husband and I try to understand what he does.’ She looked at him. Henry stirred uncomfortably. She turned to Marguerite: ‘Maybe this is a peasant superstition, but I do feel there is something that drives people to hurt each other. When a mob takes someone and beats him until he is castrated... When a mob...’ she leaned toward Marguerite, and dared to say, ‘when a mob takes a husband and a son and shears off their heads with a guillotine...’

Marguerite recoiled, her face white.

‘I’ve wanted to know. How could you forgive that?’

‘I didn’t forgive,’ Marguerite said.

‘Yes. I don’t either. It’s not Henry I won’t forgive. It’s us. It’s what’s in us. I’m afraid of who we can be. If there is a force in the air, our electricity, that can lead us to good, there is also a force that depletes and weakens us, and feeds on the worst in us. The opposite of electricity is destiny, which is nothing but the wishes of men — of people who are not wise. Who are selfish and brutal. Their wishes waft in the air like...’ she made a disgusting noise, ‘like some stink of digestion.’

Vicente barked a laugh.

‘But it’s true! We have to breathe this destiny. We can’t escape it. My mother understood in her peasant way — we can’t be free. We’re not made to be free. We have to breathe, and breathe — that! That air. It is convention. Propriety. Defying it is truly dangerous. You cannot control who gets hurt. It’s not safe to live freely.’

‘I couldn’t be free. You could,’ Henry told her.

‘If you blame just yourself, you don’t understand a word I’m saying. You’re distracted by your own shame. You can’t see what’s outside you.’

Vicente sniffed, miming a scent and following it with his nose.

‘The temptation of brutality.’

‘Exactly.’ Chjara looked at Vicente with relief.

Henry said, ‘I understand the temptation of brutality too. The erotic lust of it. I’ve seen that. It’s not me, it’s not what drives me. Drove me.’

‘I’m not talking about you.’

‘You are,’ Henry insisted.

‘I’m talking about the people who hurt our son. It’s not about you.’

But he knew it was. He’d wounded her. He remembered how she’d looked, pelted with eggs and rotted fruit. Not loved. He remembered her look of utter loneliness in the jail. And that *was* his doing.

‘So we should be paralyzed by this?’ Marguerite said. ‘That we cause each other more harm than God would ever do?’

Their food was almost untouched, the fish yet stark and splendid.

‘Well,’ Chjara said.

‘I was paralyzed,’ Marguerite said. ‘After Phillippe and Yann. Then I danced with you, my dear, do you remember?’

‘Of course I remember. But I was a child then. I can’t see it anymore. I can’t see God above wanting the best for us. I have lived too long.’

‘I have lived long and I know that I *can* — it is possible — I can add to the experience of beauty. Even *I* can do it. You cannot relinquish the burden of pleasure.’ Marguerite shook her head, and smiled as if there were not a joke yet, but one coming. ‘Not until you die. Then you can rest.’

‘She is dying,’ Vicente said. He meant Marguerite. He announced it with no dread or pompousness. ‘It is a disease of the breast.’

‘Of course I am dying, we are all dying, which is why we must live. The paradox, yes?’

Chjara looked as if she had been struck. Her eyes fixed on her friend’s face.

‘We *can* add to the power of pleasure,’ Marguerite repeated, ‘until we die. I agree with you, Chjara, and I’m afraid of who we are on this earth. We must be schooled to be better than we are. That is why pleasure exists.’

‘Why beauty exists,’ said Vicente.

‘No, pleasure,’ said Marguerite. ‘Because it’s here...’ She felt her breast. ‘Our feeling for beauty is what gives us strength. Not the beauty alone, but



our reaction to it — how we become alive. Inspired.’

There was a pause.

‘You must play,’ Marguerite said.

‘It feels so frivolous,’ Chjara blurted.

‘You must play when it seems *most* frivolous. Otherwise it is the guillotine that schools us.’

Chjara stared at Marguerite and at Marguerite’s hand on her breast. She bolted up from the table and crossed over, her skirt catching on the table edge. She whipped it free and practically threw herself at Marguerite. She clutched the older woman, and they shook there, holding each other.

Henry sat, watching.

Marguerite’s mouth twisted. ‘I will be unashamed-able. *Unvernünftig*. This is a word in German I learned from Vicente. I ask you to play the glass harmonica for me, though you express the gravest doubts. I would like to hear it again — on Saturday.’

‘All right,’ Chjara said softly.

‘We will go back into the stream of goodness. Together. And we will make a habit of it. As Vicente and I do every day, when we can.’ They looked at each other, and Vicente leaned to kiss her.

It was not a chaste kiss. This, too, Henry noticed.

‘We bring a challenge to you,’ Vicente said. He stood. ‘In eight weeks, we depart on the *Philanthropist*. It is a barge from Pittsburgh with scientists, educators, artists.’

‘The newspaper calls it the Boatload of Knowledge.’ Marguerite smiled.

‘We’re going to begin a new community called New Harmony in the West. In Indiana. There are more places left on the barge, at least two. For you.’ Vicente bowed to Chjara. ‘And,’ he paused, ‘... for you.’ He bowed more deeply to Henry. ‘Now we will take our repast to our chambers and rest, yes, my turtle dove?’ His expression, looking at Marguerite, was gentle. They could all see that she, with her emaciated body, had the exhaustion of the very ill.

Vicente and Marguerite left. Chjara and Henry stayed. The room was silent. The scorched fish lay on its platter. Henry felt unaccountably hungry. He felt ravenous. ‘Do you want to eat?’ he asked Chjara.

‘I have to practice.’ She was wan. She was staring at her hands.

‘Right now?’

‘Now.’ She left, urging him to eat for them both.  
He did. He ate keenly, sharing his plate with Justice.



Her glass harmonica was tucked in its spring-board cavity inside the carriage, as it had been during their itinerant years. Chjara had meant to play it silently there, in the carriage, since she did not need much room to maneuver when she only held her fingers above the glasses. Now she went out to the barn and entered, her skirts swishing on the hay-littered floor. A black man emerged from the shadows, and spoke deferentially. She told him she needed a place to play her music, out of earshot of the hotel guests. He gave her the barn stall underneath the main floor, a place where a cow had once eaten and shat and spent its days. There was a window out onto the kitchen garden.

She paid him handsomely. Men brought the instrument down to her.

All this time, she moved mechanically, efficiently. She shook and sometimes her heart seemed to thump twice where it should beat once. What if she had lost her talent?

The milking pail became a stool, with blankets heaped on top.

Chjara sat. They watched — the older black man and his three sons. ‘I will need to be out of earshot of you, too,’ she said, smiling.

They began to back out, but the elderly man turned. ‘Is it a piano?’

She lifted the lid for them.

She set the bowls spinning for the first time in years. She saw that the maids had dusted only the top portions: shine and duskiness flashed as the glasses turned. The men watched her wipe them down. Now they were spinning clear and Chjara dipped her finger into the water and touched a glass — as if it were not a momentous thing to touch the glass after keeping her fingers off, barely off, for hours every day.

It was the A note she played. The men came closer, listening. ‘It’s flat,’ she said. ‘That can’t be.’ She looked underneath the instrument. ‘Glass doesn’t change. It can’t lose its pitch.’

‘It sounds all right to me,’ said one son. Then he opened his mouth and sang, in a beautiful baritone, the single note of A.

Chjara looked at him — at his white teeth and his full lips. She looked down quickly. The man sang the notes of the A scale, there in front of her.

‘Hush,’ the father scolded.

‘Your ear — you hear the notes?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’

She played the glass again. ‘This isn’t flat?’

‘No, ma’am.’

‘And it can’t be,’ she told herself. She mumbled. Then she lifted her head and stared at the black man who could sing. ‘It is my ear,’ she said. ‘My ear’s gone off. I hear this—’ She sang a note. ‘That is what I hear as an A.’

‘No, ma’am,’ the man said, staring at his shoes.

‘Oh.’

‘He plays the piano at our church,’ the father explained. ‘We’ll be going now.’

‘Will you stay with me?’ she said to the son.

‘No, ma’am,’ answered the father quickly.

‘Oh,’ she said. ‘Of course.’

‘I’ll wait outside the door, if you need anything,’ the son offered.

‘No, son,’ the father said.

‘But surely it can’t hurt our reputations if he’s outside,’ Chjara said. She did not know why she wanted the company of another musician but she pleaded with the father. Her hands nervously checked the tilt of the glasses.

‘You’ll dig the turnips,’ the father told the son.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘The turnips need digging,’ the father said to Chjara.

The turnips were right outside the door.

‘Thank you,’ Chjara whispered. ‘What’s your name?’

‘I’m Howard,’ the father said. ‘This is Thomas,’ he indicated the musical son, ‘and this is Charles and this is Paul.’

‘Thank you, Howard and Thomas and Charles and Paul.’

They left her. She sat among racks of reins and bits hanging from iron rods. She sat among buckets of grain and four pallets of hay — which she realized with a start was where the men must sleep. The horses were in the barn above her; she heard their snuffling. Motes of hay fell through the planks, making a soft gold rain. The instrument lay open. Chjara rose. She

walked away from it. She wanted to walk out the door.

Then Thomas began to sing a tune from outside. He sang simply, the sound moving with him as he bent and rose, collecting turnips.

*'One of these days, you'll miss me darlin'. One of these days, I'll be goin' away,'* he sang. *'One of these days, you'll miss me darlin'. You'll miss me, 'cause I'll be goin' away.'*

It had the sound of the hymn and the sound of a love song, and Chjara seized a strand of reins, listening to it. Hanging against the leather ropes, she swung a little, eyes closed. She let him sing to her, a man among the turnips, and she felt the blood return to her fingers.

So her music was flat — music which she had been playing in her mind since Kingston days. Now it would right itself. She played the opening bars of the 'Suite for Corsica', and though the pitch rang untrue to her ears — false, and off — yet still, the notes, relative to each other, were sweet enough.



Later that evening, Henry stood in the lobby of the Brown Hotel, waiting. They were all to go out together to the Corbetts'. He thought about Marguerite and her disease. He thought about how Marguerite and Vicente seemed so alive — going West. Going to start a new community.

He waited alone in the lobby. In the mirror, he observed himself in his frock coat. The black tailored coat became him better than the cape had done. The hotel servants had pressed his shirt with so much starch that the collar bit into his neck. He found the sensation pleasant: bracing. In fact, he looked forward to the excitement of a city evening with new people. Portsmouth tired him. He didn't enjoy his success there, which was really Peter's success. His precocious brother seemed to simply tap into wellsprings of money, one after another, multiplying Henry's stores of capital. Peter had even made Henry's old 'reversible glue' into a household name. Peter called it 'rubber cement'. They enjoyed a steady — a relentless — profit, but there was no beauty and no pleasure in it. Henry had forgotten this feeling he had now: anticipation. Enjoyment before the enjoyment proper. His leg danced in his trouser pant, jiggling, as he stood in the lobby.

Finally, Vicente came. ‘Marguerite is too ill this evening,’ he announced in a toneless voice. He might have said that the carriage was outside. ‘She will join us tomorrow. And Chjara? Where is she?’ His hands pushed into gloves as he spoke. ‘We will report our adventures to Marguerite in the morning.’

‘Shall we stay and comfort her?’ Henry said softly.

‘She tells me she allows herself to feel the pain only in private. She wants to feel everything for what it is... even the pain, which is enlightening because it’s so strong, she says.’ The gloves were snug on his hands, but he tugged once more before looking up.

Henry saw that the composer’s eyes were cavernous with grief. ‘I’m sorry, friend,’ he said.

‘Yes. Death stalks us. It breathes on us.’ Vicente hissed the word ‘breathes’. ‘It’s good you’ve come quickly.’

At that moment Chjara entered, not from the stairs behind them where they expected her, but from the front doors. She still wore the traveling dress from the afternoon, and her hair had a strand of hay in it. Henry picked it out when she drew close.

She had a look on her face that was either scared or happy or both. ‘I’ve been playing.’ She held up her fingertips. She touched Henry’s cheeks with them.

They might as well have been branding irons.

‘My God, woman,’ Henry clasped her warm fingers and was aroused. He looked into her eyes and saw a hundred feelings coursing in her.

‘I’m afraid my hearing’s gone off a bit.’ She turned to Vicente. ‘But it will be good,’ she promised. ‘On Saturday, I will play well for her.’

‘We only need a taste,’ he said. ‘Play the allegro.’ He hummed a few bars from her ‘Suite for Corsica’.

‘You remember it? All these years later?’

He continued the melody in response.

‘I’m flattered.’

‘The pleasure is mine.’ He bowed a little.

Henry saw Chjara flush, and she looked at him as if she were nineteen again. ‘Hurry and get ready for dinner,’ he said, leaning to kiss her.

‘Oh no. No. I will stay and work.’ She turned her back on him and hurried up the stairs. ‘Tell me all about it tomorrow,’ she called. ‘Tell me everything.’

The men were left looking at each other.

‘Well, Henry the American.’ Vicente used the sobriquet Marguerite had given him in France. ‘We must be energetic in bringing our women good tales and memories.’



At the party, Henry watched while the elite Bostonians accosted Vicente, all wanting to try their few words of French or Italian or German and somehow to ally themselves with the gentle aristocrat. The house had a ‘portico,’ not a porch; it had drapes in the Empire style. Grand windows looked out from Beacon Hill over the wandering Charles River. Complicated smells wafted from the kitchen — mushroom, apple cider, roasting hens.

When host Ross Corbett found his way to where they were standing, Vicente beamed. ‘I have a surprise for you. We will have a glass harmonica in the opera on Saturday.’

Corbett’s smile of welcome faded. ‘But we’ve perfected our rehearsals with the flutist. He will play to the highest standard.’

‘Chjara Garland is, I assure you, a musician of the best caliber.’

‘Chjara Garland?’ Corbett clearly recognized the name, and did not like it.

‘Yes, this is her husband, Henry.’

Henry felt Ross Corbett stare at him. He felt his color rising.

‘Your wife has been unwell for some years, I understand,’ Corbett said.

‘Not at all,’ Henry said. ‘She simply chose not to perform.’

‘Really. I had heard she suffered from hysteria and could no longer play the instrument. It’s a common malady with the glass harmonica, I’ve heard.’

‘You were misinformed.’ It infuriated Henry that this man would dismiss Chjara as a hysterical woman — as if she were at all to blame, when she was the soul of strength and endurance to have stayed with him.

‘She performs now as a favor to me and to the duchess,’ Vicente said.

‘But will she sing the...’ Corbett fluttered his fingers at his throat. ‘My dear Vicente, I cannot think of a musical form that better illustrates the distinction between the higher forms of art and the animal passions than

the infamous performances of Chjara Garland.'

Vicente turned to Henry. 'What is this...?' He imitated the orchestra master's gesture.

Henry explained the throat singing. He felt Corbett's eyes on him.

'We have all heard of your family, Henry Garland. My father knew your father well,' Corbett said. 'And it is your son Simon who lectures on "The State of Grace in the Wilderness".'

'That is my son's current theme,' Henry said, straightening.

'He opines that we have much to learn from the Savages.' Corbett spoke with barely contained disdain.

'You will have to listen to the full lecture, I believe, to understand the heart and gist of it. There are men who liken it to genius.'

'Is that so?' Corbett turned back to the Italian. 'Vicente, it is not possible to have Chjara Garland perform with us.' Corbett's shoulders were erect and his voice firm.

'But I wish it. It's my opera.'

'It's my orchestra.'

Vicente seemed about to ignite. Very slowly, he composed himself. '*Bon*,' he said. 'We will depart earlier for Pittsburgh then. The opera,' he said in French, baring his teeth, 'is stillborn. What is one to expect in a city of provincials?' He left and Henry began to follow him. But Henry paused and turned back to Ross Corbett.

He peered at the man — with his center-parted hair, long narrow nose, and callow face — and felt as if the blood in his body flowed uphill. He leaned forward. 'What do you understand about passion? Do you know what it feels like, when you are so alive that your fingers...' he held his up, 'seem almost to conduct electricity? It's not *higher* or *lower*. It simply is.'

As he turned to go, Corbett grabbed his arm.

'Ask her,' he said. 'Ask her if she doesn't feel the difference between passion that is refined and passion that is lust. Lust disguised or lust commercialized.' Silence came between the men like a fist. Here it was again then: his contraband business: lust commercialized.

'Ask her,' Corbett continued, 'if she will decline the invitation to play, for the sake of the common good.'

'I will not ask anything of the sort,' Henry said, leaving, 'no matter what you imply.'

In the carriage, Vicente fumed. ‘They are imbeciles. I am an imbecile. It is Marguerite’s wish, to show you the opera. To show it to Chjara. Now I have made a catastrophe.’

To Henry’s surprise, the composer wept.

‘You will forgive me. These are trying times.’ He spoke through his hands, which covered his face. ‘Since we arrived, I have indulged this buffoon. Ross Corbett intends to create a “classical” music. This is how he describes the music of Handel or Hayden or Mozart.’ He straightened. ‘What does he mean by this word, *classical*? He says if music arouses the “reproductive passions”, it will drive *serious thoughts* from the mind. Imbecile! Does he think Mozart was serious in this way? When I was fifteen, I played with Mozart and I can tell you, Mozart understood joy. He did. Joy, which is just as complex as sorrow, yes?’ Vicente stared out the window. The tears had dried on his face. Henry began to say something, but Vicente turned, bursting with frustration. ‘He wants the city of Boston to learn to listen. To listen one hundred times to the same piece until they understand the progression of the music. But!’ he exclaimed, ‘you must always hear it like the first time! Like the love in a marriage, yes? How dare he despise the reproductive passions. Now they want to keep Marguerite from hearing our music with you.’

There was a pause. Henry’s stomach grumbled.

‘I have an idea,’ Henry said. ‘These people — they must already have a concert hall arranged, and tickets sold, and they will have puffed up the concert in the newspaper — so my friend, it is not in their interest to cancel the concert.’

‘I will not allow them to play it with the flute instead of Chjara.’

Henry did not want them to play without Chjara either. She had suffered enough because of him. He would stand exposed, if necessary. He felt a pulse of life running through him. How long had he been so timid? He had shrunk into himself out of shame, and this realization came to him now with hurricane force. He had made a terrible mistake, chopping off their lives in this way. Why not be exposed, and then go west on the *Philanthropist*? Why not do something daring, something real? He had lost a considerable amount of time.

‘Marguerite has no time for such foolishness,’ Vicente said bitterly.

‘We do not either. We will put pressure on Mr. Corbett. I have a friend



who can help us.’ This friend was none other than Chester Thurman, the man with whom Henry had launched his business. Thurman was now an assistant to the mayor of the city. ‘Tomorrow we’ll go see my friend. Now let’s stop at this tavern and eat.’



Chjara could not hear the allegro. She awoke the next morning and couldn’t find her own melody. She couldn’t remember it. At noon, the day was as fine as any autumn day ever: the air crisp to the taste, the honey sun coating the golden dome of the new Massachusetts State House. In the hotel, guests opened their windows or stood outside, simply hovering at the porch rails or taking their lunch on the swinging benches. Carts and horses clattered by. Music from the jingling harness bells distracted Chjara from the misery of not remembering.

Marguerite came down to their private dining room and announced that she wished to find a surgeon to remove her breasts. Henry and Vicente looked up from their newspapers as if she had announced that she would murder her mother.

‘The pain radiates from here.’ She lifted her arm and touched herself where the sound, round curve of breast met her underarm.

But ‘Doctor LaRouche...’ began Vicente.

‘Doctor LaRouche was a madman, yes.’ She turned to Chjara. ‘My estate physician. He advocated removal of both breasts.’ She turned back to Vicente. ‘I have changed my mind. I will survive the surgery. Surely any butcher can cauterize the skin at the end of it? In that, the good Doctor LaRouche would not have been mistaken.’ She tilted her head toward Vicente, then looked at Chjara. ‘We will perhaps postpone the concert some weeks?’

Henry and Vicente glanced at each other while Chjara agreed volubly, relieved that the postponement would give her time to remember her own music. For Henry, it solved the problem that Thurman had not yet returned his visiting card. Vicente stared at Marguerite.

‘Are you sure?’ He was pale.

Marguerite nodded.

‘A postponement will allow us to find a new conductor as well,’ Vicente

said. 'Mr. Corbett has excused himself for reasons that are not important now. But I agree — let us postpone. Let us enjoy the preparation a little more.'



They were all four together in a bedroom in a house in Concord, Massachusetts, the town where the surgeon lived. The house had many rooms and a grand garden. It belonged to a former customer of Henry's, John Tate. Tate had himself departed for England. Instead of enjoying the great grounds of the estate, they were crowded together in this single room on the second floor. In its center was a bed, and beside it were ship captains' chairs which the eccentric Tate had ordered made and installed on a patio in the gardens. Henry and Vicente had carried the chairs upstairs, on a whim of Marguerite's. These chairs could spin, and Henry and Vicente now spun in place while Chjara lay on top of the bed covers and Marguerite curled beneath them. The dog Justice napped. The day of surgery was tomorrow.

The air in the room smelled of a day of waiting. In the folds of the curtains, a last cricket of summer chirped at intervals. The party had made a game of predicting the sound. Henry nearly got it once, lifting his finger like a conductor an instant before the chirp.

Now it was dusk and rain glossed the brilliant-red maple leaves outside. Marguerite stepped out of her cocoon of blankets. She stood in white chemise and pantaloons.

'Henry,' Chjara whispered.

He was staring at the duchess, transfixed. 'Of course,' he said, coming to. He excused himself to leave the room.

'I want to be seen,' Marguerite said. She was looking steadfastly at Vicente. She crossed the room to tend the fire in the hearth. Her back, bent over, showed between the end of the chemise and the start of the pants. Her skin was pale and smooth as a girl's.

She rose. She stood and faced them. Her breasts, through the chemise, were small with almond nipples showing through.

'But it's cold here!' She leapt back into the bed, pulling the covers up and giggling with naughtiness.

‘You’re a beautiful woman,’ Chjara said.

‘Yes. Today.’ She smiled. ‘I am feeling quite well. What will we do for entertainment tonight?’

‘We have a nice broth,’ Vicente began.

‘No. No more broth. I don’t want to eat dinner. I want to eat life.’

Chjara laughed a little.

‘Yes, I don’t want to be gloomy. Come, my friends. Henry, help me,’ Marguerite said. ‘You must have entertainments— But I know! Henry, bring me one of your books, your salacious books. Read to me.’

Henry guffawed.

‘No, I want to know.’

‘I don’t have any of those books anymore.’

‘Well, tell me the story of one of them.’

‘I don’t remember any.’

‘Of course you do.’ She turned to Chjara. ‘Tell the story.’

‘I never read one.’

‘You never read one?’

Chjara shook her head.

‘Weren’t you curious?’

There was a pause. ‘I was too hurt to be curious.’

Henry felt his heart tighten.

‘I am curious,’ Chjara said to Henry. ‘Tell us a story.’

An amused glance passed between Marguerite and Vicente.

‘Well,’ Henry began.

‘And how did people know to find you? How did they approach you?’ Marguerite clutched the blankets to her chest. ‘How does one inquire after a love dagger? In fact, I would like to inquire after one.’

They all laughed at her earnest face. She persisted. ‘What is it? I want to know about it, how it is used.’

Henry turned to Chjara.

Chjara pursed her lips. She raised her eyes to Marguerite. ‘It was like this.’ She held her left hand out, the fingers curled to meet the thumb as if around a pipe. With her right, she indicated its length. ‘It was very smooth, so very smooth that it felt — once inside — like skin, only colder.’

‘Inside.’ Marguerite’s eyebrows lifted. Vicente barked his laugh.

Chjara was as red as the trees outside.

‘It is your business. You tell it,’ she said to Henry.

‘The bulk of my business was books,’ Henry said. ‘Most of the books had nothing in them to be ashamed of. Nearly everything I sold exalted the human spirit.’

‘Doesn’t the sexual act exalt the human spirit?’ Marguerite asked.

There was a silence. Henry and Chjara spoke at once.

‘Yes,’ Chjara said.

‘No,’ Henry said.

Vicente laughed again. He spun in his chair. He pointed and stopped with his finger on Henry. Him first.

‘Commerce taints it,’ Henry said. ‘That’s what Ross Corbett — that’s what the conductor said that night after you left the conversation, Vicente. He apparently knew about my contraband business. He insisted there’s a difference between refined passion and lust. I’ve been thinking all my life about it.’ He paused.

‘How does one define this refined passion? Is it...’ Vicente began.

‘Calvin calls the refined kind a foretaste of the reunion with Christ,’ Chjara said.

‘Oh, Jesus should mind His own business,’ interrupted Marguerite.

Vicente was highly amused.

‘What are you thinking?’ said Marguerite after Henry had paused a long time. He looked up, as if awakened.

‘I would like to have as much courage as you, Marguerite,’ Henry breathed. ‘And my wife.’ He looked at Chjara. ‘I agree with Corbett. The commercial taint is there. I wanted the money as much as anything.’ He told them then about the night he’d followed Tourneau to the house of whores, and down the basement to the secret hall. He described for them the scientific curiosity of the men regarding the frescos of Pompeii. They laughed and interrupted him with questions. He explained the concept of ‘tricking sexual knowledge into being’.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw that Chjara smiled at him. He grew silent. He spun his chair, and looked out the window. Then he told the story of the buttons he had sold to the inventor’s daughter in London — his first sale. He was about to tell of the Hottentot, and the profit that he had seen was possible.

‘You already started your business in London? But you told me you

began it with the *Magdalene*,' Chjara said.

His face paled.

'There's still so much I don't know about you,' she complained.

'Who are you? Do we know each other? This is what hurt me so much,' she said to Marguerite. 'Was I deceived? Do I deceive myself — willingly — because I want to love the Henry I have known? Do I refuse to see the other Henry; these other Henrys?' Her voice trembled. 'You don't know me,' she said to Henry.

'I know you.' His expression was worshipful. The cricket chirped.

'You don't know me. You elevate me. You make me into a marble statue, some pure idea of goodness. But I lusted after fame. I wanted to be adored. I had other men.'

No one moved for a moment. She could sense Vicente and Marguerite glancing at each other.

'Your thousands of other men,' Henry said indulgently.

Again the cricket chirped. 'Kill it, someone,' Chjara said, too loudly.

Henry rose stiffly. He took a towel, wadded it into a weapon, and searched the corners. He lifted the drapes.

Chjara fumed. She shouldn't be angry, she should be full of remorse. 'I bedded the baker in Roellig's apartment, do you remember him? Also, I made love to the man who made the brooches.'

Henry moved like a boxer after a strike, the white wadded towel in his sinking fist. He turned to her. He looked at her from far, far away, and the skin underneath his beard was pale.

The silence was like heat. 'Now you see me.' Her mouth was bitter. 'It takes more courage than I have — to see myself and how lonely I have been all of my life.'

I'd rather hide and pretend that we were a happy couple, that we were one country. It made me content to think so. This was our myth of freedom. That we could be alone together. It's not true. It's only useful because it helps us to endure. Even God has left us alone. How should we live here with these temptations, with this feeling coursing through our veins? Modestly? Is that how I should have lived? I have no idea.'

Henry sat down.

'In New Harmony, we will dissolve the marriage bonds,' Marguerite spoke softly. 'Fear of passion keeps us from the salutary effects of pleasure.'

That's what the founder says.'

'We will trick the love-knowledge into being,' Vicente's eyes sought Henry's. But Henry was white with silence.

'Let me you tell you about my opera,' Vicente said.

No, Chjara thought. Henry was silent, he was always silent

'Yes, tell them,' Marguerite said. 'I cannot count on seeing it with them.'

'You will see it with them,' he said, 'in a few weeks' time.' Vicente met her eyes; he nodded. 'But I can also tell it now.'

Chjara wondered what dissolving the marriage bonds would mean. She wanted to ask Henry what he thought that might mean, not hear about Vicente's opera.

Vicente rose to his feet, stretching his legs and swinging his weight back and forth as he rubbed his hands. He was a small, compact man. 'The opera begins this way: Young lovers meet. Listen.' He sang. The words were in German, which no one in the room but he understood. Yet his face was so contorted with yearning, and the notes — which he sang in an aching tenor — made them all lean forward. He broke at the end of a phrase, and changed to falsetto. It was the same melody, only transformed. This was the voice of the woman and he sang it with his hand outstretched to the stars, as if he were asking for advice or an explanation from God.

He sang a phrase in the tenor and answered it in the falsetto, the falsetto this time turning away from the stars and toward the sound of the man.

'Yes,' he said. 'They meet. They encounter each other. But we know: their love is an impossible love. She is a servant from an island in the sea. He is a wealthy traveler from afar.' Vicente held Marguerite's eyes, and smiled. Only then did he look at Chjara, whose mouth had opened in surprise.

Henry started. 'It's about us?' he said.

'It has been the most popular opera on the Continent for five years. We thought you should see it,' Marguerite said.

'It is a little about you, a little about us.' Vicente looked at Marguerite.

'The servant girl sings an aria. Love, she sings, is a gift for fools. A king in his castle can't marry his true love. Nor can a queen, who wants the bold knight. No, not even the powerful can yield to love. Why should a poor servant girl be allowed to follow her heart?'

'This aria, which begins very sweetly,' said Vicente, 'becomes more

agonized. *I will never touch his lips. I will never feel his breast against mine. I will never know surely — she sings — what is in his heart.*'

Vicente looked at Chjara. 'There is already at the beginning of the music the sound of mystery. Hear it.' He sang the melody as it changed key once, and again. 'You are making it chaotic,' Chjara said.

'Even at the beginning,' Vicente confirmed. 'The libretto says they cannot marry because the world stands in the way. But the music says something more. There's more that keeps us apart, yes?' He sang the melody again. 'What do you feel when you hear this? Quickly,' he said. 'Answer quickly.'

'Dread,' said Henry.

Chjara was quiet, her expression vulnerable.

'The audiences are always quiet after this first aria. They listen...' he motioned with his arms at the audience that was the whole world, 'with the feeling of empathy. Of sorrow. At the beginning of love, yes? Even in its initial promise, we know love will change and disappoint.'

Chjara glanced at Henry and found him looking at her. For the first time in five years, he was not asking for her forgiveness. He was only seeing her.

'But there is someone else who listens. In the window of a castle, the duchess overhears the servant girl's lament. *I have been a fool too, the duchess sings. My son, whom I loved, lies now with his heart still as stone underground. What right does a servant girl have to be unhappy? By what right does she cast the world in shadow?*

'The duchess summons the girl and the traveler. *You will amuse me with your happiness,* she says before her assembled court. The stage fills with dancers. The costumes are glorious. The audiences appreciate the costumes more, I think, than the music,' Vicente admitted.

'You disparage your own *bel canto*,' Marguerite clucked. 'But it is true,' she confided to Chjara, 'the costumes excite everyone.'

'In the sea of gowns and jewels,' continued Vicente, 'there is the servant girl in a plain dress. She sings with her lover, a duet. It expresses their surprise at being together, and the dream that all will be well.'

'But then, a gnome rises in the orchestra. He plays a flute and summons the soldiers. They parade on stage, five by five, in crisp costumes. They sing this march.' He sang abruptly, his voice barking as it did when he laughed. The burst of sound seemed to come straight out of his broad, round chest.

The march was a drumbeat of music. He explained, in between breaths, 'The troops keep coming, though the stage is already crowded.'

'What happens to the lovers?' Chjara asked.

'The man becomes a soldier.'

'That is not what happened to us,' Chjara said.

'Isn't it?' Vicente leaned forward. 'I think you were a soldier, Henry. Commerce, too, marches. It is the situation for all lovers — of peace, of each other, of the sensuality of the world — to contend with the marching forces of aggrandizement. We must always aggrandize, it seems. No? We ask that there be a heaven. But the earth already is full of marvels, isn't it? We ask for empires and for goods from every corner of the earth. Goods of every kind. We reach our tentacles out... growing larger, but becoming thinner. The priests, the merchants, the soldiers — they are inside here.' He clutched his chest. 'And they are full of a grotesque hunger. One soldier becomes a thousand...' he snapped his fingers, 'in an instant.

'Why do we aggrandize? Is it a natural spring? *Ein natürliches Sprung?* Marguerite and I, we want to discover how to live otherwise. We're going with the Boatload of Knowledge to be...'

'... in the marriage of New Harmony,' Marguerite said, savoring the idea. 'I must heal quickly.'

They were silent for a moment.

'You are brave,' Chjara said. She wondered again what dissolving the marriage bonds would mean.

'Of course,' said Marguerite. 'And you?'

'I think your shame,' Vicente interjected to Henry, 'is also an aggrandizement. You make your sin grow with it.' His hands motioned outward. 'You wanted to be more ashamed than Chjara, perhaps?' His eyebrows wiggled. 'Shame blinds. It is your shame over the act which aggrandizes it and makes the hunger never cease.'

'No, the shame makes me cease.'

'Did it?' Vicente said. 'Did the shame stop the hunger, or feed it?'

Henry looked to Chjara. His expression seemed full of hesitation. What was he hiding now?

'Did you stop?' she said.

'Yes! Now I sell...' air burst from his lips, 'rubber cement.'

'Which only makes you fat,' she said, 'and slow. And without vigor.'



Meanwhile, inside, you still have this world of secrets. You never told me these stories of Paris and London before.’ Chjara twisted her hands, not looking at Henry. She thought he was a coward, and she didn’t like to think something so cruel. And she was also a coward. She wanted to ask: would they couple with others at New Harmony? Instead she said, ‘Where does the allegro go? In the opera — where does it play?’

‘At the very end.’ Vicente painted the picture with his hands. ‘Even the musicians leave the orchestra section. They march onto the stage. They fall. They too are bloodied.’

‘This is why the opera is in German.’ Marguerite looked at Vicente. ‘Napoleon did not like it.’

‘It doesn’t glorify battle, and so doesn’t glorify Napoleon,’ Vicente said, ‘but the servant girl, she finds her lover in the heap. He stirs. He lives. They embrace, and as they embrace, a youth comes into the empty orchestra pit. He plays the glass harmonica, and the sound from it raises the skin.’ His hands twitched the air beside his ears. ‘It is a pretty melody, an allegretto, a happy tune like the march, but inside it has this tickling. This unnerving quality. Almost shrill. Do I insult you, Chjara?’ he said.

Instead of answering, she sang. Her voice obliged and split into two. The music shuddered between the note from her mouth and the overtone behind it. She had to sing loudly to achieve this effect. She closed her eyes to maintain her concentration. She held a long note within the phrase, and the air in the room vibrated.

Marguerite pressed back in the bed, as if the sound drove her up against the headboard. Vicente’s eyes burned with intensity. Chjara gasped when she was finished. She had enough breath for it, but only just.

‘I discovered this throat sound,’ she said, ‘when I didn’t have the glass harmonica and needed some likeness to it.’

‘That is how the opera ends — just like that, with a sound underneath the sound. Sweet and eerie.’

Marguerite was staring at Chjara — at her throat. Marguerite began to weep silently.

A moment passed before the others noticed. ‘What is it?’ Vicente asked softly.

‘What a surprise.’ Marguerite’s voice was calm. Her tears, though, slid down her cheeks. ‘I feel the sound still — here.’ Her hand grazed her wrist.

She touched herself lightly along the length of her arm. She shook and she smiled, though the tears flowed all the more. 'It is such a surprise to find oneself alive.' She tried not to cry. 'I adore my sensibility,' she whispered, weeping. 'Do I have to leave it already, tomorrow?'

Vicente went to her. 'Not already,' he said, holding her. 'Not tomorrow. The surgeon is skilled.'

Then the cricket chirped once more, so loudly that they laughed. It was absurd. And they listened because it too made a dual sound of sweet melody and underlying rasp.



Henry couldn't sleep that night. The house itself, with its still timbers, seemed to sleep but outdoors the trees shifted and night birds clucked. Chjara slept alone in the bedroom opposite his. Henry stood up. He bent to light a candle.

He stood a moment outside Chjara's door. He thought of what she'd done with the baker, with the man who'd made the brooches; he thought of what he hadn't known. He found to his surprise that he could not hate her for this. He wanted to claim her. Reclaim her. The force of it came to him as a violent need. He peeked in; she was sleeping soundly. He restrained himself and went down the hall to the stairs — a man in a nightshirt holding a candle aloft — and he felt like a small boy in a dark tunnel.

Through the window, anyone could have seen Henry as he lit all the candles in the chandelier. A doe grazing in the fog-shrouded field outside lifted her head. Henry climbed the ladder of the library in his nightshirt; climbed down and moved the ladder; climbed up again until he found what he was looking for.

Later, he placed a leather-bound book on Chjara's nightstand, with the name *Gulliver's Travels* on the spine, without waking her. He sat and the mattress sank with his weight. She slept on. Henry looked at his hands in his lap, his fingers swollen with the years. Chjara always slept with a window partially open. The scent of wet pine shingles and the mossy woods slipped over him. He looked up at the blank ceiling, and knew himself lost. He had thought all the thoughts that the sleepless have, and had found no

solution or comfort, only the repeated nature of his own questions. He despised himself. He despised himself for the secrets themselves, for the shame over the secrets, for the timid man he'd become.

No matter what Chjara said, he was the more culpable. If only he had not hidden himself, they might have made a country. They might have been freer. She was always ready to venture out. She wasn't a statue. She was wild and willing, and he loved her for that. He loved her with an urgency that made him tilt closer, and wish, wish, that he was not who he was, but someone else, and worthy of her love. All this showed on his face as he sat in his nightshirt in the moonlight on his wife's bedside, clutching his own hands and keeping himself from touching her unannounced.



The surgeons arrived as the day had just begun to warm itself. The sky was blue, with fluffy clouds only for decoration. In the parlor, Joseph Warren, the primary surgeon, directed two other men in fine frock coats and white shirts and taut neckties. He asked them to move furniture away to the edges of the room. In the center, they placed a single reclining chair that the surgeon now fixed with straps. He removed a large fork from his kit and tested the sharpness of its six-inch prongs. He removed a wooden-handled razor from its felt wrapping. He removed several stacks of bandages.

Then he set a flat iron spatula to heat in the parlor stove. The surgeon nodded to Henry in the doorway. 'You may bring the patient down at noon.'

Chjara had awakened that morning and sat a while on the edge of the bed. Across the hall, Vicente and Marguerite attempted to muffle the sound of their lovemaking, with little success. Chjara smiled with a bittersweet feeling, as she heard Marguerite call out in triumph like a child who had won a parlor game. In the pause before they began again, Chjara fell back onto the bed, her legs dangling. Sunlight that was bright and almost green in its essence struck the room sideways, as if the earth tilted expressly to lower the light to meet her window. She had slept soundly. It was unseemly to wake with such a light heart on such a dread morning but there it was. And next door her friends rallied, the furniture resuming a soft, rhythmic

knocking against the wall.

Chjara touched her own breasts, which were round and soft like all of her now: her belly a cushion, her arms full and fleshy — only her thighs strong, the muscles thick and solid. She rolled on her side, listening to her friends, and thought about Henry when he was young. When he had told his story last night, his secrecy inflamed her anger but now she pictured him: observing lovers on the stage in Paris. Now she was listening to lovers herself and she felt the heat in her own body. She saw the book on the bed stand that had not been there the night before. It said *Gulliver's Travels* on the leather cover. Propped up on her elbows, she turned to the first page and found there a different title: *Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*.



The minutes dragged for Henry. He wandered around the grounds; he hovered in the library. He did not hear anyone awake yet. Not even Chjara — who had been waking early to practice — had emerged from her bed chamber. Finally, at eleven, Henry knocked on the door to Vicente and Marguerite's room. Hearing no response, he knocked again. He cracked the door open. 'One hour to the surgery,' he whispered.

'Thank you, friend.' Vicente appeared, disheveled, with the rosy color of exertion in his cheeks.

'You will bathe me,' Henry heard Marguerite say to Vicente. He closed the door and crossed the hall. He found his wife with her cheeks also flushed. In her hands was the book that had sold 4,000 copies, raising the money for him to buy the Henry G.

'What do you think of it?'

She smiled at him with extraordinary wickedness. She patted the bed. He was almost ashamed to recollect later that he indulged her requests, each of them, with no sense of propriety, and with their friends right next door.



The surgeon and his two assistants stood, three men in a row. They waited

in the parlor, a short distance from the door. As it happened, they wore almost identical mustaches, the ends curved slightly up, in the fashion of the times. This gave them the appearance of wearing dark, drawn-on smiles despite the somber expressions in their eyes.

On the table beside the reclining chair, there was now a bowl of vinegar water. The tang of it mingled with the smell of wood ash from the exceedingly hot fire.

The surgeon stepped out of the parlor, hands clasped behind him. He was looking for his patient but he saw no one. Turning back, he saw that on entering the parlor, his patient would immediately see the iron paddle glowing red-hot in the open hearth. He moved a wicker chair in front of it.

‘That will burn,’ an assistant commented.

‘Move it as soon as we begin,’ the surgeon said. He could find nothing else to set in front.

At that moment, they entered: all four of them, the two women together, and the men following behind with the dog.

‘You will go to the pond,’ Marguerite told Henry and Vicente. ‘Go and see if there are any goldfish in the pond.’

‘Tate said there were,’ Henry answered stupidly. ‘He said they came from China.’

Vicente looked as though he had no blood in him and no thoughts either. His eyes were empty.

‘Go and report on them for us,’ she said. ‘Find out exactly how they look and how they swim.’

Henry leaned forward and kissed Marguerite gently on the cheek. ‘Of course,’ he said. He admitted to himself a certain curiosity at the instruments he glimpsed over her shoulder.

‘If you are still within hearing, go farther away,’ Marguerite said. ‘Take Justice and go.’

When they were gone, Chjara touched Marguerite on the shoulder. Her friend stood in a kind of reverie, the bones of her back lined up in a straight row to her tall neck. Marguerite wore a fine gown: an empire-cut dress that left her shoulders bare. Two ribbons wove in and out of the fabric underneath the bodice, a fashion that drew a line beneath the breasts. Marguerite toyed with the ribbons, looking out the window.

‘Would you like me to play music?’ Chjara said.

‘No.’ Marguerite spoke sharply. She crossed to the chair. She spoke to the surgeon. ‘Tell me how exactly you will proceed.’

‘First, we give you this tincture of opium,’ he said, holding it up.

‘No,’ Marguerite interrupted. ‘I’ll take no spirits.’

‘But you must.’

She looked at him, steely. ‘Do soldiers always have opium for surgery?’

His mouth seamed shut.

‘I thought not. I’ve seen it. I will feel it all.’

Chjara whispered, ‘My friend, give yourself some relief.’

‘Don’t you remember Victor Ravenaugh?’ Marguerite said. ‘I’ve already decided. I won’t substitute one disease for another. Tell me,’ she returned to the surgeon. ‘How exactly is it done?’

The surgeon lifted the two-pronged fork. ‘The procedure lasts twenty minutes.’ He offered this fact as reassurance but in his hand was the modified pitchfork.

‘How does it begin?’ Marguerite said.

‘We insert the fork into the breast.’

Chjara managed not to gasp out loud.

‘We pull the breast away from the wall of the ribs.’ The surgeon demonstrated with the fork, adding, ‘It is necessary to use force so that no breast tissue is left behind.’

‘I see.’ Marguerite spoke with the least possible amount of breath.

‘Once I have a good grip,’ he continued, ‘I will cut...’ He approached Marguerite. ‘May I show you?’

‘Of course.’ With one movement, she released the top of her dress, as if she had practiced this. She stood bare from the ribbons up. Her skin prickled, despite the heat of the room.

Chjara saw the tumor for the first time. It poked out from a dimple in the side of the breast and was brown and suppurating.

‘We will remove from the armpit to the center, and then the other breast from the center to the armpit.’ He showed the movement of the knife, his finger tracing the pattern in the air above her breasts.

Her nipples became erect.

‘I see,’ she said.

‘Then we cauterize the wound.’

‘With what?’

He hesitated. The assistant moved the wicker chair from in front of the fire. The assistant's hands flew into the air after contact with the top rung of the chair, so hot had it become already. He shook his fingers, as if letting the heat drip off.

The fire behind him seemed to Chjara to be gargantuan. A good foot of bright orange coals burned in the middle, and inside this nest glowed the metal spatula.

Marguerite laughed: a pitter-patter of small gasps and then a loud guffaw that ended in silence.

The snort of laughter so shocked the men that they stood as if nailed by their heels to the floor.

Chjara's belly weakened. She clenched everything she could. She blinked — releasing the tears she'd only barely managed to hold back.

'I could have asked you these questions while we were still in Boston,' Marguerite admitted to the surgeon. 'What do you think, Chjara — would foreknowledge have been better?'

Marguerite turned and Chjara saw a new light in her friend's eyes. The light of hysteria. Chjara understood this fact as if it had been spoken into the air.

'We have given birth,' Chjara said, wiping her tears. 'Did foreknowledge help there?'

Marguerite's face relaxed a little.

Chjara stepped closer. She kept her eyes fixed on Marguerite's. 'When I felt the first pangs of labor, I knew the gates of hell had opened before me,' Chjara said. 'I went in.'

'Of course.' Marguerite sat in the chair. 'It can be borne.'

The surgeon began to fetter her to the chair. He started by strapping down her right leg. Then her waist. Marguerite craned her neck toward Chjara. 'I've been thinking all the time about the soldiers we saw on one of Napoleon's battlefields. We saw the wounded.' The surgeon lifted Marguerite's right arm, bending it at the elbow, and cinched her wrist to the back top rung of the chair. Then he moved to the other side, the two women watching him. The smell of the vinegar was mixed with his sweat and the lavender of Marguerite's recent bath.

Chjara moved to Marguerite's right side. She crouched behind the chair, inches from her friend but out of the way of the surgeon. Marguerite

sat with her wrists strapped behind her head to the chair, elbows pointing to the ceiling. She twisted her head so that she looked under her exposed armpit to Chjara. Her eyes shone bright and wide with fear. Her lip shook and her breath tightened as she said, 'On the battlefield, they cauterized the soldiers' wounds. They amputated.'

Chjara blinked away her stream of furious tears. 'Yes.'

'I will be a boy when this is through. A strong boy with a flat chest.'

'You will.'

Marguerite's eyes pleaded. Chjara held their gaze. She slapped the stupid tears from her own eyes.

The surgeon lifted the fork.

'Henry gave me his most popular book last night. It's called *Fanny Hill*. Shall I tell it to you?' Chjara whispered this into Marguerite's ear.

Marguerite nodded. She turned and looked at the fork poised under her right breast.

'Ready?' said the surgeon.

'Tell it to me,' Marguerite said, whipping her face to the side, hissing at Chjara. 'Tell it to me quickly.'

'*I was a farm girl*, says a young orphan. *Ignorant of vice*. That's how she begins, our *Fanny Hill*. Her name is Fanny.'

The prong went in.

Marguerite grew, her torso stretching long. She was trying to escape the chair.

'Be quick,' she cried to Chjara.

'Fanny is a virgin when she lands in a brothel. Her trouble is, she doesn't know how the *king-member*...' Chjara drew out the words. Marguerite laughed and cried in one gasp. Chjara whispered, '*...the king member... the wonderful machine... the instrument of pleasure...*' At each name, Marguerite eked out a laugh. 'How can it fit... into her *rubied line in miniature*?' Fanny doesn't understand how it works.'

Chjara glanced at the puncture wound made by the fork. Blood slid like tears from the holes. Chjara lost control of her bladder beneath her skirts. She continued.

'So, a young mistress of the house takes Fanny to bed with her to teach her. Slowly, she caresses Fanny's breasts and the sable fur between her legs.'

Marguerite's eyes sought Chjara's, turning sidewise in alarm like a



horse's in peril. Her mouth stretched in a grin of pain and naughtiness. 'Tell me.'

'Then they sneak into a closet — the two girls — to watch a Genoese man with Polly, who is one of the other whores.'

The knife was in. Blood flooded Chjara's shirt sleeve. Marguerite's eyes went glassy and vacant with pain. Chjara leaned in even closer. 'When the Italian thrusts in, he can go only halfway.' Chjara whispered. 'He wets it with spittle — his great weapon.'

There was a flopping sound, when the first breast was dropped in the vinegar water. 'Aaahhh,' Marguerite cried out.

'He thrusts now full to the hilt, his weapon fully sheathed by Polly's body. She assists him. She rocks with him. They begin to move, and move, with sighs, with sobs and greater and greater thrusts. All this Fanny observes from the closet.'

Chjara saw Marguerite's eyes leave hers. She turned. The assistant was approaching with the red-hot spatula. Chjara grabbed Marguerite's chin and pulled Marguerite's face toward her. Chjara leaned in so that their noses were touching. She kissed her friend. She tasted the tears that were shared between them. She whispered, 'Don't look. Look at me. Look at me. Feel me. Feel me now. With Fanny. They are in the closet.'

'The closet,' Marguerite hissed through bared teeth. 'Polly.'

'He thrusts,' she said, 'he *thrusts* into Polly and she gasps with pleasure even though it seems he is splitting her body open.'

Marguerite went limp. Chjara herself felt the sear of the spatula, the tip of it burning through her clothes to her arm. She leapt back. Simultaneously she saw and smelled: the dew drops of blood risen on the circle of flat flesh where the right breast had been; the smell of blood burning like meat thrown into a hot fire; the sweat of the doctor; the two assistants whimpering like hounds; and Marguerite's splayed legs, fallen open at the knees in her loss of consciousness.

Chjara's heart felt swollen so that she couldn't swallow or breathe.

'Go,' hissed the doctor. He turned the spatula to its other, still-glowing side. He looked up at Chjara and hissed again, 'You unclean harlot. Go.'

'Harlot,' she repeated, disbelieving.

'You poison her at the moment of death.'

Chjara turned stiffly. 'She is dead?'

‘She may yet die,’ said the surgeon.

Then he seared the other side. Marguerite cried, her eyes fluttering, showing only the whites. She was inhuman. She was reclined flesh, open to the knife. Chjara cocked her head, as if she could listen for a chirp of hope. There was none. The surgeon began to clean around the wound with bandages, his movements brusque and unfeeling. The restraining straps fell to the floor like strips of hide. Chjara reared back. They were meat; the taste of Marguerite’s flesh hovered in the air. The whole house with its drapery and finery seemed a wisp of nothing; the surgeon with his grim concentration seemed a fool, and helpless. It was horrible — horrible, horrible, to be in these bodies, and so weak and vulnerable.

‘You have poisoned her.’ The surgeon lapped a row of bandage around Marguerite’s ribs, moving sharply — speaking sharply. He glared at Chjara. ‘To provide evil entertainment at such an hour? It is obscene.’

Chjara laughed. Was he blind? Didn’t he sense the comfort she gave Marguerite by distracting her? She stared at his face, worried by lines like raked scars. She saw the audience that threw rotted tomatoes at her, the feeble mass of people who joined their fears together. They were wrong. They were pathetic and powerful and they were wrong. What mattered most was to fan what little life each had into flame. Marguerite — with her shallow breaths, and swathed in bandages — Marguerite wanted to grow. To be a strong young boy with her new flat chest. Marguerite would thrive — if she lived. She would not cower. Chjara huffed out a breath and looked at the surgeon with his quick condemnation, and she thought, no: *evil shrinks life*. It was as simple as that. Each person’s vitality was their weapon against the raw brutality of this world.

Outside, Henry called. ‘Does she still live?’

Chjara went to the window and opened the sash. He reached up with an outstretched hand. She remembered his reaching toward her through the bars of the Kingston cell. Reaching. Oh, she thought, crying, here he was again. Reaching — he was constant in that. She stretched out toward him.

‘Vicente asks — is she alive?’ Henry’s hand grasped hers and held tight.

‘She is.’

‘The left breast showed no invasion,’ the surgeon said behind her.

‘Vicente will be so glad.’ His face was rosy from the cold and his eyes shone with emotion.

Chjara stood silent because she could not breathe for love of him. Yes, he had failed her. Deeply. And yet in the face of brutal chance like Marguerite's disease, in face of the cruelty so common in human affairs, they had this small persistent companionship. Like a tender shoot of green in a landscape of rock. How had she not forgiven him before now? She regretted her long silent harangue of the last years. They could still do this: reach for each other inside this dark — however much they could.

'Go tell Vicente.' She squeezed his hand, her own fingers sticky with blood. 'Go comfort Vicente and I will stay with Marguerite.'

Hope was in his eyes, tinged with worry. She didn't let go for a long moment. Tears washed her face. 'Let's be good to each other, Henry.'

He held on. His lip ticked. Between them coursed a strong feeling of electricity. Chills ran along her skin, and she knew from the fact that Henry didn't speak and from the strong ballast of his hand that he felt the current too.



Marguerite groaned in her stupor. Chjara went back to her.

Marguerite's waxen face made her seem near to death.

'It's over,' Chjara whispered.

'It will not be over for some time,' the doctor said.

'The worst is over,' she insisted.

He shook his head, *no*. 'We discussed laudanum and spirits. Madame Charon refused before, but I believe she should reconsider.'

'We will occupy her mind,' Chjara said, raising her eyes to the surgeon, a wicked light in them, 'with entertainments. With stories and music that give us pleasure. We will be bold with our reading if we cannot be bold in life. Will you teach me how to dress the wounds?'

They carried Marguerite up the stairs. Chjara felt the weight of her skirt, which was wet with her own dirty water. She felt herself return from the edge of the world back to the ordinary step, step, step of being in a house, and in her own body. Marguerite's head lolled back. They lifted her into the pillows.

As soon as the assistants were gone, Chjara slipped off her own clothes,

chose a clean shift, and lay down beside her friend. She opened to a new chapter of *Fanny Hill*, and began to read in her friend's ear.

## Epilogue

In later years, Chjara would find herself at the oddest moments seeing the new skin on Marguerite's chest. She pictured the miracle of it — the wound giving way to the pink flesh that had rebuilt itself in secret under the dark mass of the scab.

Marguerite lived. Marguerite and Vicente left Concord for their new commune in the spring of 1826. All four traveled together as far as Pittsburgh. There was still room for Chjara and Henry, and on the day of the community's departure for Indiana, Chjara stood in the open front of the barge, dressed in her warmest traveling clothes. The river swayed beneath her feet. Mist hung halfway up the trees, and the sunrise struck the mist pink.

'Are you coming with us?' one of the young girls asked. Eight female students aged fourteen to seventeen had come from France with the *Philanthropist's* leader, a friend of Marguerite's. They would experiment with education out in the wilds of Indiana.

'I don't know,' Chjara said.

Chjara observed the beautiful young women, and the men crowded together on the other side of the barge, under its small roof. Glances flew back and forth between men and women. She could feel the frissons of energy, and she pictured the love affairs that would soon begin. The forbidden had a taste like salt, Henry had said to her not long ago. The forbidden and freedom were twins, he said, and exceedingly difficult to distinguish, one from the other.

Now Henry was among the men in the barge's open-fronted cabin. Even wedged into the crowd, he stood apart. Maybe it was his height, his head canted to avoid the ceiling. His manner too — something in the lack of gestures, his habit of restraint, the fact that he looked onto the others from above. His eyes found hers and stayed. He had picked her out; he was a man who had picked her out from all the others.

He made his way to her through the people pressed shoulder to shoulder. A reporter from the newspaper approached her and she referred him to

Marguerite. She waited for Henry at the bow, and soon he was there, his warm hand on her waist.

‘It is not the *Henry G.*’ she said, clasping the ship’s rail and leaning out.

‘No, it is not. The *Philanthropist* will stink in days. She’s overloaded and the captain knows next to nothing about how to navigate this river.’

She laughed. ‘Should we warn Marguerite and Vicente?’

‘Would it stop them?’ His voice was gentle.

The water sluiced beneath them.

‘Should we stay and help?’

He didn’t answer.

The current bubbled along the boat’s edge. Chjara turned, pressing her back into the railing, and faced Henry. He looked healthy from the long time of outdoor travel. The wrinkles around his eyes accentuated his alert, attentive expression. She pursed her lips, considering. She knew her expression was flirtatious. His eyebrows danced in response, questioning.

‘Do you want to dissolve the marriage bonds?’

‘I want to strengthen them.’ His expression was so intense, she almost had to turn away.

She said, ‘Don’t you want to go West?’

‘Yes.’

‘Yes?’

‘More than anything. But not with them.’

‘Ah.’

‘With you and you alone.’

She scoffed. ‘We can’t do it alone.’

‘True...’

‘Our children are living their own lives now. They are—’

He interrupted: ‘With men *I* choose and hire. Using my own knowledge, my own money, making our own freedom.’

‘Would you sell the contraband?’

He hesitated.

‘Is that how we would pay for it?’ she pressed him.

He hesitated still.

‘Tell me, Henry. Is that what you want to do?’

‘Yes.’ He said it. ‘I do. I want to sell again, not just goods, but the means to market them. I want to show how it’s done. So others can do it.’

‘You would bring, what — printing presses?’

‘Presses are large and cumbersome. Other people will do that. I will tell them what to sell, how to sell it, how to make French Letters perhaps. How to find your herbs.’

‘You would?’ She was astonished even while in some part of her she had expected it. ‘You believe it’s right to do this?’

Henry leaned forward. ‘Every farmer, every miner, every fur trader...’ his arm swept out toward the west, ‘they all seek some living, some gold, some way to survive. There will always be a market for these goods. And in this free age, people will choose for themselves what to buy and what not to buy.’

She listened to his words rushing together, and she realized he had been waiting a long time to say this. It had taken him a lifetime to find the self-knowledge and courage for what he really wanted to do.

‘And I will play to distract people from what you’re doing?’

He looked away across the water.

Her words stung. His hand dropped. She could see she’d shamed him.

‘Do you want to go back to Portsmouth then?’ he offered.

‘No.’

‘To France?’

‘No.’

‘To Corsica?’

Chjara let out a long breath. ‘No.’ The sorrows of their lives still weighed around her heart. ‘I don’t want to be as timid as I feel right now,’ she said.

‘No,’ he agreed.

‘But aren’t we too old?’

‘I heard you playing at Concord,’ he countered.

During Marguerite’s healing, Chjara had crammed her glass harmonica into the stairwell at the house. She played at the bottom of the stairs, and the notes echoed up and down as if she had flung them out on a lasso and pulled them back again. Within the protection of their small society — the four of them in a large house secreted away down a long drive — she’d trained herself to touch the outer edge of propriety again. She sensed Marguerite listening through the walls. Her fingers trembled when she played and she found a harmonic in her voice that matched the lowest glass

note. She had to distort her face obscenely to reach that note. She knew that the trembling was related to the force of life, that she should not shy away from it, and that this force conveyed itself to those who listened.

‘Do you know that when I read *Fanny Hill* to Marguerite the surgeon called me obscene?’ Chjara told Henry. ‘I have since looked up the English word *obscenity* in your Webster’s and it says, *lack of modesty*.’

‘You’re not obscene. It’s not true.’

‘It is true.’ Her voice shook. ‘I have always been immodest.’ She lifted her eyes. ‘I chose it. Maybe I will be obscene again, for all to see.’ Was she agreeing to a life with him, alone — him with his obscene books, and she with her obscene voice? Would she be a distraction, a decoy, this time on purpose?

She looked across the crowd to Marguerite, and she pictured her friend’s new chest. Chjara was afraid. She was still afraid. Experience

had taught her that people were capable of small gestures of kindness and great acts of cruelty and violence. The disproportion between the best of people and the worst accumulated over the ages. It resided in the words and feelings that each generation passed on to the next. She wondered, what if this air that they breathed, what if this ephemeral communal atmosphere that surrounded them was itself like a body, and equipped to heal?

Across the deck, Marguerite and Vicente laughed among their friends, these idealists venturing out to recreate the world. Chjara could distract people as she had Marguerite — from brutality, from fear. ‘We would do this where?’ she asked her husband.

‘On the Erie, the Ontario. On Michigan and Superior. We would travel the inland seas of America.’

He rolled the names on his tongue. He was above her, looking down, but he was not on stilts. He was seeing her, waiting, his enthusiasm ignited.

She did not answer for a while. The quiet turned to an ache. ‘Silence too shrinks our lives,’ she sighed at last, ‘doesn’t it?’ She looked up. Did he know what she meant?

He cocked his head.

‘I am wrong to be silent. I should not be a Fraid.’ She smiled, ruefully.

‘It’s all right...’ He put his arms around her, protectively.

‘No. Let’s not coddle each other. Let’s help each other. I’ll sing, and when



I get scared, you will *buck me up*.' She exaggerated the American phrase.

'We'll go West.'

'We'll go?'

'Yes. We'll go.'



Not much is known about Chjara Garland, née Vallé, and her husband Henry after the departure of the Philanthropist from Pittsburgh in 1826. Archivists have found a few last letters sent to their children from Chicago, and these are collected with the others at the Institute for Music at the French estate where Marguerite's correspondence with Chjara and Vicente's opera manuscripts also remain. The letters stopped in 1829. Simon searched for his parents in the years after their disappearance, venturing further west each year. He paid for his excursions with lectures, and it's said he invited Ralph Waldo Emerson to tour with him but that Emerson declined. The subject of Simon's lectures was 'The End of the Age of Sensibility', in which he discoursed on his parents' freedom and the contrary rise of Temperance as a moral philosophy.

In the sparse townships of the inland West, Simon and his crew occasionally found the trail. An Ojibway shaman on the northern Mississippi River told the story of a woman dressed in trappers' furs, sitting on a canoe, singing like a frog and a spirit, both. In Missouri in 1832, a family of new Mormons broke silence over their rituals and revealed that they had hosted a visit from 'ghost people'. The dead had been summoned to a tent by an elderly preacher and his wife who played an ethereal instrument. Simon discerned in this story a hint of his father's tales about a ghost show in France.



In 1836, in a sleek new boat again called the *Henry G*, Simon followed the legends inland up the Missouri River and the Platte until he reached the great blockade of the Rocky Mountains. Exhausted by seven years of travel

and short on supplies, he anchored one evening at the foot of a granite cliff, his eye caught by shattered glass glinting on the riverbank. He disembarked as the sun vanished beyond the mountains. The pewter sky paled against the black of the peaks, and the stars materialized as if by a curtain drawn open. It was August and the time of the Perseids' meteor shower. Simon's body was thin, his throat sore, and in the indigo light, he nearly missed finding the place. He pawed in the dust around a mutilated campfire. Probably the glass fragments were from a trapper's lantern.

Weary, he crouched to inspect them, and imagined that he saw the colors of faint purple, dusky red, sea green.

A star fell, and another. His mother's life had been as brief and brave. He recalled another campfire and her confiding, 'I am proud, and willful, and my husband leaves me alone too much.' Her eyes had shone with adult sorrow; he was still a boy and she had let him see her secret self. He hadn't known until then that his perfect mother believed she deserved to be exiled, to be unloved. If only he could tell her his feelings; if only he could hold her.

He feared what might have happened to them. He longed for her to appear, for both parents to come back, to be living still in the woods around the next bend. He wept, his cries hoarse and lost. Would there be no more letters? Not ever? Loneliness raked through him. He curled up against the pain; he wanted to be a part of them in the world and not alone. Why had she taught him to avoid the prayer, *I am a vile creature, made more vile by practice*, when she must have believed it herself? Was that why had they gone so far, so very far into the wild? He should have traveled west with them. He did not want to picture how they might have died; he'd seen terrible deaths. He rubbed at his eyes; his hands were gritty with ash. He didn't notice a porcupine approach. It shuffled toward him, placid and curious, snuffing at his hand. He bolted up in alarm and the animal struck with its tail, its spines flying, too close to his bared arms. He stood with his heart thumping. The rodent eyes peered up at him: what was he doing here? He understood that his own time on Earth would be short. He would honor her best by living up to her prayer, 'I am a good creature, made better by practice.' The sky seemed to answer him in shrieks of light.

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I am indebted to the Irish poet Ger Reidy for saying, while at the artists' residency in Can Serrat, Spain, that virtue and pleasure seemed as alike as sand and chocolate. I am also indebted to another Can Serrat fellow, François Truyol, who helped me translate the *Traité des Effets de la Musique sur le Corps Humain*. And Can Serrat International Art Center ([www.canserrat.org](http://www.canserrat.org)) helped birth the book, because publisher Penelope Todd and I met there. Artist residencies at Montana Artists' Refuge and Byrdcliffe in Woodstock, New York, helped me to complete the work. Dennis Lehane and Sterling Watson, who run the extraordinary Writers in Paradise workshop, bucked me up at a moment of failing courage.

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## *Bibliographic Note:*

### *Truth in this Fiction*

The main characters in this novel are fictional. There is no archive of their letters, and yet *The Glass Harmonica* draws deeply from historical records. This bibliographic note describes the non-fiction foundations of the novel, as well as some specific threads of accuracy. In the end though, this is a work of imagination.

#### *The truth about the glass harmonica, or ‘armonica’*

Nearly forgotten today, the glass harmonica arguably deserves the label of first pop-music phenomenon. Invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1761, the instrument had the advantages of vaguely dangerous sounds and great PR: a blind woman virtuoso musician toured the concert halls of Europe with it, Mozart composed for it and Franz Mesmer mesmerized his patients with it.<sup>1</sup> Audiences fainted at the eerie music of the glasses, and news of the listeners’ ‘celestial ravishment’ spread widely.<sup>2</sup> One had to be careful with *ravishment* in those days, as today. Its effects seemed so powerful that some German towns banned the instrument.<sup>3</sup> Before 1802, nearing the end of its heyday, the fictitious German Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler looked back with some irony at the fad, including the sexual undertones.

*For any young lady of breed ing it would have been most ill advised, as soon as the glasses were even touched, not to fall into a tolerably convincing swoon; she would have risked becoming an immediate object of indifference to any young man of refinement, however long he had courted her with amorous glances. Even ladies of more mature age fancied themselves transported back ten or fifteen years by all the pangs of blessed rapture...<sup>4</sup>*

The instrument’s notoriety grew in part because the most well-known players were women, which was unusual enough in a time that discouraged,

if not disbarred, women from the early ranks of professional musicianship. Playing the glasses proved fraught with dangers for these women.<sup>5</sup> Doctors hospitalized some players, including the renowned Marianne Davies, for hysteria.<sup>6</sup> While some speculate that lead poisoning from the glasses caused the women to go mad, science appears not to bear out this theory. Much more likely is the broader historical interpretation that doctors diagnosed any woman who broke the social rules as suffering from ‘hysteria’. The doctors employed a language of pathology as part of a larger cultural pattern of disciplining free-thinking women.

The strange effect of the glass harmonica does have some scientific basis. Because of the 1000—4000 hertz range of the sound, which is uncommon, the brain doesn’t quite know where to place the source of the sound.<sup>7</sup> Contemporaries of the period debated the effects of the instrument.<sup>8</sup> Karl Leopold Roellig’s treatise, mentioned in chapter four, exists (though I did invent Roellig’s trip to Paris.). He’s the one who cast the instrument as so powerful, you had to take the music in small doses to survive the impact.

*Not only these soft ‘airwaves’ which fill your ears can have serious consequences but also the percussion and the constant straining of the cups with already fragile nerves on your fingers can cause illnesses which can — sometimes — even end fatally.<sup>9</sup>*

The instrument’s few decades of fame, ending around 1820, dovetailed with the beginning of the invention of the celebrity, which is why I allowed myself the conceit of creating Chjara Garland as America’s first popular music celebrity. While people in ancient and early modern civilizations achieved fame, it was only with the expansion of printing and also the increase of literacy among common people that celebrity, as we know it today, began its engine of stardom.<sup>10</sup> For the first time, people began to read news accounts with intimate details about the individuals they admired.

In addition to the invention of celebrity, music enjoyed special powers during the fever of new nationalism. In the 18th century, the French worked hard to get their musical heritage recognized, competing with the Germans in particular. The revolutionary Jean Baptiste LeClerc went so far as to suggest that the law should circumscribe good and bad French music, and a special magistrate would guide people toward the ‘right music’. The

nationalistic aims to which music was harnessed flowed naturally out of a discourse that empowered music to lead the soul and improve the body's health.<sup>11</sup>

Undoubtedly, the vaguely naughty air that clung to the instrument helped to promote its popularity. Mesmer was the lightning rod for these implications. The character of the German choirmaster Kreisler gave voice to these thoughts: 'Of the use made of the instruments by Mesmer I prefer not to think!'

My personal interest ignited in part from glimpsing, out of the corner of my eye, these historical figures winking at me from behind the distance of the years. Like them, I have long had the hunch that sensuality might lead to virtue instead of vice, which is the question that (the fictional) Marguerite poses with the help of (the real) Joseph-Louis Roger's out-of-print text.<sup>12</sup> I believe that music and other sources of joy or ecstasy can overcome warlike ways of being in this world. In fact, the inspiration for the entire book drew from the moment when I took an accordion into my arms for the first time. The feel of the bellows breathing against my chest changed me. And a trip to the Salt Lake Library in search of accordion recordings tumbled me accidentally into a bin of glass harmonica CDs, a happenstance that sent me down a rabbit hole these last nearly eight years.

Before we turn to the historical accuracies behind Henry's business interests, a few more threads of accuracy between the real music history and my invented one: A hidden performer did play the glass harmonica at the 'ghost shows' in the catacombs of Paris. The ghost-show scene in chapter three plays on the history of Etienne-Gaspard Roberts (who was also called Robertson) and his *Phantasmagoria*. Roberts helped create the technology of the first 'moving' pictures, though I have changed Roberts' name to allow myself some flexibility with the details.<sup>13</sup>

Part Two's singing schools did sweep through New England in the 1700s, driven by Puritan elders' insistence on getting people to sing the 'right' way. Their intentions went awry in amusing ways, including that by early 1800, they tried to change the melodies to ancient European tunes to stop the young men and women from singing scripture to bawdy tunes.<sup>14</sup>

Part Four's Bostonian snob, the fictional Ross Corbett who disdains the first American pop music of the glass harmonica, accurately represents the

point of view of music lovers of the period who invented what we know of today as ‘classical’ music. They began the tradition of listening again and again to the then-current European composers.<sup>15</sup>

*The sex shop on cartwheels: the truth behind Henry’s business*

The political revolutions of the late 18th century coincided with an expanding sense of freedom, including sexual freedom. By some estimates, one in three New England brides was pregnant. Richard Godbeer chronicles how young people took advantage of an increasingly permissive atmosphere in his *Sexual Revolution in Early America*.<sup>16</sup>

I have invented Henry’s business, which catered to these new freedoms. The modern pornography business hadn’t yet come into being, including the word ‘pornography’ itself, which dates to mid 19th century.<sup>17</sup> Change was underway, however, before photography and mass-market printing transformed the secret world. Before the American Revolution and the separation from England, printing presses were few and tightly controlled. After about 1790, book peddlers on the new roads and expanding transportation networks dramatically increased the availability of books considered salacious, including the novel *The Coquette*, which some libraries banned and ministers railed against. Literacy skyrocketed, and people turned their backs on the prescriptive, early ‘self-help’ publications of the past, such as Benjamin Franklin’s *Poor Richard’s Almanack*.<sup>18</sup> While I invented the ‘Johnny Appleseed’ of erotic literature, people were getting their hands on *Fanny Hill* somehow, as evidence of it being printed has survived.<sup>19</sup>

In a broader sense, historians suggest that between the founding of the United States and the Comstock Act regulating obscenity in 1873, the old ‘secret museum’ paradigm of elite appreciation of obscene art moved toward the mass-market business we know today.<sup>20</sup> The story about the discovery of sexually explicit frescos during the excavation of Pompeii is factual, and there were secret societies of intellectuals in Paris. I invented the lecture, however. The race to create pornographic movies instead of mere text, drawings and objects may very well have been set back by Robertson’s famed secrecy over his phantoscope technology.

The erotic objects including the scrimshaw buttons carved with scenes from Pompeii frescos are only partly traceable in the historical record. The



Museum of Eroticism in Paris showcases some of the variety of sailors' erotic carvings of the period. The 'Nantucket husbands,' or love daggers as Chjara prefers to call them, are rumored to exist, though as yet I have heard of no surviving examples.

I also invented Henry's showboat, but itinerant musicians and showmen were all the rage in the early U.S. Republic, and the first steamboats began to appear about when I put Henry's ship onto the Hudson. Also, Harlequins intrigued Americans in the early years of the 19th century.<sup>21</sup> I have found no reference to any sex shop on cartwheels, but how else, I might ask, did rural people get their hands on these things at this time?

Other historical truths

As one might expect in an historical novel, many of the events in the book are true to the period. Masquerades did draw many hundreds if not thousands, though these events declined after The Terror, and costuming did include the he-whores, the Evites, and the lower/ upper classes' cross-dressing.<sup>22</sup> The second elephant ever to grace American shores did visit towns in New England around this time, and farmers did set bonfires in the middle of the night to see the great animal without paying any fee to the animal-exhibition promoters.<sup>23</sup> Wax figures, such as the Mohawk 'king' Henrik, were popular entertainments.<sup>24</sup> Portsmouth did burn to the ground at Christmas 1802.<sup>25</sup> Philip Dray describes the electricity demonstrations with the Leyden jar in *Stealing God's Thunder*, and I've drawn the details of Marguerite's surgery from James S. Olson's *Bathsheba's Breast: Women, Cancer, & History*. The *Philanthropist*, or the 'Boatload of Knowledge', did depart Pittsburgh loaded with intellectuals in 1826.<sup>26</sup> My favorite overviews of the period are Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* and Joyce Appleby's *Inheriting the Revolution*.

- 1 Current musicians provide much of the history of the glass harmonica on which I depended. See especially William Zeitler's website, [www.glassarmonica.com](http://www.glassarmonica.com).
- 2 American poet Nathaniel Evans used the term 'celestial ravishment' in a poem praising the glass armonica to Benjamin Franklin: [www.theotherpages.org/poems/evans02.html](http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/evans02.html)  
See also [www.crystalisa.com/content/history.html](http://www.crystalisa.com/content/history.html)
- 3 See the Franklin Institute's brief survey of the instrument's history at: [www.fi.edu/learn/sci-tech/armonica](http://www.fi.edu/learn/sci-tech/armonica).  
One of the current players of the instrument, Thomas Bloch, elaborates on why the German police banned

- the instrument: 'Among the reasons put forward: the sounds made by the instrument frighten animals, cause premature deliveries, shoot down the strongest man within one hour (according to a medical dictionary published in 1804) and drive the interpreters to madness...' [www.thomasbloch.net/en\\_glassharmonica](http://www.thomasbloch.net/en_glassharmonica)
- 4 Kreisler is the creation of composer-writer E.T.A Hoffmann. These lines are quoted by Zeitler at [www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/armonica\\_germany.php](http://www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/armonica_germany.php). Zeitler draws on *Musical Quarterly* (1991) 75 (2): 219–224.
  - 5 For an excellent discussion of the particular historical affinity between women and the glass harmonica, see Heather Hadlock's 'Sonorous Bodies: Women and the Glass Harmonica,' in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 2000, vol 53, no. 3.
  - 6 See [www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Marianne\\_Davies](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Marianne_Davies).
  - 7 I am not qualified to evaluate the debates on the lead theory. I conclude from other secondary sources that lead could not have leached into the water used by the harmonica players.  
See [www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Glass\\_harmonica](http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Glass_harmonica).
  - 8 The medical establishment of France interrogated Mesmer's claims for his treatment method. In the course of this investigation, the doctors debated the glass harmonica's effects with contributions by Benjamin Franklin. See [www.uh.edu/engines/epi710.htm](http://www.uh.edu/engines/epi710.htm).
  - 9 Zeitler has reproduced Roellig's key thoughts at: [www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/roellig.php](http://www.glassarmonica.com/armonica/roellig.php).
  - 10 A summary of this history of celebrity can we found at [www.randomhistory.com/1-50/010celeb.html](http://www.randomhistory.com/1-50/010celeb.html). The article cites Jake Halpern's *Fame Junkies: The Hidden Truths Behind America's Favorite Addiction* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007) and Maureen Orth's *The Importance of Being Famous: Behind the Scenes of the Celebrity-Industrial Complex* (New York: H. Holt, 2004).
  - 11 See Peter Huray and James Day, eds., *Music and Aesthetics in the 18th and Early 19th Centuries*, pgs 108 and 117 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
  - 12 See Joseph-Louis Roger's *Traité des effets de la musique sur le corps humain*, translated from Latin to French by Etienne Sainte-Marie, 1803; first published in 1758 as *Tentamen de vi soni et musices in corpus humanum*.
  - 13 I have relied on several excellent histories, such as Terry Castle's *The Female Thermometer: 18th Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford University Press, 1995). In Castle, I found not only splendid details of the Etienne Robertson's ghost show but a larger kinship. 'I have aimed,' wrote Castle, 'at precisely this sort of light-bringing: at the enlightenment that is really only the apprehension of a greater, more far-flung, bewilderment.'
  - 14 For the New England music scene, I depended on a number of secondary and primary sources, in particular: Michael Broyles *Music of the Highest Class: Elitism and Populism in Antebellum Boston* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); Stephen Marini et al, ed., *Norumbega Harmony: Historic and Contemporary Hymn Tunes* (University of Mississippi Press, 2003); Peter Benes, *New England Music: The Public Sphere, 1600–1900* (The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings, 1996; Boston University Scholarly Publications, 1998).
  - 15 See Broyles, *ibid*.
  - 16 See especially chapter 7, 'Under the Watch' The Metamorphosis of Sexual Regulation in Eighteenth-Century

- New England, in Richard Godbeer's, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
- 17 See the Oxford English Dictionary for a brief history of the word 'pornography.'
  - 18 See Cathy N. Davidson's introduction to *The Coquette* (Oxford Paperbacks edition 1987) for an excellent survey of both the novel's importance and the context of exploding literacy.
  - 19 Richard J. Wolfe offers a brief summary of the contentious debates around the clandestine publishing history of *Fanny Hill* in *Marbled Paper*, pgs 95–99, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990). See also the American Antiquarian Society's list of 'risqué literature published in America before 1877,' compiled by Marcus A. McCorison: [www.bibsocamer.org/BibSite/McCorison/Risque.pdf](http://www.bibsocamer.org/BibSite/McCorison/Risque.pdf).
  - 20 See Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography* (NY: Zone Books, 1996) and Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture* (University of California Press, 1987).
  - 21 See Peter Benes, 'The American Death of Harlequin: Musical Pantomimes in Boston before 1815,' In *New England Music: The Public Sphere, 1600–1900*, pgs 30–47 (op. cit.).
  - 22 See Castle, op. cit.
  - 23 See Peter Benes, ed., *Itinerancy in New England and New York*, (The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings, 1984, Boston University Scholarly Publications, 1986).
  - 24 See Eric Hinderaker's *The Two Hendricks: Unraveling a Mohawk Mystery* (Harvard University Press, 2010).
  - 25 I'm indebted to the generous staff at Portsmouth Athenaeum for helping me find newspaper accounts of the fire. See also Charles W. Brewster's *Rambles Around Portsmouth*, originally published in 1869.
  - 26 See Philip Dray, *Stealing God's Thunder: Benjamin Franklin's Lightning Rod and the Invention of America* (NY: Random House, 2005); James S. Olson's *Bathsheba's Breast: Women, Cancer, & History* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005); and Donald E. Pitzer's, 'The Original Boatload of Knowledge Down the Ohio River: William McClure and Robert Owen's Transfer of Science and Education to the Midwest, 1825—1826,' *Ohio Journal of Science* vol. 89, no. 5, pgs 128—42; Godbeer, op. cit.; and Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2001).

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## *The author*



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Dorothee Kocks's previous works include the *Accordion Monologues*, prose pieces featuring a sequined red accordion, and the non-fiction book, *Dream a Little: Land and Social Justice in Modern America* (University of California Press, 2000). She earned a PhD in American Studies from Brown University and has made her living as a professor and editor. Like the characters in her book, she has been something of an itinerant: born in Germany, she has lived in various parts of the world but has settled now in the extraordinary desert country of Salt Lake City, Utah, in a neighborhood called Sugarhouse. She is married to Mark Etheridge. [dorothee@dorotheekocks.com](mailto:dorothee@dorotheekocks.com)

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