

The Time of Terror Ch 15 *Christmas in Paris*

SARA SETON HAD GROWN UP IN the conventional wisdom that Death was essentially a silent presence: the thief who comes in the night. You awoke to find him standing at the foot of your bed, crooking a bony finger. He crept like a miasma into the room where your mother lay ill and stole her breath away. He lingered discreetly in the graveyard where you buried her like one of the pale statues on the tombstones. But Death seemed to have grown noisier of late. He came rampaging through the streets at the head of a mob banging upon a drum and yelling, *Mort aux aristocrates*. He rattled and creaked over the cobbles in the *Rue Honore* with a cartload of victims for the Machine on the *Place de la Revolution*. Or he came banging on your door in the early hours of the morning escorted by a squad of gendarmes with a warrant for your arrest, signed by the proper authorities.

The one thing Death did not do in Paris in Year II of the Revolution was surprise you.

So when Sara was awoken by a determined knocking upon the door early on Christmas morning her first thought was that it was Death come for her at last, and the second the rather uncharitable hope that he had got the address wrong and come for one of the neighbours.

She sprang from her bed and ran to the window but it was just one man and he did not look like a policeman. Then he stepped back a pace and looked up and she saw that it was Nathan. She grabbed her robe and ran out on to the landing. Alex was standing at the open door of his bedroom looking anxious. He said nothing but there was a world of questions in his eyes. "It is good," she told him. "It is the American. The friend of Mary's that I told you of. Go back to bed before you catch cold."
"Helene!" she shouted. "The door."

But then she remembered. She had sent the maid off to her family for Noël. And the cook had gone to stay with her sister. She and Alex were alone in the house. She inspected herself in the mirror on the landing and lifted her hands to her hair to tie it back in a ribbon but then she thought better of it and let it fall back to her shoulders. She made a lions roar to stretch the skin round her mouth and gnawed at her lips to put more colour into them. Then she ran down the stairs to the door. She had to struggle with the bolts and she was quite breathless when she finally opened it but it was only partly to do with her exertions.

"Madame, I am sorry, I..."

He tugged off his hat and stared at her like a delivery boy who has come to the wrong address.

"I am desolate to disturb you at such an hour."

His hair was longer than she remembered it and his face thinner; but he was still a mere child.

"I was hoping to find Imlay," he said.

"Imlay is not here," she told him.

"Oh."

They stared at each other in silence for a moment, "Oh come in, come in," she said, standing back from the door. "Out of the cold."

"I should try and find him," he said but he stepped into the hall.

"I have sent all the servants away for Noel," she told him, as if she had a whole household of them and not just two women and a part-time gardener, "Whatever the authorities have to say about it, it is still the festive season, at least for some families."

But not hers. She had not wanted to draw attention to herself. She had not even been to Mass.

"Come down into the kitchen," she said, "It is warmer there and you can talk to me while I make some coffee."

She had banked the fire up for the night and happily there was still a small glow among the embers. She began to rake fiercely at them.

"Let me do that," he said, as if embarrassed for her.

"Just pass me a log from the basket," she told him. She had raked enough fires in her time. "Have you had breakfast?"

"No. But please do not trouble yourself..."

"It is no trouble. Sit." She pointed at the table. Why did he make her feel like such an old dame—and why did she act like one? And what was she going to give him for breakfast? Gruel? They had some bread somewhere; a bit stale but she could toast it—and perhaps some cheese. Toasted cheese. The juices stirred at the thought of it and her stomach rumbled. She started grinding coffee beans to hide the noise. Her precious hoard.

She glanced sideways at him while she worked the grinder. He was resting his chin in his hands, gazing into space and looking worried. Not at all as she remembered him. She had made several sketches of him after they last met but she saw now that she had not got him quite right. She had made him too ... Like something out of a fairy tale with high cheekbones and a wide mouth: a Puck or an Ariel, playing on his tin whistle. But he was not so fantastical. Beautiful, like a woman almost, but his features were stronger and his eyes more slanted; she had made them too big and round.

She had not thought to see him again. She still could not believe it was him and that he was sitting here in her kitchen. She caught his eye and felt herself blush. "So you are back in Paris," she said to cover her confusion.

"I arrived last night from Le Havre. They said Imlay was in Paris and we have some business to attend to."

"He is probably with Mary in Neuilly"

"Neuilly?"

"A little village just outside the *barriere*. She rents a house there. You probably came through it on the way in from Le Havre."

"Maman?"

Alex stood at the door, still in his nightdress.

"Little one, I said you were to stay in bed. Come over to the stove, then, to keep warm. This is my son Alex," she introduced them. "Monsieur Turner. Monsieur is a friend of Monsieur and Madame Imlay."

She really must learn to say *Citoyen* and *Citoyenne* but it seemed so ridiculous. Pretentious even. Everyone was forever pretending to be something they were not. But she did not want Alex saying the wrong thing in public and being denounced to the authorities. She had heard of children being taken away for little more than that and their parents thrown in prison.

"Alex, will you set the table for us?" she asked him. "We are having breakfast in the kitchen."

As if they were accustomed to dine in state with footmen to serve them.

She watched him as he set out the dishes, wondering what their visitor would make of him. He was a pretty child; people said he had her looks and not his father's. He looked so thin though. He caught her eye and she smiled. At least he had good manners. He was growing up in a very different world from his father—but that was not so very bad a thing. She filled the kettle and set it on the hob.

"Is it very urgent that you see Imlay?"

He nodded. "One of his friends has been arrested. Well, he is Mary's friend, really. They came for him at the hotel this morning."

She shook her head reprovingly, though it was not the most surprising event in Paris.

"What is his name?"

"Thomas Paine."

"Oh, but I know Mr. Paine!" Her hand flew to her cheek.

"And they have arrested him? Oh, but how shocking. And he is a representative of the people. What are we come to? Assassins! Do you know where they have taken him?"

He frowned. "I thought they said Luxembourg, but I may have misheard."

"No, you heard right. The Luxembourg. It is a prison—where they take most of the foreigners. All the English are there. Is that why they arrested him—even though he is American—because they say he is English?"

He looked puzzled. "I have no idea. They would not state the charge. Is it far from here, the prison?"

"Not far. It is the old palace of the Medici. Half the neighbourhood is in there."

She glanced towards the window as if they could see it from here and blinked in surprise.

"My goodness," she said, "it is snowing."

They made their way to the window, all three, and peered up at the snowflakes drifting down from the grey and purple sky. Great beautiful snowflakes. They were already sticking on the rooftops opposite, transforming the city into something different, something almost magical instead of the cruel, dangerous place it had become. Sara looked down at Alex and saw the wonder in his eyes and she knelt

down to his level and put her arm round him and raised her face again to the window and the falling snow. But her eyes met Nathan's looking down at her and there was an expression in them that caused her some agitation. Too many feelings, they were upon her in a rush, like the mob, and as impossible to separate or control.

"Merry Christmas," he said and he grinned down at her and she saw him then as she had seen him with the mob, with the tin whistle to his lips and his eyes dancing with mischief and a kind of delight in the danger of it all. "We could be snowed in," he said. "We could be trapped here for days."

She stood up, feeling shaky, disorientated. She did not know what to say but what came out surprised her.

"My husband died. In Germany. A fever of the blood." He stared at her, the smile fading from his lips and his eyes.

"We only heard a month ago." She gathered her robe at her neck.

"We are in mourning, officially"

"I am sorry," he said. His eyes said, what are you telling me?

She put her hand on Alex's head. It steadied her, "So there is just me and Alex," she said, smiling down at the child.

"And Helene," he reminded her, looking up at them both with his grave countenance.

"Oh, and Helene," she confirmed, adding for the benefit of their guest, "our maid, though she has become more like a friend."

"And Marie-Eloise," the boy persisted.

"And Marie-Eloise," Sara confirmed—and to Nathan: "The cook."

"And Figaro."

"The cat." She silently indicated the creature, sleeping in his basket near the stove, or pretending to.

The kettle was boiling. "Let us have coffee," she said. They had coffee with toast and cheese, the three of them at the table and the cat wrapping itself around their legs, hoping for a share,

"Our affairs are in a muddle," she told him, a masterly understatement. "The Republic has confiscated my husband's property in the south. I have some land of my father's in Provence but it is poor and so are the tenants and the rents are not paid since the Revolution. I am not against the Revolution. But we are not rich and they make it very difficult for people like ourselves." She wondered why she was telling him all this. Some compulsion to be open with him. To eschew pretence. You see me as I am, with no make up, thirty-two years old, the mother of a young child, and no money. They had barely met. He looked towards the window. The snow seemed to have eased a little.

"I should find Imlay," he said.

(p.143-151)

He viewed the prison across the frozen gardens, a vast, sprawling Renaissance chateau with a sprinkling of snow on its soaring abundance of turrets and rooftops. It had been built early in the seventeenth century for *Marie de Medici*, widow of the murdered King Henry IV, and even with its boarded and shuttered windows it retained elements of Renaissance grandeur, though it suggested to Nathan more the castle of an ogre than the palace of a queen. And now it was a prison, though the only physical barrier preventing a closer approach to the walls appeared to be a wrought-iron railing about seven or eight feet high tipped with *Fleurs-de-lis*. There were sentry boxes at intervals but no sentries that they could see. Perhaps they were inside keeping warm.

He heard shouts and looked back. *Alex* had made a snowball and hurled it at his mother and now she was trying to scrape up enough to throw back at him. She appeared very young—and happy. She caught his eye and looked a little sheepish. They were not supposed to look happy with *Thomas Paine* in the Luxembourg and *Mary* risking her own safety by visiting him there.

They walked on beside the lake with its frozen fountain and its sepulchral statues. They seemed to be the only human figures in the frozen landscape and Nathan felt exposed to the gaze of hidden watchers high in the palace turrets. The gardens were open to the public but not many people went there these days, *Sara* had warned him, and it was wise not to stop and stare. Then they entered an avenue of chestnut trees flanking the west wing and saw a small crowd at the far end just outside the railings.

"They are friends or relatives of the prisoners." *Sara* had dropped her voice, though only the trees could have heard her. "There is a large room—a gallery—on the upper floor with windows overlooking the gardens and the prisoners are allowed to walk there about this time of day." Nathan wondered how she came to know so much about the interior of the prison and its workings but kept the thought to himself. The crowd was composed mainly of women and children, huddling in the cold like mourners at a funeral. Two guards stared stonily back at them from inside the railings.

"We should not go too close," warned *Sara*. "There will almost certainly be policemen or informers among them"
"How long will they wait?"

"Oh, hours sometimes. It is quite wretched to see them, the children especially, stretching out their hands to their fathers inside the prison"

They turned off along another path that led back out on to the streets. Most of the snow had gone from here or turned to slush and the light was fading. They waited in a small cafe in the *Rue Medici* where they had arranged to meet

Mary and drank hot chocolate and ate small honey cakes. *Nathan* paid. People were starving in the *Faubourg Saint Antoine*, it was said, but you could still eat and drink well in Paris if you had money. The trick was not to dress as if you did. He wore his greatcoat and his knitted Brecon hat with the tricolour pinned firmly to the side.

"Are you a sailor?" asked *Alex* through a mouthful of cake. "Yes," said *Nathan*, after considering a moment and finding no apparent danger in the admission.

"Where is your ship?"

"In *Le Havre*."

"Did you sail it from *America*?"

"I did," *Nathan* lied. He thought he saw *Sara* look sharply at him. Had *Mary* told her he was from England? He avoided her eye for the moment.

"I would like to go to *America*. My father was a soldier in *America*. He fought against the English. Did you fight against the English?"

"No. I was too young," *Nathan* told him. Was he? He tried to work it out. But of course he was. All these lies were unsettling him.

"I would like to fight against the English."

"*Alex*, please do not speak with your mouth full." *Nathan* smiled at her but she did not smile back and her eyes were guarded. Happily the door opened and *Mary* swept in looking flushed and excited.

"Villains," she said, hurling herself into an empty chair.

"Would they not let you see him?" *Sara* kept her voice low.

"Oh, I saw him." She shook her head fiercely. "He is in a damp cell, below ground level, with water streaming down the walls and no fire. No fire or even any light, not so much as a candle."

"Keep your voice down," *Sara* warned her glancing about the cafe. It was practically empty and the proprietor was watching them from the bar.

"They let you into his cell?"

"No. There is a visiting room. But he told me what it is like."

"How is he?" *Nathan* asked her.

"How do you think in those conditions? He looks like death. I complained to the governor."

"You saw the governor?"

"Well, his assistant. I said he is an American citizen and a representative of the National Convention and they dare to treat him like a common criminal."

"What did he say?" *Sara* seemed amazed. Clearly this was a side of *Mary* she had not seen before.

"He said it was a temporary measure until they received the papers from the Police Bureau. Then they would move him to a proper cell. But he seemed shaken when I said he was a friend of *George Washington*."

"Is he a friend of *George Washington*?"

"Well, *Imlay* says so" She shrugged. *Nathan* gathered that she did not regard this as the firmest of endorsements. "I

said he has committed no crime, broken no laws and was imprisoned for one reason only—to prevent him from writing about the crimes against liberty." Their expressions reflected a degree of concern. "Well, someone has to tell them."

Nathan could understand why she and his mother had seemed to get on so well.

"They said he was imprisoned under the Law of Suspects. Ha. Are you rich?" she demanded of Nathan, though she might have been addressing the entire café by the volume of her voice. "You must be cheating the state. Suspect!" The proprietor looked up in alarm, "Are you poor? You must have sent your money out of the country. Suspect!"

"Mary," hissed Sara in horror. Two people got up and left the café. "Are you a recluse? You must have something to fear. Suspect! Are you cheerful? You must be celebrating a national defeat. Are you sad? The State of the Nation must depress you. Are you a philosopher, a writer or a poet? Suspect, suspect, suspect."

Nathan offered her the last cake.

"Do you want a hot chocolate?" he asked her.

"No," she said, standing up. "We haven't the time."

"Where are we going now?"

"I know where *I* am going, I am going to see the American Minister. You can come with me if you like. If you have had enough cake."

"So you are back in Paris," the American Minister remarked to Nathan, as if it was a circumstance very much to be regretted.

Gouverneur Morris was a tall, confident man of middling years with handsome if florid features, marred, to Nathan's thinking, by the supercilious contours of his mouth. If it was a smile it was one that reflected the Minister's good opinion of himself rather than anyone else in the world. His most dominant feature, however, was a wooden leg which gave him a certain piratical air, though Imlay said he lost it falling out of his carriage, drunk. It fitted into a kind of basket at the knee with straps attaching it to the thigh and as he leaned back in his armchair it pointed directly at Nathan's groin, rather disconcertingly like a cannon or a swivel gun.

They were in the library of his house in the *Rue de la Planche* with the curtains drawn and a fire lit. It might have been cozy but their welcome had not been as warm as Nathan might have wished. He and Mary Imlay sat side by side on the sofa while the Minister regarded them haughtily through the pince-nez that he kept on a silk ribbon round his neck.

"I am only lately arrived," Nathan told him, "from New York."

"And for what purpose on this occasion, if I may make so bold?"

"The study of astronomy," replied Nathan. "I am making a study of the works of Tycho Brahe in the Paris Observatoire." He felt Mary's stare but the Minister regarded him with a new interest. "Really? So you are a scholar, sir? Have you had anything published?"

"An insignificant little paper on the mathematical relationship between the cube of a planet's distance from the sun and the square of its orbital period."

"Really?" Morris appeared genuinely impressed.

"And an article in the *Harvard Science Review* on Herschel's discovery of the planet Uranus and the mathematical probability of there being another just behind it."

Mary cleared her throat and moved her foot next to his. He suspected that in a moment he would feel some pressure. "I am heartened that Paris continues to attract the attentions of a scholar and a gentleman," Morris confided, "for all that her most accomplished citizens are led to the guillotine, or butchered by the mob and tossed into holes in the ground like dead dogs. Bailly, the previous mayor, was an astronomer, I recall, with an international reputation, but it did not save him from losing his head."

He sighed and Mary cleared her throat but he had not finished. "Ah Paris, how she bleeds. Art is gone. The dancers are gone. The *modistes* are gone. Paris is left to the mercy of the provinces for its fashions whence come little bonnets trimmed with yellow flowers." He pulled a face as if a quantity of bile had been stirred. "Only the theatres appear to thrive. I wonder if that is significant, the national temperament being somewhat inclined to drama? And duelling, I believe, is more popular than ever, being no longer confined to the quality. The morning procession of cabs to the *Bois de Boulogne* resembles that of the tumbrels in the afternoon, I am told, and produces almost as many corpses. Yes, Paris does its best to divert us from more serious pursuits. One goes to one's club to murder a little time. I have seen enough to convince me that a man might be incessantly occupied in this city for forty years and grow old without knowing what in the least he has been about."

"Thomas Paine," Mary said at last, recalling him to the purpose of their visit. "Paine." The American Minister closed his eyes and gripped the bridge of his nose between finger and thumb as if the source of his discomfort had taken up residence there and could not be dislodged. "I cannot tell you how that man has plagued me since he came to France."

"I am sure it is to be regretted," agreed Mary. "However, he is now incarcerated in the Luxembourg and..."

"Do you know why he came here in the first place?"

"I understood," said Mary, "that it was to assist the cause of Revolution."

"In fact it was to build a bridge." Nathan thought he meant in the metaphysical sense but no, he meant a real bridge. "He fancies himself as an engineer as well as a philosopher. Building bridges is his forte. Indeed he offered to build one for me once—across the Harlem River, where we maintain a modest estate. He said it would increase the traffic to New York and we might charge a toll. We thanked him politely but declined and I fear he took it amiss. And so he became a Revolutionist."

He addressed Nathan, "You are familiar with his works, sir?" As if they were the Devil's ... Nathan had seen both volumes of *The Rights of Man* on the Minister's bookshelves beside the works of Rousseau and Voltaire but they were books that might be found in the library of any gentleman with pretensions to learning. "I am," he confirmed. Mary made a small noise of disgust. "America is to be the hope of mankind," Morris quoted satirically. "A safe haven from which the friends of liberty might pour forth and spew..." "*Spread* their campaign for free and equal citizenship around the world," Mary completed the quotation accurately in acid tones.

"Indeed," Morris arched his eyebrows at her. "I had forgot you are an educated woman, Mrs. Imlay. I wonder if the French were as well informed when they elected him to the National Convention. I am inclined to doubt it. One of his first speeches—he hardly speaks a word of French but it does not prevent him from making speeches, alas—was to call for the abolition of slavery. This did not go down at all well. In fact I doubt it would have been more coldly received in Virginia. You appear bemused, madam. Yes, you might think the Revolutionists would oppose slavery but without slaves they would have no coffee, sugar or tobacco. Life would be even more insupportable than it is already. So Paine was not so popular of a sudden. People began to call him *Tom le Fou*, 'Tom Fool' or 'Mad Tom' like the English. Tom o' Bedlam. Then he opposed the execution of the King. Another surprise, given his views on monarchy. He would take his crown but not his head. He is not a sanguine man, our Thomas, whatever else might be said about him. He wished to have the King banished to America. With his entire family. He proposed that Congress should purchase a farmhouse for them somewhere near Philadelphia and that I should escort them thither. You smile, madam. Have I said something amusing?"

"Your pardon, sir, it was the image of the King and Queen of France on a farm in America."

"If it were that or the guillotine you might not consider it such a poor choice, madam," he snapped, "Unhappily it was not a choice they were given."

He looked away into the fire and by its glow Nathan saw his eyes were moist. Morris and Marie Antoinette had become close friends, Imlay had said, and perhaps more. "It is partly because he spoke up for them in the Convention," Mary reminded him, "that Mr. Paine is now in prison. The very least we can do, I would have thought, is to make a strenuous protest on his behalf to the French Foreign Ministry."

Morris regarded her coldly. "The reason Mr. Paine is in prison is that the present rulers of France entertain hopes of American aid in the war against England. They need American grain and American tobacco and," he waved a hand airily, "whatever else is grown in America. They do not wish this notorious troublemaker to poison the Congress against them."

"I would not have thought that it would recommend the present rulers of France to the American people that they have imprisoned its greatest philosopher and a hero of the American Revolution," Mary pointed out. Morris sighed and rubbed a hand across his face. He did not look at all well, Nathan thought. Imlay said he was a martyr to the gout and was often to be seen with his right foot swathed in bandages, which given the absence of its neighbour seemed especially unfortunate.

"Perhaps a letter to the Foreign Minister," Mary persisted, "reminding him that Thomas Paine is an American citizen and a friend of President Washington." Morris frowned, shaking his head. "It would do no good," he said. "No good at all. The Foreign Minister has no influence whatsoever. You might as well appeal to the ticket clerk at the *Comedie-Francaise*,"

"Then what is your advice, sir?" she demanded coldly.

"My advice, madam, is to wait upon events and trust that the French authorities will come to recognize Mr. Paine's worth as a philosopher," And if they condemn him as an enemy of the people?"

"Then I trust he will find comfort in philosophy."

(p.153-155)

He looked up as he heard the sound of a drum. He had been walking without noticing much where he was going and now he saw that he was in a large open space, part meadow and part town square, with some great buildings on the far side and a large crowd of people in the middle, gathered around an object that he recognized with a shock as the guillotine.

Or the Humane and Scientific Execution Machine, as the Revolutionists called it. No longer shrouded.

A macabre curiosity compelled him to seek a closer view of the device. It had been designed by the King himself, he had heard, who had amused himself by making locks and other mechanical contraptions while his country slid into chaos. But its popular name was derived from Dr.

Guillotine, the man who had tested it at the School of Medicine in Paris, using corpses, it was said, of criminals who had suffered the traditional forms of execution by hanging or being beaten to death with iron bars. It was supposed to be much more humane than either. The blade fell so fast and cut so cleanly, the severed arteries gushed like a fountain but there was no pain, the good doctor reported; it was like someone blowing on the back of your neck.

Nathan shivered and turned away, ashamed to be so ghoulish. He was not in favour of public executions, nor inclined to watch them. But then from the street opposite, parallel with the river, there emerged a grim procession. First there was the drummer, beating the step, then a file of foot soldiers in blue uniforms with fixed bayonets. Then a troop of horse, And then the carts. Farm carts with high sides that the English called tumbrels and the French *charrettes*. Nathan stood as though mesmerised. The convoy turned and came across the square and passed within a few yards of where he was standing. Two carts with about five or six prisoners in each. And all of them women.

Women of all ages, though mostly young. Their hands were tied behind them and their clothes torn at the front, as low as the breast. And their hair cut short to expose the neck. Some were crying, the tears coursing down their grimy faces, some were moving their lips as if in prayer, others simply looked dazed.

The sight stirred memories that were buried deep in Nathan's memory—or perhaps not memory, for he had not been alive at the time; more of an instinctive response that combined elements of loathing and horror and fear. Like a family curse. The witches of Salem.

And some of this must have shown in his face for after they had passed he saw a man looking at him with suspicion. A man better dressed than most he had seen in France, with red, white and blue plumes in his hat and thigh-length boots and a sword at his hip.

"Why are they all women;" inquired Nathan. It came out almost without thinking, as if in explanation of his shock, for he thought the man might be an official. The man continued to stare at him silently.

"What have they done?" Nathan persisted, unwisely perhaps, "They are whores," said the man. "Or nuns." With a shrug as if there was no distinction. The carts had reached the scaffold now and the women were being led out of them and stood in two rows with their backs to the machine. "Are you a foreigner?" said the man, stepping closer, and his hand was on the hilt of his sword. Nathan shook his head and turned away, pushing through the crowd. He stopped after a while, when it was clear he was not pursued, and found he was shaking. From fear or anger or something of both. And disgust. He felt as if he was

walking through a city of death He could not walk away from this. But what could he do?

Danton would stop the Terror. Nathan recalled the words but not who had said them. Then he remembered: Tom Paine on the night before his arrest. He felt an excitement and an agitation, very like his feelings for Sara. A sense of frustration. He could do something about this if only he knew how. Could he approach Danton himself?

But what was he to tell him? He was no diplomat. He had no powers vested in him. Danton might denounce him to the authorities as an English spy. He would certainly suspect him of being a provocateur. But should he not take the risk? Or was it all vanity? Vanity and delusion. Just as he had thought the cannonball fired at him in the mouth of the Somme would give him enduring fame as the instigator of war, now he thought to be the instigator of peace.

"Good day. Citizen." He stopped dead and found himself staring at Sara Seton. She was regarding him with a quizzical smile and her head tilted at an inquiring angle. Of course, he was in the *Rue Honore*. It was the route they took with the death carts from the *Conciergerie* to the Place de la Revolution, And it was where the painter Regnault had his studio, where Sara went for her art lessons. "What were you thinking?" she said. "You looked as if you were in another world." The world of the dead. Did she not see them, did she not hear them, when they passed below the windows of the studio? Did she carry on painting her flowers, or whatever it was she painted, while the death carts rolled through the street below with their hapless cargo? Did she close her eyes and her mind to them, like the rest of Paris?

"I have news for you," she said excitedly but glancing over her shoulder and lowering her voice for fear of being overheard. "From Mary. The Americans in Paris have made a protest against the arrest of Thomas Paine. They have been invited to petition the National Convention and they have asked Imlay to be their spokesman. Mary is delighted. She is confident that Paine will be promptly released."

Ch 24 *The Artists' Model* (p.209-216)

PARIS WAS HAVING A SPRING CLEAN. Gangs of labourers had begun scraping the filth off the streets and shovelling it into carts to use as fertilizer and in the gardens of the *Tuileries* the first buds were showing through the dead leaves of winter. In the new revolutionary calendar it was *Ventose*, the month of winds, but in defiance of the prevailing order the air remained stubbornly calm and was in danger of prosecution under the Law of Suspects. Sara had almost reached the *Rue Honore* when she heard the drum. She knew at once what it meant and quickened

her pace but she was too late. There were guards lining both sides of the street and already she could see the start of the procession winding its way towards her. She hesitated, wondering whether to turn back and linger in the gardens until it passed—she had no desire to watch the latest batch of human misery on its way to the guillotine—but then she heard a voice she recognised.

"Good day, Citoyenne. Anyone you know today?" Eleanor Duplay. One other fellow student. And though her eyes were mocking there was the suggestion of a threat there, too—or a warning. "No. Why should I?" Cursing her lack of wit as soon as the words were out. Overhasty, defensive ... Why could she not make a joke of it? Laugh in her face. Except she did not laugh at Eleanor Duplay. And if you made a joke you had better *make* sure it could not be misconstrued as unpatriotic. One such joke—incautiously told in Paris—was that wherever two people were gathered together, one would be an informer. But it was surely the curse of the Setons to have as your own personal sneak the daughter of Robespierre's landlord. Further incautious rumour suggested that she was also Robespierre's lover but Sara could not believe it of so cold a fish. But perhaps this was what they had in common. "We all seem to know someone these days who has betrayed the Revolution," observed Eleanor reprovingly. "What, even you, Eleanor?"

Eleanor looked at her searchingly a moment, to see if she was being ridiculed. Then, apparently satisfied that no one would dare, least of all none as inconsequential as Sara Seton, she added: "We have trusted too many who have proved false in the past. And doubtless will in the future. They all wear masks to hide their corruption." One of the other students had whispered to Sara that when Eleanor said "we" she meant Robespierre and that she spoke as a kind of priestess or oracle, echoing the voice of the god, "But at least some have been found out," she added with satisfaction, gazing past Sara towards the approaching convoy.

It was led by the drummer, beating the step. Next came a file of National Guardsmen with fixed bayonets and behind them, flanked by more guards, the death carts and those that were to die. Sara was gripped by a fascinated horror that would have kept her rooted to the spot, even without Eleanor Duplay at her side. *What would it be like to be one of them?*

It was more than a ghoulish curiosity. It could happen at any time. It was like living in a city ravaged by the plague except that you usually knew if you were likely to become one of the victims. She had nightmares about it. Going through this macabre ritual. The death march of the beasts, marked for slaughter. Through that door, along that corridor, into that yard... Bowing your head so they could cut your hair, placing your hands behind your back so they could bind your wrists. Climbing into the waiting cart...

The frightful inevitability of it; nerves screaming against acceptance but your feet moving obediently along the destined route, closer and closer to the waiting blade. How could they do it? Only because they had no choice. It was too late for choices. You had made the wrong choices a long time ago. Too late to change them now. Now you were in the death art and the drum was beating and the wheels were trundling over the cobbles. She could hear them, beyond the sound of the drum, louder and louder. And now they were level with her. Five in the first one—three men, two women—all young, gazing stoically ahead. No imagined fate for them; this was their reality. Sara began to pray for them, silently, keeping her eyes open, the prayers she had been taught by the nuns at her convent school in Provence. Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death ...

She had seen it all before, of course. It had become a daily ritual. Sometimes just one victim—someone special like a king or queen. Other days there would be a whole batch of them, thirty or forty, even more. And they always took the same route—out of the *Conciergerie*, across the river and along the *Rue Honore* past the art school. The students would crowd at the windows looking down and it was unsafe to be the only one to stay away, carrying on with your work as if disinterested or disapproving. But there was a sense of being distanced from it all when you were in a room, up above. Here at street level it was more tangible, more terrible.

Three carts today. She stopped counting the people in them, no longer speculating on who they were or what they could possibly have done to merit such a fate. Aristocrats or peasants, priests or prostitutes ... they were all beasts to the slaughter. And now, increasingly, more and more were revolutionaries themselves. The *Indulgents* or the *Enragees*, moderates or extremists, any who deviated from the strict path laid down by those in power, were sent down this other road—to the dread Machine in the Place de la Revolution.

"Shall we go—or do you want to stand here praying for them?" The procession had passed and they were letting people cross the street and Sara was still there, staring into space. "I wasn't praying," Sara said. "What makes you think I was praying?" But Eleanor just smirked and shrugged and picked up her skirts and stepped into the street and Sara followed, hating herself for being so frightened, and wishing she could slap her.

The painter, Jean-Baptist Regnault, was one of the few acknowledged rivals of the great Jacques-Louis David who had his own studio in the Louvre. Sara was surprised Eleanor Duplay wasn't one of David's students because apart from his fame as an artist he was a Jacobin and a friend of Robespierre. But perhaps she was. Perhaps she studied at both schools. She was keen enough, you had to give her that: a dedicated student, she

wasn't playing at it. There were some who considered Regnault a better painter than David; certainly he was a better teacher. Even at this time of the year he made use of what little light there was, posing the model close to the fire to show them how the light from the flames fought with the light from the window.

"Two sources of light," he told them, "one warm, one cold. One red, one blue, but of course far more subtle than that. See how they coil around the body like serpents."

The model was a young man, pale and undernourished. You could see the bone beneath the skin like a fledgling fallen from the nest. Perhaps that was why Regnault had chosen him so they could see how his body was made. More likely, though, he was just cheap. Poor enough to pose near naked for a meal and a small fee. He shivered, even close to the fire. Sara did not know where Regnault found his models and did not like to ask. It was said that some of the men—the healthier, more muscular ones—were Savoyards who ran messages round the city and that the women, old and young, were mostly prostitutes. They did not have many women lately in the life classes. Most of the prostitutes had been rounded up by the police. It was considered "uncivil" to be a prostitute, a betrayal of the principles of the Revolution, Regnault said that he would soon have to call for volunteers from among the students. This was taken as a joke. But why not? Sara knew there were rumours that she had posed nude for the artist—even for some of his students—but they were untrue. She had been almost nude but with a sheet artfully draped across her private parts and there had been no impropriety. It had been a foolish thing to do though. [...]

Regnault made them draw the figure first in charcoal, using their fingers to shade in the warm light from the fire and leaving pale, bare patches for the light from the window. Only when he was satisfied that they had captured the difference in charcoal did he let them start mixing up the paints they would use. They had to work very fast, because the light was always changing. That was part of the test, Regnault said.

But long before they had finished the firelight was winning, the daylight retreating fast, even from the window. The boy huddled close to the fire, the flames licking his meagre flesh. Sara was hurrying to clean up her palette at the sink when Eleanor Duplay came up to her. "Where are you off to, in such a hurry?" she said. She made it sound like an accusation, and Sara felt like a suspect, hurrying off to an assignation, up to no good. "I have to be home," she said, "Before it is dark." "And where is home?" My God, this was serious. In her nervousness she dragged her sleeve across the palette. "I have an apartment," she said, "in the Rue Jacob." Was that a crime? It was not a good address from a revolutionary

point of view. She dipped a corner of cloth in turpentine and rubbed at her sleeve. The smear was like blood. "You must come back one day for coffee," said Eleanor. "I live just up the road. Perhaps when the days are longer."

She drifted off, leaving Sara staring after her, astonished. She was still thinking about it when she emerged from the studio and saw Nathan on the opposite side of the road.

Ch 27 *The Trial* (p.234-236)

MY NAME is DANTON. IT is a name tolerably well known in the Revolution. I am a lawyer by profession and I was born at Arcis in the Aube country. In a few days time my abode will be oblivion. My place of residence will be History,"

Danton, at the Revolutionary Tribunal, when they asked him for his name and address.

Nathan rolled his eyes at Sara who was sitting next to him in the public gallery with Lucille Desmoulins. Not Imlay. Nathan had not seen him since the previous morning when he had brought news of Danton's arrest. There were people he had to see, he said mysteriously, but he had promised to be there for the trial. The gallery was packed with Danton's supporters. Many more were behind the barriers at the back of the court all the way to the doors and beyond: the crowd outside ran to several thousand. Many were peering in at the windows, or pressing in as close as they could to the walls to hear what they could of the proceedings. Danton pitched his voice so it would carry to the farthest extremities of this vast audience.

He was the only one standing in the crowded dock. Some of the accused Nathan recognised or knew by repute: Camille, of course, Lacroix and Phillipaux, Herault de Seychelles who had been on the Committee of Public Safety; Fabre d'Eglantine, the playwright who had drawn up the revolutionary calendar ... all friends of Danton. But the others were unfamiliar to him—and to most of the court. These were the bankers, the swindlers and forgers that Imlay said had been thrown in to confuse the issue. They were charged with fraud or hoarding, currency speculation, conspiring with foreign powers . . . The idea was that people would think Danton and his friends were somehow implicated in their alleged crimes: that they would be tainted by association even if they had only met them for the first time in the dock.

The charges against the Dantonists had not been made public yet. Doubtless they would be read out in due course, when the President managed to make himself heard. He kept ringing his bell furiously to bring the court to order but it was inaudible above the din. People

were chanting Danton's name, stamping their feet, singing the Marseillaise ... It was something between a carnival and a riot. It seemed that at any moment the mob would storm the courtroom and free the prisoners by force and carry them shoulder high through the streets.

Lucille was looking hopeful for the first time since the arrest. Danton's voice rolled out, overriding every attempt at interruption, rising above the whistles and the cheers.

"Who are my accusers? Bring them forward. Who dares accuse me, Danton?"

Nathan felt for Sara's hand and pressed it encouragingly. But privately he was not optimistic. He felt that it was all scripted—a performance—and that this was the noisy part, the prologue before it properly began. Now Danton had the stage but soon others would. Nathan saw the vulture face of Fouquier, the prosecutor, with his black hat and its patriotic plumage watching Danton carefully, his face impassive, waiting for the corpse to stop moving and waving its arms and shouting so the feast could begin—the real purpose of his life. And he saw the faces of the jury: the hand-picked jury who could be relied upon to do their patriotic duty. And a voice inside his head kept repeating: *theatre, pure theatre*. Or a bull fight, like one he had seen in the Argentine. There was music and noise and flags and ceremony, and the matadors in their garish costumes and the bull rushing into the ring, its head lowered for the charge. And then the shouting would stop and everyone would go quiet and they would get on with the serious business of killing.

When the court adjourned for the day, with nothing decided, they took the prisoners back to the prison and Sara went off with Lucille to stand in the Luxembourg Gardens in the hope of catching a glimpse of Camille while Nathan walked back to his hotel alone.

He was no longer staying at the Philadelphia. Most of the Americans had left—with neither idealism nor profit to keep them—and it had begun to have a run-down, end of season look. Besides, it seemed unlucky after what had happened to Thomas Paine and Nathan suspected it was still under surveillance. He had found a different place in the narrow cobbled streets behind Notre-Dame: the Hotel Providence, which, according to the proprietor, was where the great Peter Abelard had lived when he was courting the beautiful Heloise.

Ch. 31 The Children of the Revolution (p. 255-259)

WITH A RISING SENSE OF PANIC Sara scanned the crowded courtroom for the faces of her friends. Nathan had gone off with Imlay the night before on some mysterious errand he clearly did not wish to discuss with her. All being well I will see you in the morning, he had said. But he had

not come back to the house and he was not here in the courtroom. Nor was Imlay. She could not even see Lucille.

They fetched up the prisoners. Danton was on his feet almost at once but he looked terrible. His massive form was swaying in the dock; his great voice a harsh croak. For three days he had fought them but now he was finished and everyone knew it. And Fouquier stood to deliver the coup de grace. "I have urgent information to lay before the court," he began. Astonished, Sara heard the name of Lucille Desmoulins ..., Why was he naming Lucille? She strained to hear what he was saying for though the court was silent for once, his voice seemed to be filtered through some thick distorting mask.

"Agents of a foreign power in concert with Lucille Desmoulins and others ... plotting to free the prisoners from the Luxembourg ... to raise an armed riot inside the Convention and assassinate members of the Committee of Public Safety ..."

It took a moment to sink in. Even the judge and jury appeared amazed. Then a single anguished cry from Camille: "They are trying to murder my wife!" And then uproar.

Most of the defendants were on their feet shouting to be heard, Danton's harsh croak rising above them, pointing at the bench: "Murderers. See them. They have hounded us to our deaths."

Camille was trying to climb out of the dock and Danton and Lacroix holding him back until he collapsed between them, a sobbing bundle of rage and despair. And Herman ringing his bell and Fouquier waiting for the din to subside and then reading out in his dry, deathly tones the emergency decree of the Convention:

"In response to the threat to national security the President shall use every means that the law allows to make his authority and the authority of the Revolutionary Tribunal respected ... All persons accused of conspiracy who shall resist or insult the national justice shall be outlawed and shall receive judgement without any further proceedings."

Danton was still on his feet, still demanding witnesses for the defence, but he had almost lost his voice and he was tugging at the stock around his throat as if it was a rope strangling him. And Sara caught sight of two faces she knew: Vadier and the artist David, both members of the Police Committee, leaning on the back of the bench where the jury sat and looking towards Danton and laughing.

"Your rights, Danton, are in abeyance." She heard the voice of the President, Herman, exultant in victory. He turned to the jury, "Have you heard enough? "One of

them stood. "Yes, we have heard enough "Then the trial is closed."

The mob was surging towards the doors, trying to get out and Sara thought there must be some hope of a rescue. The prisoners would have to be taken back to the *Conciergerie* and from there to the *Place de la Revolution*. Half the number that had crowded into the court to voice their support would be enough to free them.

Camille was on his feet waving a bunch of papers. She heard his voice with no trace of a stammer for once.

"I have not yet read my statement, I have been here three days and you have not heard my defence. I demand to be permitted to read my statement to the court. You cannot condemn people without hearing their defence . . ."

Herman said something Sara did not catch and then Camille threw the papers at him. They sailed like a dart across the courtroom and with surprising accuracy. The judge ducked so violently his hat fell off and the bunch of papers fell apart in the space behind him, floating separately to the courtroom floor. Before they had landed Fouquier was on his feet shouting, no longer calm or impassive, but the flecks of spit plainly to be seen in the light from the windows: "The prisoners have insulted national justice. Under the terms of the decree they may now be removed from the court."

Herman putting his hat back on and ringing his bell more in a bid to recover his lost dignity than in any hope of imposing order.

"The jury will retire to consider its verdict. Remove the prisoners."

There was a fight going on in the dock. The guards were trying to get the prisoners out and Camille was trying to stay. One of them was pulling at his long hair and then they knocked him down. The last Sara saw before she was borne back by the tide of bodies was his limp form being carried down to the cells.

She did not hear the verdict. By then it was impossible to get back into the court and she was carried in the surge of spectators across *Pont Neuf* to line the route along the *Rue Honore*. She heard later that Fouquier had already told the executioner, *Sanson*, to bring three *charrettes* to the *Conciergerie*. She also heard that they did not bother to bring the prisoners back into the court and that the sentence of death was read out to them in the prison while *Sanson's* men were cutting their hair. It was four o'clock in the afternoon and she was still looking for Nathan's face in the crowd.

She joined the great tide of people flowing across the bridges from the *Ile de la Cite*. She was still convinced they would storm the convoy. That was why she stayed with them; char was how she saw what she saw. It was inconceivable to her that the *sans-culottes* who had cheered Danton's every word in court would just stand idly by and watch him die, much less cheer his executioners. But when

they reached the *Rue Honore* she found the National Guard lining the route forcing the crowd into the sides of the road. When the death carts came, hundreds tried to follow them, pushing and shoving their way along the narrow gap between the guards and the walls. It was impossible to stay in one place even if you wanted to, Sara went with the flow.

For at least part of the time she was in that section of the crowd moving in line with the *charrettes* and she would rise herself up to catch a glimpse of the prisoners, then lose them in the froth of heads and bodies. Later, she was not sure what she had seen for herself or what she had imagined seeing from the descriptions of others or read about in the press. She was sure she had seen Danton standing in the front of the cart like a primitive god: a giant figurehead with his arms tied behind his back and his shirt open to his chest, his great head unbowed, his expression defiant, the lips curled in what could have been a mocking smile or a sneer—you never knew with that mouth. But it was the same image as that captured by David who had once been his friend and who now managed to make a sketch of him in that immense crush of bodies; a last sketch: to record the death of Danton for history.

She definitely saw Camille, his shirt ripped from his back in the fight with the guards and wrapped like a ragged shawl around his shoulders exposing his thin, pale body, his face bruised and bleeding. "I am thirty-three," he had told the court, "the same age as the *sans-culotte Jesus Christ* when they nailed him to the cross."

He was trying to exhort the crowd, to use the same desperate magic that had moved the crowd to storm the Bastille five years before. "People, they have lied to you, they are sacrificing your servants! My only crime is to have shed tears." But then he gave up and slumped against the rock that was Danton. And later she read that Danton, ever the realist, had told him: "Be quiet. Leave that vile rabble alone."

So Danton must finally have realised that the crowds were there simply for the spectacle and that no one would try to save them. Or perhaps he had known it all along. That the Revolution would devour its own children.

Towards the end of the *Rue Honore* they passed the house of the *Duplays* and the prisoners began to shout up at the shuttered windows and she heard the voice of Danton again, restored for one last roar, the great voice that had dominated the Convention: "Vile Robespierre, you will follow me! Your house will be levelled and the ground it stands upon will be sown with salt."

Then they were in the great square and there was the Machine rising above the ranks of soldiers, black against

the sky and the blade gleaming blood red in the last rays of the setting sun.

Sara did not watch the executions. She looked up only once, towards the end, when it was Danton's turn to die. She saw him mounting the scaffold unaided, his hands still tied behind him, turning for one last moment to face the sun. He said something to Sanson, the executioner, whom he must have known well when he was Minister for Justice. Then Sanson's assistants took hold of him by the hands and feet, and big as he was threw him down on the wooden plank. Sara turned her head away then and put her hands to her face but the crowd had gone very quiet of a sudden and she heard three distinct thuds: one as the plank was run forward under the blade; one as the brace was clamped around his neck; and the last when the blade hit the block.

She heard later that he had told Sanson: "Show my head to the crowd; it's worth a look." She was running. Back along the far side of the river. She must have crossed by the Pont de la Revolution but she had no memory of it,

(p.276-280)

There was a small knock on the door and everyone sat up as if it was a gunshot. The young woman—who must be Robespierre's reputed mistress, Eleanor Duplay—opened it a crack and bent her head. Nathan glimpsed the figure of a child. A low-voiced exchange that none of them heard. Then the woman turned and summoned Nathan by the simple expedient of crooking a finger. Feeling very much like a schoolboy anticipating a caning from the headmaster, Nathan followed her from the room.

She led him out of the house and across the yard past the waiting coach to what might have been taken for a storeroom except that it had drapes on the windows of the upper floor and a small wooden staircase leading to a door with a large mailbox attached to the front. The woman knocked gently and a voice bid them enter: the same high-pitched voice Nathan had last heard in the Convention extolling the virtues of the Terror. Eleanor Duplay held open the door for Nathan to step through and then shut it firmly behind him.

Citizen Robespierre was standing by the little fireplace, as if he had struck a pose in expectation of visitors, wearing a kind of dressing gown, or chemise-peignoir, but with a quantity of immaculate linen at the throat so as not to appear too informal. His thick, brown hair was unpowdered and looked the better for it, Nathan thought. In fact, he looked much younger than he had in the Convention and of less consequence.

The room was sparsely furnished with a wooden bedstead and a cupboard, a small table with a bowl of oranges, and two cane chairs. A single book lay open on the

mantelpiece. Also some papers ... and the infamous green spectacles.

He greeted Nathan amicably enough and invited him to sit. Nathan sat but his host remained standing, one arm thrown casually across the mantelpiece, almost as if he needed the advantage of height; or perhaps it reminded him of being at the people's tribune and the authority that went with it. Almost immediately he launched into a speech—though at least he did not read it from notes and it had the merit of being short and to the point.

"I am sorry you have been inconvenienced on your visit to Paris," he began. "I wanted to take the opportunity of assuring you that it has not been with any hostile intent and I trust you will take back no harsh opinions to your countrymen."

As if five weeks on bread and gruel in the Grand Chatelet was no more than a minor irritant; the kind of thing most tourists took in their stride.

"And we are very sorry to disoblige a friend of Thomas Jefferson,"

With a great effort Nathan forestalled an expression of incredulity.

To be taken for an American was one thing, but a friend of Thomas Jefferson... Who could possibly have given him such an impression; Morris? Imlay? But Imlay had last been seen disappearing through a hole in the ground and was now presumably a fugitive from revolutionary justice.

Whoever it was he had clearly done Nathan an enormous favour. Jefferson's was a great name in Paris, almost as great as Ben Franklins, at least among Frenchmen of a certain class and political persuasion.

"But I hope," continued Robespierre, "that you will assure him we had the most compelling reasons of national security."

Nathan spread his hands—what could he say?

But Robespierre was reaching for the dreaded green spectacles.

"As a member of the Committee of Public Safety, I receive a multitude of reports. They are a regrettable consequence of the current emergency."

The papers on the mantelpiece appeared to be a small sample of this multitude. He adjusted the spectacles on his nose the better to inspect them, though Nathan suspected he knew very well what they contained.

"One of the more recent details your contacts with Citizen Danton..."

A pregnant pause.

"I have had the briefest contact with Citizen Danton," Nathan protested. "On a social occasion."

Robespierre regarded him coldly. The eyes were no longer childlike.

Or indeed, even blue. They glittered like two cold emeralds, polished with malice.

"That may well be," he murmured, "that may well be. However Citizen Danton who, as you are doubtless aware, has been executed by order of the Revolutionary Tribunal on charges of gross corruption—"

Nathan was aware of no such thing. He felt the blood drain from his face. The man had seemed indestructible, even in the courtroom with his back to the wall and the wolves at his throat—but this little man with the green glasses had destroyed him. And if he could destroy Danton he could destroy anyone.

"Citizen Danton was no more a friend to America than he was to France. Indeed, I have evidence that he was in the pay of the English who are enemies to us both."

The letter! The document Pitt had given him to remind Danton of his obligations to the British taxpayer—it had been on the barge with the gold; well concealed but not so well that a thorough search would not detect it. But if Robespierre had seen the letter he must know that Nathan was not an American ... It made no sense. He must be guessing or have evidence from some other source.

Robespierre said nothing for the moment but he pushed the spectacles to the top of his head and contemplated Nathan thoughtfully, as if he was trying to make up his mind about something. Then he came down from his extemporary tribune and sat in the chair opposite. His manner when he spoke again was less formal. Yet it was a modified version of the speech Nathan had heard him make to the Convention.

"Citizen, we are engaged in a War against Tyranny. A degree of suffering is perhaps inevitable in the interests of democracy—even to those who may be innocent of any crime. It became necessary to hold you under the Law of Suspects while certain investigations were carried out. Certain of our law enforcers wished to hold you for a great deal longer but I prevailed upon them to release you and permit you to return to America."

He appeared to be waiting for Nathan to thank him.

Nathan did.

The Tiger-cat inclined his head in polite acknowledgement.

"I am aware," he said, "that certain of your countrymen have been critical of our recent policies. Even General Washington himself. Perhaps they are not aware of the

grave danger that we face—a danger, I might say, to both our great Republics."

He stood up again and returned to the mantelpiece. The green spectacles came down once more. He held a note in his hands, which he studied thoughtfully before passing to Nathan.

"Do you know what this is?"

There was no mystery about it. Nathan had seen a great many during his visits to France.

"It is an *assignat*," he said, "to the value of twenty livres."

"That is certainly what it looks like. Doubtless it would surprise you to know it was made in England?"

It took a moment for Nathan to register the significance of this.

"A counterfeit," Robespierre continued, "made in England, smuggled into France and distributed by criminals. We have reason to believe that many millions of such forgeries are being circulated in the Republic. As a result the value of the *assignat* is rapidly declining. If this continues it will result in a complete loss of confidence and a collapse of the economy. The Republic has little or no reserves of gold. We should not have the means of paying our armies or of purchasing their ordnance or food supplies; not to speak of the general misery and confusion it is already causing among the civilian population. It is a most effective weapon. Citizen, more effective than any number of foreign armies. And you, as one of our American allies, must surely deplore it."

"Indeed," began Nathan, "but—"

"Then I hope that you will inform your friends in America of our concern in this matter and the necessity of adopting extreme measures to counter it. It is no exaggeration to say that this note — he reached over and took it back—"this note is responsible to a large degree for what our enemies are calling the Terror."

Robespierre accompanied Nathan to the door and out on to the staircase. Eleanor Duplay was waiting at the bottom. The coach was waiting in the yard.

"I am sorry that you are leaving France," Robespierre simpered almost coyly as they parted. "Perhaps if circumstances allow you will return and visit us again. We occasionally have a few friends round for some entertainment in the evenings: to read a little poetry or play a little light music. I think you would enjoy it."