

# Black Gold

Charles O'Brien

Poisoned Pen Press



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*For Elvy*



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## Cast of Main Characters in Order of First Mention

Colonel Paul de Saint-Martin, a French nobleman, provost in the Royal Highway Patrol ...	1
Comtesse Marie de Beaumont, Saint-Martin's aunt .....	1
Baron Breteuil, Minister for Paris, distant relative of Saint-Martin and his patron .....	1
Captain Maurice Fitzroy, an Irishman, womanizer and rogue .....	2
Sylvie de Chanteclerc, Baron Breteuil's goddaughter, assaulted by Fritzroy .....	2
Anne Cartier, English actress of French Huguenot descent; also teacher of the deaf .....	3
Madame Francine Gagnon, a French milliner on Milsom Street, Bath. Spies for Baron Breteuil .....	7
Georges Charpentier, resourceful assistant to Paul de Saint-Martin .....	9
André Cartier, Anne's paternal grandfather, a wealthy gunsmith .....	13
Thomas Braidwood, educator of the deaf .....	17
Jack Roach, a clever criminal; Anne Cartier's particular enemy .....	18
Charlie Rogers, 11-year-old deaf son of Lady Margaret and Sir Harry .....	19
Lady Margaret [née Pakenham], an Irish noble woman, married to Sir Harry Rogers .....	19

Mary Campbell, young woman, Charlie's first tutor, died of a fall .....	20
Sir Harry Rogers, wealthy slave trader from Bristol, husband of Lady Margaret .....	21
Harriet Ware, Anne Cartier's best friend, a singer and dancer. Sir Harry is her patron .....	22
William Rogers, Sir Harry's nephew, a 15 year old cheat and bully .....	36
Edward Critchley, William's learned tutor .....	36
Jeffery, also called Lord Jeff. A black slave, footman at Combe Park, and a boxer .....	37
Peter Hyde, Sir Harry's coachman and former boxer .....	54
Dick Burton, Bow Street officer from London .....	82
Betty Murphy, elderly Irish woman in Bristol, nurse to Lady Margaret and her son Charlie .....	107
David Woodhouse, Quaker printer and abolitionist .....	180
Sarah Smith, seamstress, free black woman and Jeffery's friend .....	180

# Contents

Acknowledgments .....	vii
Map of Britain and France .....	viii
Map of Bath and Vicinity, 1787 .....	ix
Map of Combe Park and Vicinity .....	x
Cast of Characters .....	xi
1 A Family Matter, Winter 1787 .....	1
2 A Change of Plan .....	13
3 Despair .....	23
4 Family Problems .....	31
5 Tracking the Prey .....	49
6 An Accident? .....	59
7 French Agents .....	67
8 Mortal Enemy .....	81
9 A Curious Invitation .....	93
10 A Poor Rich Boy .....	101
11 A Day in Bristol .....	123
12 Laying Blame .....	139
13 Fancy Ball .....	149
14 Fateful Theft .....	167

15	Secrets .....	177
16	Partners .....	187
17	Confrontation .....	197
18	The Battle .....	209
19	Victory Party .....	221
20	Foul Play? .....	235
21	A Strange Letter .....	253
22	Discoveries .....	261
23	Quandary .....	279
24	A Tissue of Lies .....	291
25	Lives in Crisis .....	307
26	Approaching Storm .....	319
27	Nightmare .....	331
28	Spring Ball .....	339
29	Final Reckoning .....	351
30	Justice and Honor .....	359
31	Aftermath .....	369
	Author's Note .....	381

# Chapter 1

## A Family Matter, Winter 1787

**Saturday, January 6**

The sky was overcast, the thin light of day rapidly fading. Gusts of freezing wind whipped up dust in the courtyard. Colonel Paul de Saint-Martin left his cabriolet in the care of a groom and stepped into the entrance hall. He shivered. The room was unheated and the chill of the ride from Paris was in his bones. His Aunt Marie had suddenly called him to Chateau Beaumont, her country residence a few miles south of the city.

“May I take your cloak, sir? The Comtesse is with Baron Breteuil in the library.” The doorman gathered the garment on his arm. “She is expecting you.”

A liveried footman led the colonel through the building to a closed door and knocked. At a soft command from within he opened the door.

Saint-Martin entered the library, raised his arm in greeting. A strange, heavy atmosphere pervaded the room. Darkness seeped through the windows; dozens of candles struggled to dispel the gloom. Their light flickered on the gilded spines of books. Eerie shadows danced on the high stuccoed ceiling.

“I understand we’re gathered here to deal with a family matter,” said Saint-Martin with a frisson of apprehension. He

glanced at his mentor and distant relative, Baron Breteuil, who rose from his chair. The man was grim-faced. And so was Comtesse Marie, who came forward to greet him, her brow knitted with concern. What could be so serious? True, the baron often looked grim these days when dealing with affairs of state as the king's minister for Paris. The government was virtually bankrupt. Its critics demanded deep cuts in expenditures and the right to approve new taxes. The baron mumbled a greeting through tight lips, then fell silent.

But Aunt Marie? What troubled her? Saint-Martin could not recall ever seeing her in such distress. She was usually lighthearted and gay, a welcome tonic when his own spirits were depressed. This evening she gave him a weak, distracted smile and inquired about his health.

Servants arranged three chairs at a small table. Tea was poured, sweetcakes served, and the servants withdrew.

When the door closed, the baron put his cup down with a clatter. His hands gripped the arms of his chair. He threw a glance toward the comtesse, then addressed Saint-Martin. "I'll come right to the point, Paul. I'm asking you to pursue a certain Irishman, Captain Maurice Fitzroy, at one time in our king's service in the Dillon Regiment."

"We've never met, though I've heard his name mentioned—a gambler and a rake."

"An expert gambler, indeed! He has won large sums of money from Comtesse Clare, my cousin." The baron paused for a deep breath. "I could forget about the money. She was foolish to risk it. But I cannot overlook what he did to my godchild, Sylvie."

The baron yielded to Comtesse Marie, who reminded her nephew, "She's my godchild as well, and your distant cousin."

Saint-Martin felt a tightening in his chest. He knew Sylvie de Chanteclerc from summers he had spent at Chateau Beaumont a decade ago. She'd have been eight or nine years old at the time. A sunny child, always eager for a new game.

A few months ago over coffee in the Palais-Royal, they had renewed their acquaintance and promised to meet again soon. He had been struck by her uncanny resemblance to his friend, Anne Cartier—lively blue eyes, blond hair, fair complexion.

“She’s a spirited, sensible girl of nineteen,” the baron continued. “For some time, the Irishman attempted to court her. At first, she found him handsome and charming. They met on a few occasions, but she came to distrust him. Polished on the surface. Mean and deceitful underneath. When she tried to discourage him, he pressed his suit even more ardently. Two days ago, she finally rebuffed him.” The baron paused, swallowed, then went on, his voice just above a whisper. “The monster found her alone, beat and raped her. He spread the rumor that she had complied gladly, that I had punished her.” The baron looked down, stroking his forehead.

Saint-Martin gasped, turned to his aunt. “When did this happen? I hadn’t heard. I just got back from Rouen.”

“Late Thursday evening,” she replied. “At the baron’s chateau while he was in Paris. Sylvie had sent Fitzroy away. But he only pretended to leave the estate and hid somewhere on the grounds. When everyone had gone to bed and the house was quiet, he sneaked through a window he had earlier unlatched. In a footman’s disguise, he made his way to her room, bound and gagged her, violated her. A pair of trusted servants found her unconscious yesterday morning.”

The comtesse excused herself and pulled on a bellrope. A maid appeared. The comtesse spoke into her ear and sent her off, then resumed her account. “When Sylvie recovered consciousness, she was in shock and wouldn’t talk to anyone. She was brought here last night, started to feel better, and told me what had happened. I wrote to the baron at once.”

“Aunt Marie...” Saint-Martin struggled for words. “I can hardly believe it! Poor Sylvie!”

“But it’s true.” The comtesse fell silent and took a deep breath. “She allowed me to verify the evidence on her body.”

"And you can see for yourself," came a strained voice from behind Saint-Martin. He heard the rustle of a garment and looked over his shoulder. A young woman wrapped in a plain brown dressing gown stepped out of the shadows. Her hair was covered by a gray bonnet that shadowed her face. Obviously in pain, she managed to hold herself erect.

She bowed to the baron and the comtesse, then approached Saint-Martin, who rose from his chair. "Colonel," she said, curtseying stiffly before him.

"Sylvie." His voice faltered. Shocked by her altered appearance, he glanced toward his companions. Their eyes had fastened on him.

Untying the bonnet, she moved a step closer, then bent forward into a candle's light. "He did this, Colonel." She removed the bonnet and tentatively touched her face with her fingers, as if to confirm the damage. The left side was deeply discolored, the eye half-closed. Her lips were swollen.

Saint-Martin felt his gorge rising. "My God!" he breathed.

Stepping back, she pulled open her gown and let it fall over the cord at her waist.

Out of respect, Saint-Martin instinctively tried to avert his eyes. But Sylvie held his gaze. She pointed to dark bruises on her side. She coughed slightly, grimacing with pain.

"He kicked her and broke two ribs," said Comtesse Marie. She hurried to the young woman, wrapped her again in the gown and gently embraced her.

Sylvie cast her a thin smile, then turned back to Saint-Martin. Wrath worked the lines of her mouth. "Fitzroy claims I invited him to my room and the baron beat me for having dishonored the family name. But I swear before Almighty God, the Irishman lies." Her voice dropped to a hoarse whisper. "I want you to kill him."

The baron rose to his feet and shook his fist. "Death would be much too quick, too gentle!"

Sylvie sagged into the comtesse's arms, then forced herself upright. "Kill him!" she cried, her voice low and hoarse. The two men looked on while Comtesse Marie helped her from the room.

When the door closed behind the women, the baron began to pace the floor furiously, staring ahead, pounding his fist into the palm of his hand. After a few minutes, he sat at a desk and waved Saint-Martin to a chair facing him. He held up a document. "This is the king's *lettre de cachet*, a secret order for Captain Fitzroy to be held in solitary confinement for the rest of his life in a royal prison." He handed it to Saint-Martin, adding, "I'm ordering you to execute the royal command."

Shocked by Sylvie's tragedy, Saint-Martin could only nod his assent. For a few seconds he struggled to control his feelings, then found his voice. "The captain's behavior revolts me, sir. Where shall I catch him?"

"The scoundrel disappeared from Paris yesterday, after claiming he was about to be accused of a crime he hadn't committed. I assume he'll flee to England, but he may go there by way of the Low Countries. He knows we will watch the French channel ports closely. I want you to organize a search. Alert the posts of the Royal Highway Patrol at the frontiers. As far as the public is concerned, he is wanted for questioning concerning allegations of fraud."

"May I inquire, sir, why you secured the *lettre de cachet* instead of a warrant for his arrest?" Saint-Martin took a dubious view of this arbitrary procedure that lent itself so easily to abuses of the worst kind. An innocent man could be plucked from his home in the middle of the night and imprisoned without trial, without knowing his accuser or the crime of which he was accused.

The baron leaned forward, arms on the desk, hands clasped tightly. "I want to spare Sylvie the horror and shame of a public trial. She would have to reveal what happened. Judges

would question her testimony, probing into the most intimate details. Every hack scribbler in Paris would spread lurid tales about her.”

Saint-Martin agreed. “She should not have to endure the tearing open of such a wound.” And, to make matters worse, he thought to himself, she could lose the case. Fitzroy might go free. The crime of rape was difficult to prove. And the baron had powerful enemies in high places who resented his great influence at court or had been stung by his sharp tongue. They would be eager to credit Captain Fitzroy’s tale.

“Well, there you have it,” said the baron, rising from the desk, the discussion at an end. “Fitzroy is guilty beyond a doubt and must be secretly imprisoned. Once in chains, I can assure you, he will suffer the torments of the damned.”

### **Tuesday, March 20**

Colonel Paul de Saint-Martin removed his gloves and flicked specks of dust off his red lapels. Baron Breteuil had summoned him to his office in the royal palace at Versailles. The colonel sighed softly. Ten weeks had passed since Captain Fitzroy had assaulted Sylvie and the rogue was still at large.

Saint-Martin surveyed the antechamber. At this late morning hour the room was crowded with petitioners waiting for an audience, most of them supercilious aristocrats, fashionably dressed. They passed the time exchanging bits of court gossip. To judge from the impatient glances they threw at the baron’s door, each of them felt entitled to enter immediately.

The colonel smiled to himself. He would be shown into the office before any of them. The baron’s message was cryptic and urgent. Something must have happened concerning Captain Fitzroy.

Punishing the knave lay very close to the baron’s heart. He had been sorely troubled that the search had thus far been fruitless. Fitzroy had indeed fled to the Low Countries, keeping a step ahead of the French agents pursuing him. Saint-

Martin himself had travelled to Brussels and received full cooperation from the Habsburg authorities. In vain. Fitzroy had disappeared, most likely into Germany or England.

A liveried servant opened the office door and with a bow invited Saint-Martin in. The waiting crowd stirred. A titter of chagrin trailed after him.

Baron Breteuil rose from behind his desk and greeted the colonel with a smile. "Paul, I believe we've found the Irish scoundrel." He sat down again, beckoning Saint-Martin to a chair opposite him. "I can't tell you how pleased I am."

"Where is he?"

"In England." The baron was silent for a moment, allowing the new diplomatic complications of the case to sink into Saint-Martin's mind. "One of my agents, Madame Gagnon, a milliner, has spotted him in Bath under his own name. Maurice Fitzroy! Would you believe it! The bold villain!"

The colonel weighed the baron's words carefully before replying. "That's bad news for us. He's a devil, not a fool. He must have found powerful men to protect him, so he now feels secure."

Breteuil shrugged his shoulders, then pushed a sheet of paper across the desk. "A description of the milliner and the address of her shop. I want you to call on her."

So that's what this conversation was all about, Saint-Martin thought. He must pursue Fitzroy in England. He folded his arms across his chest and leaned back listening, while the baron went on about the milliner's report. Saint-Martin's mind soon began to wander, distracted by a large map of western Europe on the office wall. His eyes fixed on England. Suddenly, London leaped out at him.

Unbidden, an image crept into his mind. A tall, lithe young woman with golden blond hair and blue eyes. Anne Cartier. He had longed for months for her to return to Paris. Fond memories surfaced: beads of dew dripping from a rose onto her sleeve, a ride together in the woods near Wimbledon. Was

Providence now sending him to her? From her last letter, he knew she would be in London yet a little while longer. They could surely meet again as he passed through en route to Bath.

The baron tapped his fingers on the desk. "A certain aspect of this mission seems to appeal to you, Colonel. Bath may be the loveliest city in Britain and offers pleasures to suit every taste. But you will be there on serious, dangerous business."

Caught day-dreaming, the colonel quickly collected himself. "I'm fully aware of that, sir. Fitzroy's wily as well as ruthless." From the report of others, Saint-Martin had formed a mental picture of this foe he had yet to meet. Medium height, slender build, wavy black hair, soft blue eyes, high forehead and refined, delicate features. This almost feminine appearance masked the strength and agility of an athlete. An accomplished fencer, he was also expert with dueling pistols.

"May I ask, Baron, why you have chosen me for this mission rather than, say, an experienced agent like Inspector Quidor?"

"We're dealing with a family matter, Colonel, as well as a crime. You have a personal interest in the mission and the discretion to carry it out properly. I can trust you to avoid diplomatic complications. You know the English and their ways and speak their language. Our relations with them are tense at present. They fear we shall intervene in the quarrel among the Dutch, clash with the Prussians, upset the balance of power in the region. In a few words, you will abduct Fitzroy for me without making a mess. Quidor is clumsy, as we learned in the necklace affair."

Saint-Martin smiled inwardly. A little more than a year earlier, Quidor and his ruffians had tried to kidnap Comte de la Motte, who was in England selling off diamonds from the notorious stolen necklace intended for the French queen. Debarking near Newcastle like a small invading army, they witlessly stirred up the authorities and had to flee in confusion.

"I suggest you travel as a private person on vacation. I'll supply the money and documents you'll need."

“And what of my duties as a provost of the Royal Highway Patrol?”

“I’ll find someone to act in your place.” The baron paused, his voice took on a conspiratorial tone. “I do not intend to inform our foreign minister. He might become unduly alarmed. Our embassy in London, therefore, will not be aware of your mission. As I’ve said, this is a family affair. The less that’s known of it, the better.”

The baron reached into a pile of papers on his desk, then looked up as if to say, if there’s nothing else...?

“I understand what you expect of me,” said Saint-Martin, rising from his chair. “By the way, I’d like to take my adjutant, Georges Charpentier, with me as a valet.”

“By all means. Good man. Knows England. How soon can you leave?”

“By Friday, the 23rd, arriving in Bath a week later, with a couple of days in London en route.”

The baron wrinkled his brow in an afterthought, then drew a small silver case from his pocket. “Take this with you, Paul. And study it from time to time.”

Saint-Martin opened it to a recent miniature portrait of Sylvie in a gauzy white summer dress. She gazed at him with a happy, innocent expression. He felt profoundly saddened, then angered. A precious part of the young woman’s spirit had been brutally destroyed. He snapped the case shut and muttered through tightly pressed lips, “This should help me remember why I’m going.” He bowed stiffly to the minister and stalked out.



Outside the baron’s office, Saint-Martin’s mind was churning. How could he apprehend a wily, ruthless, well-connected villain in England, a foreign country, France’s enemy for centuries? He walked rapidly through the state apartments of the royal palace, oblivious to the bustle of courtiers and clerks around him. By an instinct he had learned to trust, he sought out the

great palace garden that André Le Nôtre had built for Louis XIV over a century ago.

From the terrace outside the palace, Saint-Martin gazed out over this vast symbol of the Sun King's glory. Broad flights of stone steps led from one level down to another. Wide graveled avenues cut through a regimented forest of trees. Water jetted from fantastic fountains or mirrored the sky in still, pellucid pools. Colossal statues struck every conceivable attitude. A marvelous symmetry and balance ruled over all.

Saint-Martin drew a deep breath. The garden's formal grandeur, so striking in early spring with trees and bushes just beginning to bud, reassured him that the human mind could master even the most wayward impulses of nature. The human variety, included.

This place had once been little more than shifting sand and marsh. Louis XIV had decided it would become a great garden, cost what it might. His architect Le Nôtre designed an ambitious plan, brought in earth, water, and stone, set thousands of men to work to create a masterpiece of cultivated taste and intelligence, a symbol of the absolute authority of the French state and its monarch.

Saint-Martin felt certain that a similar intelligence and energy could be brought to bear on Fitzroy. Beneath his polished, elegant surface, the captain was a primitive man, a wily brute, all sand and marsh. Baron Breteuil was as determined as the great king and willing to spend whatever it would take to outwit and capture the miscreant. Like the king's architect, Saint-Martin would have to devise a credible plan and execute it. A daunting task, but in an odd way he felt lifted up by the majesty of the state. Its ideal of justice would inspire him, and its power would enable him to prevail.

He left the terrace and walked down the steps into the garden. The parterres to left and right still slept, awaiting their floral robes. In the Apollo basin, a gusty spring breeze rippled water around the sun god in his chariot rising from the depths.

In the distance, the Grand Canal stretched out nearly to the horizon. A few pleasure boats drifted lazily on its shimmering surface.

He imagined himself out there with Anne, her hands dangling in the water while he rowed. "That's for a warmer season," he murmured to himself, for the sun had slipped behind a cloud and the breeze had turned chilly. He found a sheltered bench with a view of Apollo's fountain, pulled a small case from his pocket, and opened it to a miniature portrait of Anne. Their deaf friend Michou had painted it last summer. Saint-Martin had carried it with him ever since.

As he gazed at Anne's image, his mind drifted back to that time. He and Anne had stood side by side at this very fountain after a private royal audience. She had handed over to the king the priceless stolen jewels she had recovered, having been wounded in a struggle with its thief. As a reward, the king had given her a fine cabochon emerald set in gold and hung on a gold chain.

In the fountain's reflected light, she had asked Saint-Martin to help her put it on. He had slipped behind her and fastened it around her neck. She had turned her head and ravished him with a tender smile. His heart leapt. It was a moment he would never forget.

Later in September, as Anne was leaving Paris for London, they had agreed to be friends. He had wanted a more committed relationship, perhaps marriage, but had cautiously yielded to her yearning for independence. She had said she'd only be gone for a few weeks, visiting grandparents and friends.

Saint-Martin looked up to the sky, searching for the sun, then sighed. The "few weeks" had stretched out into seven months. Anne had nursed her grandmother through a lingering fatal illness. Her letters had expressed an ardent wish to see him soon. But delay followed delay until he wondered if she were losing interest in returning to Paris, to Abbé de l'Épée's school, where she had been learning to teach deaf

children. Had she been trapped into caring for other aged relatives? She might stay in England forever.

He stared again at Anne's portrait as if his gaze could somehow bring her back to his side. How he longed for her! He returned the case to his pocket, leaned back on the bench, and thought ahead to his forthcoming visit to England. He would seek her out in the village of Hampstead near London where she was staying with her grandfather. Would her face light up, her arms reach out, when he appeared on her doorstep?

Buoyed by a fragile hope, he imagined the two of them riding in the lovely green English countryside, her blue eyes teasing him, her cheeks flushed with pleasure. The prospect lifted his spirits. But a quiet voice within warned him not to let his hopes rise too high. Or distract him from his task. He rose from the bench and walked purposefully back to the palace.

# Chapter 2

## A Change of Plan

Tuesday, March 20

The scent of hay and freshly oiled leather filled the tackle room. A young woman stepped back to inspect her work and gave it a nod of approval. She believed in caring for her own saddle and her boots, never mind what the men thought. Out in the stable a mare whinnied softly, then snorted. The horse had been fed, now she wanted more personal attention.

“I’m coming, Mignon.” The young woman walked into the stable and stroked the fine-boned black thoroughbred’s gleaming neck. It whinnied with pleasure, bent its head toward the young woman, and nuzzled her.

An old man’s voice, still robust, came from the house close by. “I’m home, Annie. You’ve another letter from Paris. Can’t *imagine* who sent it.” The language was French with a Norman accent, though the old man had lived his entire adult life in England. He had just returned from Hampstead with the mail. A daily morning ritual.

Anne Cartier smiled ruefully. She had detected an undertone of concern in her grandfather’s teasing voice. He knew very well who had sent the letter. The French colonel. She closed the stable door behind her and hurried up the garden

path to the house, a modest two-story brick building set on a gentle rise of land and surrounded by great oak trees and lush, grassy meadows.

Monsieur André Cartier sat quietly at the table on the garden terrace cleaning the barrel of a pistol. A square, ruddy-faced man with dark bushy eyebrows, he had about him even in repose an air of authority. Thick wiry steel gray hair attested to his seventy years. The recent loss of his wife had dulled the brilliance of his blue eyes. But he still managed a large gun shop in Hampstead a mile away, crafting duelling pistols, fowling pieces, and the like for wealthy customers. As Anne approached, he smiled at her with obvious affection.

Sheltered by the house from a cool spring breeze, the terrace gathered the full warmth of the March sun. The letter from Paris waited for her on the table. She took a seat facing her grandfather, drew a small case from her bag, and opened it to the miniature portrait of Paul that her deaf friend Michou had painted in Paris. For a few moments she gazed at the portrait, drawing in Paul's presence, then picked up the letter.

After reading a few lines, Anne wondered if she shouldn't have retired to the privacy of her room. Her face surely betrayed her yearning for this man. On the other hand, she had always felt comfortable confiding in her grandfather. Months ago, she had spoken about Paul de Saint-Martin. A provost of the Royal Highway Patrol, he had helped her clear the name of her stepfather, Antoine Dubois, falsely accused of murdering a woman in Paris, then killing himself.

During that investigation, she and Paul had grown fond of one another, despite the great social distance between them. It had been hard for her to leave him last September and return to England for a visit.

Her grandfather had listened to her patiently but with a skeptical ear. He had heard of the man before. Years ago, Anne and her parents had sung his praises. They had met him, then a young officer, during summers spent in France before the

American War. Unfortunately, as a child, the old Huguenot had learned to hate the French monarchy and its church. His parents had suffered imprisonment and the loss of their property at the hands of the king's agents. Relatives in France were still subject to force and guile designed to bring about their conversion. As he grew older, he judged individual Catholics on their personal merits. But the ancient antipathy welled up whenever he pictured Colonel Paul de Saint-Martin in the king's uniform.

Sometimes Anne wondered if her grandfather also feared that another man might take away his beloved granddaughter. When she first mentioned Saint-Martin, Cartier had suggested the colonel might have ulterior motives in befriending her. Was he a typical nobleman looking for a mistress? Or, did he have marriage in mind? If so, was that in her best interest? Would his family accept her? Would he expect her to adopt his religion?

She had wrestled with these questions for the past several months. Her grandfather had suggested she stand back and take a sober look at Saint-Martin. Allow time and distance to test her feelings for him.

That she had done, aided by delays she could not avoid. In the end, as her reaction to today's letter confirmed, she wanted to be with Paul more than ever. But, marriage was a different matter. As she had said to her grandfather, she didn't want to *belong* to anyone. She wanted to manage her own life.

Her grandfather now seemed to read her mind. "Our law and customs are creating this quandary." He reached across the table and held her hand. "You and the colonel could marry according to society's conventions but agree to treat each other as free and equal. That agreement would depend solely on the sincerity of your promises. Whether within or outside of marriage, your best guarantee of remaining your own person is the integrity of his love for you. Thus far, it has survived the test of separation."

He gazed at her thoughtfully. A tinge of sadness came over his face. "Annie, consider the situation of your Protestant relatives in France. In public, they have to conform to the law requiring them to marry, baptize, and worship according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church. In private, they act according to their consciences. It's galling to have to compromise in such matters but unavoidable." He sighed deeply.

Squeezing his hand, she thanked him. The future remained unclear, but glancing again at the miniature portrait of Paul lying next to the letter, she felt hopeful. Michou had caught the frank cast of his brow, the quiet humor in the lines of his mouth, the glint of desire in his eyes. Anne caressed the portrait with her fingers.

She read Paul's letter again. He was still working on the special assignment Baron Breteuil had given him in January. A difficult, very troubling case. One day he would tell her about it. In the meantime, he missed her and was looking forward to a ride together at Chateau Beaumont.

He was referring to an early morning during the past summer. A tender moment. They were about to mount their horses when news came of a murder on a nearby estate. Reluctantly, they had to abandon the ride. The ensuing investigation absorbed their attention and the moment was lost.

Anne's desire to return to Paris strengthened with every line of the letter. She would resume her studies with Abbé de l'Épée and master his system for educating deaf children. And she would renew her friendship with Paul. At the end of the second reading, she laid the letter on the table and looked up at her grandfather. His smile was sad but accepting. She felt a tug at her heart.

"I'll be leaving for Paris by the Dover coach on Monday the 26th."

"Yes, we've talked about it before. There's risk, but you've given it enough thought. Go to him. He seems to be an honorable man."

“But I hate to leave you, especially since Grandmother is gone.” Anne imagined her grandfather alone in the house, its rooms filled with the mementos of a long married life. They would constantly remind him of the loss of his wife.

“Don’t worry. I’ll be fine. With spring coming, my mind will be busy with work on the estate as well as the gun business. I’ll have my sister Adelaide. She’ll soon come to live with me.”

Anne felt relieved. Her recently widowed aunt was an amiable, sensible person. They would comfort one another. Blowing him a kiss, Anne rose from the table. “I’m going to ride over to Hackney to say good-bye to Mr. Braidwood.”

Since returning to England in September, she had often visited his institute for the deaf, where she had worked prior to becoming involved in the Dubois case. Braidwood had entrusted a few of his students to her for tutoring and shown keen interest in her report on the work of Abbé de l’Épée in Paris, whom he viewed with suspicion as a rival.

“Julien will ride with you to Hackney,” said Monsieur Cartier in a voice that admitted no contradiction. “There’s safety in numbers, especially on English highways.”



A few hours later, Anne Cartier rode sidesaddle on her thoroughbred down the gravel path that led to the highway. Julien, Monsieur Cartier’s trusted groom, followed a few paces behind. Like his master, the groom had fled from Normandy to England as an infant together with his French Huguenot parents. He too had kept his mother tongue. Neither man felt entirely at home in England.

Anne cast a sidelong glance at him and smiled. He merely nodded back, but she could see a hint of pleasure in his eyes. A taciturn man, he spoke only when he thought he had good reason to do so. Yet she felt comfortable with him. And grateful. He had shared with Anne his knowledge of horses—he had served several youthful years in a British mounted

regiment. Thanks to him, she could ride and shoot like a cavalryman.

On this day, Anne was especially happy that Julien allowed her to pursue her own thoughts. Halfway to Hackney, they passed by Islington, where she had fond memories of rope dancing and tumbling at Sadler's Wells, first with her stepfather, Antoine Dubois, and then, later, by herself.

There were darker, painful memories also, from a year and a half ago, when Jack Roach and his cronies attacked her at night outside her Islington cottage and trumped up charges of lewd solicitation and assault against her. She had spent the night in a wretched jail. The next day, Roach's ally, the magistrate, Tom Hammer, had condemned her in a farce of a trial. The crowd in the village marketplace had shouted, "French whore." On the scaffold Hammer had cropped her thick golden hair. Even now, she shuddered at the thought of that bitter, humiliating experience.

With relief she spurred her horse toward Hackney. When she had felt depressed, Mr. Braidwood had given her comfort and rewarding work to do. She owed him a great deal.

At the institute an ancient servant showed her in, then gestured in the direction of Braidwood's reception room. "You know the way, Miss Cartier, you're at home here." He bowed slightly and returned to his post.

She felt pleased to be thought of as one of the family. Wending her way through the building, she renewed her acquaintance with students and teachers. They greeted her warmly, if briefly, for the students—some twenty of them—were in the midst of their daily vocal exercises, tediously learning the position of lips and tongue for every sound their teachers wanted them to make.

Anne stopped at an open door to watch Mr. Braidwood's son John work with three young children. One student at a time, he shaped their mouths with his own fingers. Then he pronounced the vowels, and they followed his lead. To correct

their mistakes, he chose a rounded silver instrument the length of a tobacco pipe, flattened at one end, with a small ball at the other. Placing it in the students' mouths, he moved their tongues to the exact position for each vowel.

Frustration flashed across the students' faces as their teacher calmly repeated the exercise again and again. But they endured it more or less patiently for they realized its purpose. They must learn to articulate clearly, or no one would ever understand what they said. Finally, he put the device in its case and smiled. They would move on to something more enjoyable.

The door to Braidwood's office stood ajar. Anne knocked, then cautiously stepped inside. Bent and gray, Braidwood was standing by the window, looking out at the garden. Hearing her enter, he turned and immediately straightened up. "What a pleasant and, I must say, fortunate surprise. For I've just now been thinking of you. In this morning's mail I've received a most troubling message. Let me tell you about it."

The day was still warm and sunny, uncommon for March. He ordered tea, then led Anne to a sheltered table at the far end of the garden. When tea had been poured and they were alone, he met Anne's eye. "I'm concerned about little Charlie Rogers. You recall him, I'm sure. The eleven-year-old boy from Bristol. You tutored him frequently and got on well with him."

"Of course. A sweet, bright child, rather small and frail, suffers from asthma. He's away on holiday with his parents at a spa, isn't he?"

Braidwood sighed. "Yes, he's in Bath. I learned this morning that he needs a new tutor for the next four or five weeks." The old man shifted in his chair and took a sip of tea, as if gathering courage. "And you came to mind."

Alarm bells rang in Anne's head. Several weeks tutoring in Bath? She wanted to leave Hampstead for Paris in six days!

Braidwood apparently failed to notice her consternation, for he went on explaining the "troubling message." It came from Lady Margaret Rogers, the boy's mother. "His tutor Mary

Campbell has suddenly died," he said, his voice breaking. "Lady Margaret asks me to send a replacement."

Anne drew back in horror. "That's incredible! How did it happen?"

"Accidentally. She fell. Lady Margaret didn't say how."

Anne knew Mary Campbell, a likeable, conscientious seventeen-year-old whose parents were deaf. A hearing person herself, she was familiar with oral training of the deaf.

"Her parents studied with me in Scotland many years ago," Braidwood continued. "We've kept in touch. Mary visited us here in Hackney in January when she moved to London. A kind, friendly girl. I thought she'd be a good companion for little Charlie, if not exactly a tutor. I recommended her to Lady Margaret." Braidwood stared at the ground, shaking his head. "I feel devastated by her death and partly responsible for it. After all, I sent her to Bath."

"Don't punish yourself." Anne struggled for words that would console the stricken man. "You couldn't foresee an accident like this."

"Thank you, Miss Cartier, for your kindness." He looked up at her, knitting his brow. "But I should have done something. She had complained to her parents that the family was a hornet's nest. When I heard that, I should have called her back and sent an older person. She was perhaps too young and inexperienced. I also worry about the boy's well-being in such a family. His parents have little understanding of his disability and treat him as a nuisance or an embarrassment."

Though realizing he desperately wanted her to take Mary's place, Anne remained silent. Her heart was set on her reunion with Paul. Moving into a strange household wasn't at all what she wanted to do. Yet she owed Braidwood a favor, and a small inner voice urged her to repay him.

"Couldn't someone from the staff here in Hackney be sent to replace her?" It shamed Anne that she was trying to evade his clear desire.

“My son’s health is too delicate for the journey and for what are surely stressful circumstances. My assistants are needed here and are also too young and inexperienced.” He paused for a moment, then raised his hands palms up and smiled tentatively. “I thought of you from the start. You have worked with the boy over the past several months, and he likes you.” He paused, then continued with a more confident voice. “You are a mature, resourceful, and courageous woman, as you recently proved in Antoine Dubois’ case. I would be most grateful if you could relieve my mind of this concern.”

“This comes as a complete surprise to me,” Anne responded as calmly as she could. “I have made plans to return to France this coming Monday. But, I see the urgency of Charlie’s situation. Give me an hour’s time and a quiet place to think it over.”

“I appreciate your willingness to consider my request. The garden is yours for as long as you need it.” Braidwood rose from the table, visibly hopeful, and returned to the house.

Anne paced up and down the garden paths, recalling Charlie’s slender, delicate features, black wavy hair, high forehead, soft blue eyes. He was small and immature for his age, but an unusually intelligent and sensitive boy. Three years ago, a high fever had taken away his hearing. His parents placed him with Braidwood, who had just opened his institute in Hackney. Sharp-eyed and alert, the boy developed a remarkable talent for reading lips. Since he had acquired the habit of speech before his illness, he articulated well enough to be understood. But his voice had become monotone and unnaturally loud and high pitched. He stumbled on new words and certain sounds, like “ch.”

At home, Anne understood, the boy spoke reluctantly, fearing criticism or ridicule. She knew little about the boy’s family, other than it was rich. Braidwood had mentioned that the father had made a fortune in West Indian trade, and his wife was an Irish baron’s daughter. Under the circumstances, Anne reasoned, she could set her own terms: decent accommodations,

good pay, and a suitable measure of freedom and respect. It was only for a month or so. The boy was isolated and lonely. Or, worse.

She glanced across the garden at the institute. Teaching here had helped her recover from her humiliation at the hands of Roach and Hammer. She owed Braidwood for that. He could have taken advantage of her but he didn't. And he wouldn't have asked her today if he had any other choice. Rising from the bench with a heavy heart, she knew she must postpone her return to Paris and travel immediately to Bath.

On her way to Braidwood's office, she began considering the preparations she must now make. Harriet Ware, her best friend from Sadler's Wells, was working as a singer and dancer at a theater in Bath. Anne would write to her this evening, announcing her imminent arrival. Then she would write to Paul. A tear escaped from her eye. She hoped he would understand.

# Chapter 3

## Despair

Thursday, March 22

Shortly after dawn, Colonel Paul de Saint-Martin strolled through the enclosed garden of his residence on Rue Saint-Honoré. The marks of winter were still visible everywhere: fallen twigs, moldering leaves, dry stalks of plants. But spring had arrived. In a few hours, the full heat of the sun would beat down on the flower beds. Daffodils were about to bloom.

He had risen early to ready the garden for its new season. It was his last opportunity. Tomorrow, he would leave Paris for England and didn't know how long he would be gone. He regretted that he might miss the spring flowers already making their way out of the ground. They cheered his spirit after the dreariness of winter. For over an hour he cleared away the debris and left it in a pile for servants to dispose of.

At seven o'clock, he broke off work. Time to talk to Georges about the trip. Up to this point, he had not involved his adjutant in the pursuit of Fitzroy. Georges Charpentier was an older man in his late forties, with a broad knowledge of policing. While Saint-Martin was away from Paris, Georges had capably managed the provost's office and investigated several crimes. Saint-Martin's substitute, a retired colonel, was

happy that someone else looked after affairs. Had Georges been of noble birth, he could have expected to rise to a position of authority in the Royal Highway Patrol.

Saint-Martin had ordered breakfast to be served in his office. Georges appeared promptly, just as a servant was setting the table with plates and cups, baskets of bread, butter, preserves, and cheese. He poured coffee, set the pot on the table, and left the room. The adjutant rubbed his hands with relish, took a seat, and broke off a piece of bread.

Before he could bring it to his mouth, the colonel cleared his throat. "Georges, can you be ready to leave for England tomorrow?"

The adjutant blinked. "You're joking, aren't you?" He grinned and wagged his head.

"No. The baron gave me orders two days ago. Couldn't reach you yesterday. Fitzroy's been spotted in Bath. I need you to help me catch him and bring him back."

Georges put down the bread, his brow furrowed. "I thought Fitzroy was a family matter. Should I be involved?"

His tone of voice was neutral, his expression detached. Still, the question had an edge that caught Saint-Martin by surprise and disquieted him.

"The baron wants to keep the affair out of the public eye. But, family honor isn't the only issue. Fitzroy raped and beat a young woman, who happens to be my cousin. He shouldn't be allowed to do that to anyone. I'm treating this as a serious criminal offense. Normally, we'd ask the English to give up a suspected felon. But, in this case, the procedure would expose Sylvie to public shame. And, the English might refuse to cooperate, preferring to accept Fitzroy's version of the incident." He paused to gauge his adjutant's mind and noted his growing interest. "Now, to answer your question: Yes, I think you should be involved in catching Fitzroy; he's a fugitive. Furthermore, you're familiar with the English and speak their language. I couldn't find a better man in all of Paris."

“That’s true,” Georges remarked candidly. “Sartines was my master!”

The colonel had often heard Georges’ homage to Lieutenant-General Sartines, the man in charge of French police more than a decade ago. Georges had in fact served Sartines as a spy in England.

Georges palmed the imaginary hair on his bald pate, grinning lecherously. “Well, it looks like the women of Paris will have to find another lover for a while. I’ll warn them I’m being called away suddenly on business.” He lifted his cup and took a sip of coffee. “What role am I to play?”

“My valet. I’ll be travelling as a tourist.” The colonel explained they would cross the Channel at Calais, spend a few days in London, then go on to Bath. “Baron Breteuil has arranged for Lieutenant Faure from Villejuif to move into this office while I’m gone.”

“Will we see Miss Cartier?” Georges asked, a sly look in his eye.

“I hope so,” Saint-Martin replied with feeling.

The two men had nearly finished breakfast when a message arrived. “From Comtesse Beaumont,” said Saint-Martin, scanning the page. “She wants me to visit her on Rue Traversine. Sylvie’s with her. Something’s wrong.” He stared at the note, then turned to his adjutant. “You had best come along, Georges.”



The two men hurried on foot through busy crowded streets to the comtesse’s town house. She and Sylvie had come to Paris a few days ago. The young woman had been convalescing at Chateau Beaumont and had recovered to the point where she might benefit from meeting people, shopping, enjoying something light at the theater, attending a concert.

A maid met the two men at the entrance and showed them into Aunt Marie’s parlor on the first floor. She and Sylvie were lingering over breakfast. Saint-Martin introduced Georges to Sylvie, who studied him with curious interest. The comtesse

smiled a greeting; she already knew him. The men declined an offer of coffee but agreed to join the women at the table. When Georges hesitated to take a chair, the comtesse insisted.

While chatting about the unusually fine March weather, Saint-Martin observed Sylvie with growing concern. True, her facial bruises were gone. Her ribs appeared to have mended for she moved her body easily. But, her long blond hair was combed back severely and tied in a tight knot. She had lost weight, giving her an emaciated, haunted appearance. Her blue eyes were downcast, deep-set and dark. She spoke seldom, and then in flat, halting words.

In the course of conversation, Saint-Martin mentioned that he and Georges would leave Paris for England tomorrow.

Sylvie looked up with a start. "Have you found him?"

"Yes, we know he's in Bath."

"Why do you bother going there? He said he had friends in England." She spoke emphatically, her voice laced with scorn. "They'll believe his story and protect him."

"He may be overconfident," Saint-Martin replied. "With Georges' help, I intend to catch him."

She glanced at Georges, then at Saint-Martin. "Good luck." All feeling drained from her voice, her shoulders sagged. "Please excuse me." She turned to the comtesse. "I'll retire to my room."

When the young woman had left, Comtesse Marie sighed deeply, then explained that, yesterday, she and Sylvie had gone shopping in Palais-Royal close by. They had enjoyed themselves, trying on the enormous hats that had become fashionable. When they were tired, they stopped for tea in Café du Foy. Hardly had they sat down when Comtesse Louise de Joinville entered the restaurant together with several elegantly dressed men and women.

Saint-Martin grimaced; this tale could not come to a good end. Louise, his cousin, thirsted for malicious gossip. "What happened?" he asked apprehensively.

“She noticed us. Rushed over to express her sympathy. It was obvious to me, and certainly to Sylvie, that Louise was merely curious to see how much damage Fitzroy or—as she might have thought—Baron Breteuil had done. ‘Oh, Sylvie, you poor thing’ she said again and again. Finally, she left us and joined her companions at another table. From their sidelong glances and their tittering, one could tell they were tattling about Sylvie.” The comtesse fell silent, glanced at Georges then at Saint-Martin. Finally, she shook her head, unable to continue.

Her nephew offered her water from a pitcher on the table. She sipped at her glass, took a deep breath, and went on. “That was one of the worst moments of my life. I had been nursing Sylvie for over two months. I knew exactly how she felt. She looked up at me and asked to go home, as if all hope had died within her.”

While his aunt recounted the incident, Saint-Martin thought of Sylvie. A good, sensible person, yet she had aspired to the conventional life of her class: parties, seeing and being seen, a successful marriage. Since Fitzroy’s assault, she had come to realize she could no longer thrive in society. The rape had cast a deep shadow of shame over her and lessened her attractiveness to suitable men. Life seemed nothing but a dark abyss.

A sudden fear gripped Saint-Martin, his aunt, and Georges at the same instant. They stared at one another for a moment, then Comtesse Marie pulled a bell rope and called a maid. “Go to Sylvie’s room and see if she’s comfortable.”

In a minute, the maid came back. “She’s not there, my lady. Shall I continue looking?” Comtesse Marie leaped from her chair, anticipating Saint-Martin and Georges by only a fraction of a second. “Paul! Check outside. The maids and I will search the house.”

Saint-Martin beckoned Georges. “To the stables! Follow me!” They ran downstairs, crossed the courtyard, and tried the stable door. Locked. “The bar drops down into a slot.

Maybe I can force it out.” He slipped his sword through a narrow space between door and frame and lifted up. The door swung open and he saw her. “Go around the back way,” he whispered to Georges.

Sylvie stood in her shift on a stool, her clothes piled in front of her. She had thrown a rope over a low transverse beam and was tightening it around her neck. Saint-Martin took a step into the room, then stopped for fear of provoking her to jump. She stared at him blankly. “Go away, Paul. This is the end.”

“Stay alive, Sylvie, for the sake of those who love you. Louise and her kind are false friends. Vipers. There’s much more to life than pleasing them.”

Her eyes widened but her mind appeared not to grasp what he was saying. She looked up to see whether the rope was secure on the beam. Georges crept into the room behind her. Saint-Martin, his throat parched, kept on talking. Suddenly, she gave him a faint, despairing smile, then jumped, kicking the stool aside.

At that instant, Georges leaped forward and slashed the rope with his sword. She fell to the floor, the rope coiling loosely over her. Saint-Martin felt weak in the knees, but he stumbled up to her. Georges was already easing the rope from her neck.

She clawed at his face, thrashed about, moaning, “No! No! Let me die.” They quickly restrained her and carried her into the house.

Aunt Marie met them on the way. “She’s alive,” said Saint-Martin, “but desperate. Watch her constantly.”

“I’ll see she gets the care she needs. There’s surely a way out. She’s a sound young woman.”

“Yes, dear aunt, there’s hope for her.” But only a slim hope, he thought sadly. It would be difficult to save a woman who was determined to kill herself. “I want to know her progress. Write to Madame Francine Gagnon, Milsom Street, Bath. She can be trusted to pass your messages on to me.”

On the walk back to the provost's house on Rue Saint-Honoré, Georges was unusually quiet, head bent down studying the pavement. At the entrance, he leaned toward Saint-Martin and hissed through lips drawn tight with anger, "Colonel, I'm with you all the way. By God, we'll bring the bastard back to France!"