**The Patient**

**By**

**Rob Marsh**

**Paris, France 1668**

**Antoine Mauroy**

Saturday March 1

I feel poorly oh so very poorly… the room is silent now the voices have gone though I can hear Perrine whispering to someone in the garden it’s not noisy here like in Madame’s ballroom which was always full of light and people dancing or His Lordship’s where there was much shouting and blood running on the floor am I dreaming I think I am dreaming but my thoughts fly like birds too fast to catch I also remember a dark street a man putting a cloak round my shoulders someone’s curled fingers twitching on a rope thick and twisted that was hanging from a hook Antoine the man said you’ve had a brain seizure that woman wasn’t for you what woman I said I have a wife named Perrine but he was putting the noose out of sight and wasn’t listening and I went with him even though my mind was fogged then the doctors came one after the other the last one saying iced water will cure him iced water will cure him after that they put me in baths again and again made jokes about my privates, which were shrunken from the cold while I stood shivering the nurse giggling you must leave I said but she didn’t Madame wants your brain fixed though that’s a foolish hope she laughed please stop I said what advantage is there to me of baths so cold and wet but no one listened so I ran away again not because of the slurs but because of the freezing water and the baths…the cold cold baths… When they caught me again the doctor said I was beyond hope and Madame nodded which I knew was a bad sign then they locked me in the madhouse where people were shitting and throwing food which was a waste when so many servants go hungry that was where doctor Jean came to see me I’ve come to cure you Antoine he said but no one can cure me sir I answered but he said have faith Antoine you’ll be famous after the ‘periment’ what ‘periment’ I asked *hex*-periment he said slowly, but I didn’t know what that meant but I nodded as if I did but when I saw the knife I got scared though it was too late to run and people were cheering afterwards doctor Jean said the *hex*-periment had been a great success but the animal died I said that doesn’t matter he said we’ll get another do the *hex*-periment again the day after tomorrow which he did making me feel poorly again which he said was a good sign when doctor Jean said I was cured Perrine took me home even though the voices were still there whispering always whispering Perrine’s a cruel woman shouting and complaining look at this hovel I live in she’d say this shithole is not what you promised when you were fucking me all the time and stop drinking you’re nothing but a drunken bastard she’d call me other dirty names too until I’d get angry and hit out with my fists and she’d run screaming from the house…

Chapter 1

## **Tuesday 10 March 1668**

The office of Nicolas de la Reynie, the Lieutenant General of Police, is a cavernous place, both dark and dismal. Along one wood-panelled wall is a row of windows, all shuttered. The smoke-blemished ceiling contains faded scenes of myth and legend: the Song of Roland on one massive panel, the story of Tristan and Iseult on the other. The once-gleaming marble floor lies tarnished beneath threadbare carpets.

The Great Man himself sits behind an enormous teak desk at the end of the room. The desk is stacked with an assortment of official documents: beribboned appeals and complaints in the main, but also numerous reports from his spies throughout the city. He is bent forward, hard at work when a handsome young man, dressed exuberantly in the latest fashion and carrying a large felt hat plumed with an ostrich feather and ribbon loops, is escorted into the room by an officer of the guard and told where to stand. Eventually, the Lieutenant-General looks up, though despite the candelabrum at his shoulder, his face remains in shadow.

“Are you Guillaume Varenne?” he asks quietly. The room is bitterly cold and his breath is like smoke in the air.

On being addressed, the young man pulls himself up to his full height and, grinning, bows with elaborate courtesy, sweeping at the same time his hat across the floor. “Yes, my lord.” Amongst those who know him, Varenne has a reputation for flair and flamboyance.

The Lieutenant-General glares at him for a moment then tut-tuts his displeasure at such foolishness. The young man continues to grin.

Two paces behind Varenne, the officer of the guard has taken up station, stiff as a pillar. The only other occupant in the room is an ancient scribe in a silver-powdered wig who is seated to one side at a high-legged writing table. He is wearing a thick green muffler, heavy maroon coat and woollen gloves, the fingertips cut away. An assortment of quills, ready sharpened, stand alongside a small pot of ink and a box full of sand for sprinkling. On hearing the young man’s reply, he picks up a quill and scratches briefly on a sheet of paper. In the stillness a candle gutters.

“Do you know why you are here, Monsieur Varenne?” the Lieutenant-General asks a moment later.

The young man frowns then shrugs, evidently mystified. “No, my lord, I do not.”

“You are here to tell me what you know about the murder of Antoine Mauroy.”

Despite his denial, this is exactly what the young man has expected. The Mauroy case is the talk of the city and he has been involved in the affair from the beginning, but only, he would argue, as an observer, not in any way an active participant. It is true, however, that five days before, a doctor of his acquaintance had been accused of Mauroy’s killing and to make matters worse, on his way into the building that morning, two eminent physicians from the University of Paris Medical School had scowled at him in passing.

“I know nothing of Mauroy’s murder, my lord,” he says.

Out of the corner of his eye he notices that the scribe has stopped writing and is studying him intently.

“How interesting,” the Lieutenant-General says smoothly. “Then tell me what you *do* know about the case, sir.”

“Of course, my lord,” the young man answers, but then falls silent again. He looks around the room, notes the profusion of lit candles in sconces along the walls and breathes in the fragrance of beeswax. His nose wrinkles. It suddenly occurs to him that only the Church, the very wealthy, or the very powerful, can afford such wasteful extravagance.

“You are not on trial, Monsieur Varenne…” There is a pause, followed by a cold smile, “…at least not today.”

“I am pleased to hear it, my lord,” he says boldly, though from the flush around his collar it is obvious that his heart has quickened.

The Lieutenant-General studies him for a moment, then, on impulse, decides to enter into the spirit of the game. He places the quill he has been using back into its inkwell and steeples his fingers, making a theatre of giving his visitor undivided attention. The young man blinks. “You are aware, are you not, as to the gravity of this matter, Monsieur Varenne?” the Lieutenant-General smiles.

“Indeed, I am, my lord.”

“Then I would advise you to speak… honestly.”

At eight o’clock that morning Varenne had received a visit at his father’s warehouse by a Captain of the Swiss Guard and ordered to present himself at the Lieutenant-General’s office before midday. Being an impetuous and self-opinionated young man, and, even though he knew his name had been bandied about in connection with the case, he had foolishly demanded to know the reason for the summons only to receive for his impertinence a reprimand of such withering invective he had stood frozen with shock.

After the Captain had departed, he had informed his parents of the interview then dashed off a note to Anne, even though he doubted it would be delivered, or if delivered, would not be read given the current state of their relationship. At ten o’clock, having refused his father who had insisted on giving unwarranted advice, he had donned his best coat and breeches and set out for his appointment.

The Grand Châtelet was within walking distance of his father’s offices which were situated at the port of La Grève on the right bank of the river and the day was dry and cold, but there was also the threat of rain, so he had called for a carriage rather than risk his shoes and stockings on the streets of Paris, which, even in the height of summer, were a stinking quagmire of mud, garbage and animal shit. During inclement weather they often became treacherous and impassable.

On arrival at his destination, he had alighted from the coach, paid the coachman twenty sous then stepped around a pig rooting in a dung heap. For a moment he stood in the roadway, his hands hanging loosely at his sides, his face tilted to the sky. “I am meeting Monsieur de la Reynie,” he said, raising his chin to underscore the importance of such an illustrious name. “Wait for me here. I wish you to take me home again afterwards.” In different circumstances such bluster would have impressed, but not this time: the coachman had conveyed passengers too many to count to similar ‘meetings’, never to see them again. He looked down at the young man with a look of sympathy. It was not an encouraging expression. “I shall wait for an hour, young sir. After that I shall leave since you may be… delayed.”

The remark, or at least the subtle note of warning it contained, did not escape the young man. It caused him a moment of breathlessness. It was all he could do to splutter a reply. “Ye…. yes, of course.” He had attempted to appear unconcerned, but the touch of fear that had leapt unbidden into his eyes had given the game away. To hide his distress, he turned his gaze upon the building.

Outside the entrance a group of lawyers in flowing black robes milled around some food stalls and two militiamen in doublet and breeches and carrying muskets, stamped their feet and eyed him from their guard huts. He glanced back towards the Seine and saw a distant sail unfold and swell with air, recognised the familiar shape of a cargo ship heading down towards the coast.

The Grand Châtelet is a twelfth century monstrosity. At the centre of its fortress-like façade were two round towers framing an arched entrance tunnel leading to a gloomy inner courtyard. Located on the right bank of the river Seine, the building had originally been intended as a bulwark designed to guard the northern approach to the Île de la Cité, but was now ancient and fetid; a fading edifice that had been rebuilt and extended over the centuries yet still managed to exist in an advanced state of disrepair. Despite its dilapidation, in recent years it had become the principal seat of common law and held jurisdiction over the city. To this end, it possessed a court, a newly-established police headquarters, a prison, Nicolas de la Reynie’s cheerless rooms; and a sinister reputation: people – both the innocent and the guilty - were rumoured to vanish without trace within in its dank and dismal corridors.

Back in the present, it has dawned on the young man that there is serious menace in the room. Up until this point, he has assumed that a mere show of confidence and self-assurance would carry the day, but, suddenly, he is less certain. “I first became acquainted with Monsieur Mauroy four months ago, just before Christmas, my lord,” he says cautiously.

He means to continue, but de la Reynie raises a forestalling hand in the air. The Lieutenant-General then does a most astonishing thing; he rises abruptly from his chair and moves towards an elaborate cabinet in the brightly lit corner of the room where a decanter of wine and some glasses on a silver tray stand waiting. “Would you care for a glass of Bourgogne wine, Monsieur Varenne?” he asks in quite another conversational tone.

This unexpected development causes the young man some confusion. He wonders if the question is some kind of trick or contains hidden meaning. “Well…Yes…that would be most kind, my lord,” he says finally.

After pouring for them both, de la Reynie hands the young man his drink, goes behind his desk and opens a shutter, letting light and an icy breath of air into the room then returns to his desk where he plonks himself down with a sigh. He appears to be enjoying himself. “Sit, Monsieur Varenne,” he says, motioning towards a chair over to one side which the officer of the guard carries hastily into the centre of the room. “I merely wish to know how you became involved in the Mauroy affair.”

Varenne, who is now standing to attention with his hat pressed hard against his thigh, accepts the glass somewhat clumsily because his arm is shaking. When the officer of the guard retreats, he sits down awkwardly. The chair creaks.

With a drink in one hand, a hat in the other, he dithers for a moment before placing his hat carefully on the floor. Baffled, he looks to the scribe for some kind of hint, some kind of guidance as to the correct behaviour in such a situation, but the man’s expression remains carved in stone. Nevertheless, despite his bewilderment at the sudden change of events, the young man has had chance to observe the Lieutenant-General in more detail, though it is too early to form an opinion of him. He has noted, for example, that he is a rather slim person with bright blue eyes, heavy-lidded and a pink-white complexion and that, despite his sour demeanour, he is also a man of fashion. Bewigged beneath a kilo of long curly hair he wears a knee-length black coat, sleeves upturned to the elbow and a white shirt, the cravat held in place by a small black ribbon. He has seen also that his fingertips are ink-soiled which, he thinks, confirms the generally held view that de la Reynie is a workhorse.

“I do not think I was actually *involved*, my lord?” he remarks when finally able to find his tongue.

“But you were present at the first blood experiment involving Monsieur Mauroy, four months ago, were you not?”

“Yes, sir, I was, but…”

“And also, I believe, at the second…”

Varenne finds it difficult to mask his astonishment. The Lieutenant-General is well-informed, which is unsettling. He begins to wonder what else the Lieutenant-General knows about him…

**Chapter 2**

**Guillaume Varenne**

The first time I saw Antoine Mauroy was on December 19, last year, at the home of Henri-Louis Habert de Montmor, the celebrated scholar. I was with my friend Doctor Theophile Chernier. At the time we were standing amongst a group of learned men in a magnificent dining room on the upper floor of Lord Montmor’s city estate at 79 Rue Sainte-Aroye.

I should also mention that Theo is himself a physician of some repute and occasionally gives lectures at the University. He had been requested to attend the ‘momentous event’ as the evening had been advertised and had invited me to accompany him because of my interest in natural philosophy. I confess that I did not feel out of place to be amongst such illustrious company. (Perhaps I should add that I am an only son and heir to my father’s Ship’s Chandlery and a full-time student of Humanities at the University of Paris. My father, you see, wishes me to acquire the manners and education of a gentleman, which he believes - mistakenly, I suspect - will enable our family to rise in society.)

I remember too that Theo was particularly agitated that night. I could tell by the way he kept sweeping his fingers through his thinning hair, an affectation he sometimes displayed when he was nervous or keyed up in some way.

“Why are you anxious, my friend?” I whispered.

Theo is a tall, lanky man of forty years with a permanently blotchy face. He shook his head though his lips remained pressed firmly together. “Not anxious, more a little troubled,” he said under his breath, after a moment’s thought.

I would have pursued the point except that at that moment there was a sudden burst of cheering from the people gathered around us.

The setting for the ‘momentous event’ was impressive. An array of candles had turned Lord Montmor’s long dining room into a jewellery box of reds and gold: one side a wall of tall casement windows hidden behind maroon curtains, the other a line of glittering mirrors.

Beneath the chandeliers and sidelights, the assembly of learned men jostled for position around the room’s enormous dining table. On the table-top at one end a calf had been strapped down with an intricate arrangement of ropes and pulleys. Monsieur Caron, a local butcher, and his leather-aproned assistant stood nearby, arms folded. Both were panting from their recent exertions: dragging the recalcitrant beast into the room and then immobilising it had been no easy task, made all the more difficult by the ribald comments from the amused audience. The calf had shat and pissed on the floor. An animal stink now filled the room and the terrified bovine, its one bulging eye roaming the chamber, was moaning pitifully.

It goes without saying that Lord Montmor is a fabulously rich landowner. He is also a man of letters and a collector of scientific paraphernalia. Thirty minutes earlier he had greeted us all in the courtyard at the front entrance of his mansion where we had been required to gather then, waving his arms for us to follow and accompanied by a phalanx of servants, had led us into the house. At the foot of a massive, curved staircase he had paused, one hand on the newel-post, to survey the multitude flooding into the entrance hall before turning once more and rushing up the stairs.

Lord Montmor, though rather short and stocky, is surprisingly sprightly for a man of his age and the tramp and noise of the crowd behind him was quite deafening and caused the entire staircase to shudder. At the top of the stairs, he halted, turned suddenly then raised his arms for silence. The result was a jam of bodies and a confusion of arms and legs; like a great wave crashing against a sea wall, I remember thinking.

“Do you mind, sir!” I said to a man on my right, pushing an elbow into his stomach.

“How dare you, sir!” he replied angrily.

“You get above yourself, sir,” I retorted sharply.

“Why, you arrogant young pup!” he cried, and probably would have pursued the matter further had not his lordship not spoken up again.

“Gentlemen,” he cried, “tonight is an auspicious occasion. You are here to witness a medical experiment of unparalleled importance.”

I have to say that I was singularly unimpressed by this declaration. In my experience of academia, men of science, or those who claim themselves to be of this persuasion, often have tendency to exaggerate, particularly when speaking of their own accomplishments. In other words, I expected to be bored, and the evening to be something of an anti-climax. However, his lordship’s announcement was greeted by a general murmuring of anticipation then the doors were thrown open and we all moved into the dining room.

Lord Montmor’s attachment to scientific discovery is well known. Not only had he established, a decade before, the Montmor Académie for Scientific Endeavour, but he had also been patron to a number of eminent thinkers including Descartes and Huygens and more recently, Gassendi. Unfortunately, his Académie had fallen out of favour with the scientific establishment over the years, though this decline seems not to have dampened his ardour for inquiry and investigation. Unfortunately, many of the distinguished scholars who had previously associated themselves with his name had deserted him and aligned themselves with the more prestigious French Academy of Sciences which had as its patron King Louis XIV. But that is hardly surprising. After all, it is difficult to compete with an institution promoted by the King and which meets in His Majesty’s Library at the Palace of Versailles!

Inside the room we pushed forward again to get a better view of the proceedings. That was when I asked Theo about these two competing Academies. At first, he gave me a sharp look of warning. “Keep your voice down, Guillaume,” he rebuked then grasped my arm and pulled me away from the crowd. “Our host can be highly sensitive about the opposition. Remember, this is the dog-eat-dog world of modern science,” he whispered.

I knew that to be true. I had many times witnessed at first hand, the vitriol of academic rivalry while attending lectures at the university. For example, there is currently much debate concerning Descartes theory of space and vacuum in which he holds that space is identical to matter and that, therefore, a vacuum or empty space is logically impossible. This theory is strongly condemned in some quarters, not least of all by the theologian Antoine Arnauld. In a recent allocution this puffed-up man of God had heaped both scorn and contempt on Descartes and all his theories.

I was clearly the youngest person in attendance that night, but, as I have mentioned, I was not intimidated to be amongst such a gathering, quite the contrary, in fact. I stood on tiptoe to peer over the shoulders of those in front of me and to catch a glimpse of the poor calf whose cries of distress seemed suddenly to have become more desperate. I also saw a large wooden chair being dragged noisily into position near the roped animal by two of Lord Montmor’s servants.

As if on cue, the wide double doors at the end of the room opened with a flourish and two leather-aproned men entered the arena. I recognised them both immediately. One was Doctor Jean-Baptiste Denis, of Montpelier University; a thin, dark-haired man, barely thirty who was France’s pre-eminent transfusionist, the other his older and more portly assistant, the surgeon and anatomist, Doctor Paul Emmerez.

Doctor Denis has been greatly in the news of late having recently carried out some much-talked-about dog-to-dog blood transfer experiments, including one trial in full public view in the shadow of the Pont-Neuf Bridge. (According to Theo, it was this ‘performance’ - I use Theo’s word – which had been witnessed by Lord Montmor that had first brought the two men together.)

Not surprisingly, Denis has gained from his experimentations a certain notoriety, if not fame. His many achievements have been published in both England’s *Philosophical Transactions* and France’s *Journal des Sçavans*, for example, and this has led to him being strongly criticised by certain members of the scientific fraternity, not least of whom, are several eminent physicians from the University of Paris Medical School. It is these detractors who have been the most vociferous in their condemnation of Denis and who clearly consider him little more than an ignorant and ill-trained upstart from the provinces. I, on the other hand, applaud his audacity in challenging the existing order.

Doctor Denis was carrying a small medical case. Moving swiftly into the room, he went directly to the head of the table and began unpacking surgical instruments – blood-encrusted knives, scalpels, clamps, bleeding bowls and suchlike - laying them out alongside the animal’s head. Doctor Emmerez, meanwhile, checked the animal, flexing the ropes that were holding it in place, making certain they were secure and that the calf was sufficiently restrained. Behind them, lord Montmor danced energetically from foot to foot, all the time glancing inquisitively over the shoulders of the two physicians as they made their preparations.

When it became clear that everything was in place and that the procedure was about to begin, the buzz of conversation in the room suddenly increased to fever pitch and there was much pushing and shoving for position. Meanwhile, the two medical men had moved closer together and were conversing quietly, their heads almost touching, completely ignoring the melee their preparations had created. When they were finally ready to begin Doctor Denis nodded to his companion then turned and bowed deeply to his patron. At this point Lord Montmor stepped forward and gestured for silence.

“Gentlemen,” he began, his voice deep with gravitas, “a few moments ago I promised you a medical spectacle of great significance, and, as you will now see, I am a man of my word. Although I am certain that no introductions are necessary, allow me to present Doctor Jean-Baptiste Denis” – Doctor Denis bowed deeply to the assemblage – “and his assistant Doctor Paul Emmerez.” Doctor Emmerez did likewise.

Monsieur de Montmor then stepped back from the table.

“Thank you, my lord,” Denis said then turned to address his audience. “Eminent gentlemen and fellow scientists, the new procedure that I have developed has already proved itself to be of great therapeutic value. Tonight, it will be used to treat a man whose sanguine passions have driven him to insanity.” Then, without more ado, he nodded to a manservant who had been waiting at the double doors through which he and his associate had emerged. “Bring in the lunatic,” Denis commanded.

The door at the end of the room opened a second time and this time three men emerged: two burley attendants, footpads or pugilists by the look of their scarred faces and rough apparel, dragging a third man between them. Their captive, a small white-faced creature who was barefoot and dressed in ragged, ill-fitting clothes, was clearly a confused and distracted person, evidenced by his wild, untamed hair, his long and straggly beard, the drool running from his mouth and the sharp and unnatural way his head jerked continually from side to side. The patient, however, needed no introduction since he had been the talk of Paris for many weeks: this was the infamous Antoine Mauroy…

**Chapter 3**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

When Pierre Gagnon came into my office a day ago, I knew from his expression that he was bringing me a problem.

“What?” I snapped before he could speak.

He drew in a breath. “A charge of murder has been laid.”

“Against whom?”

There was the merest twitch in his cheeks and his small eyes narrowed either side of a blade-like nose. “Jean-Baptiste Denis,” he answered.

“The blood doctor?”

“Yes.”

“And the victim?”

“His…patient, Antoine Mauroy.”

I was aware of Denis’s reputation as something of a showman, but his blood transfer experiments had brought him both supporters and an abundance of powerful enemies. In the past, however, he had not broken the law, at least not Man’s law; what God thought of his experimentations I had no idea.

“A doctor killing his patient isn’t that unusual in my experience,” I said.

Gagnon shrugged. He is a small, taciturn man and his countenance gives nothing away, which is why I had made my remark: to goad him a little.

“So, what do you propose?” I asked when it was clear that he was not going to rise to the bait.

“Given the people involved I think more questions should be asked, my lord.”

I was reluctant to get involved. I had more important matters to attend to, but the good doctor had stirred up a hornet’s nest of controversy with his antics. I sighed. “Make some enquiries, Pierre - discreetly of course. I want you to make this whole affair go away as swiftly as possible. You understand what I mean?”

“Yes, my lord,” Gagnon said quietly. Then he bowed and turned to leave. That is when I caught the smell of him: something sour and squalid; a whiff of the prison vault. He departed as soundlessly as he had arrived.

That is how the enquiry began: a simple instruction to extinguish a fire at the first spark, but now the city is ablaze and the University of Paris Medical School an inferno. Suddenly I must put aside more important matters in order to become involved. Someone will suffer for causing me this much aggravation…

**Chapter 4**

**Guillaume Varenne**

It was Anne who first told me about Antoine Mauroy. At the time, I remember, we were strolling arm-in-arm in the Tuileries garden, chaperoned as usual by Anne’s maid-in-waiting, Danielle, who walked five paces behind.

Anne is nineteen and the only daughter of Joseph Turgot a rich and powerful business associate of my father. We had met a year earlier when I accompanied my father to the Turgot’s offices for a meeting about a joint business venture. In an impressive boardroom, the walls lined with portraits of the Turgot family’s eminent ancestors, and all depicted in heavy gilt frames, old man Turgot had welcomed us warmly, invited us to sit then called for refreshments. Five minutes later Anne came in carrying a silver tray on which rested a coffee pot and cups and all that was necessary.

Anne, by the way, is tall and slender with the face of an angel. On that first occasion I remember that beneath a small white cap her long auburn hair was piled high and stabbed ferociously with pins.

“Allow me to introduce my daughter, Anne,” said Monsieur Turgot.

Bright eyes downcast, she curtsied then began laying out the coffee things. I remained frozen for a moment then remembered my manners and leapt to my feet, but with such haste and awkwardness I sent my chair crashing over backwards onto the floor. The noise seemed to reverberate off the walls. My father gave me a sharp look of reprimand for my clumsiness, but what I recall most clearly about that moment was Anne’s fleeting look of amusement, quickly concealed. It was all I could do to whisper, “Mademoiselle,” before rushing to right my chair again.

“Sir,” she replied then left us to conduct our business, though I recollect very little of what was discussed on that occasion because having once set eyes on her, I was in love.

After that, I confess, I was besotted. Two days later I spoke with my father who with extreme reluctance at my insistence, agreed that I could request a meeting with Monsieur Turgot. The interview took place in the same boardroom we had met previously, but this time his son, Thomas, was also present standing stern-faced and silent at his father’s shoulder. They were both cut from the same cloth: short, fat and bald, the younger man, if anything, the more corpulent of the two. I addressed myself to the father.

“I have requested this meeting to ask if may call upon your daughter, sir,” I said.

I saw the son frown at this request. Clearly, he was against the idea, as was my father, but old man Turgot was more circumspect and, as I would later learn, would deny his daughter almost nothing. “I must consult with Anne first,” he said. I was dismissed.

The following day I received a note saying that Anne Turgot would be pleased to receive me for afternoon coffee at the family home. And thus, we began. Over the months that followed we have become close despite some opposition from her brother. Marriage has not been discussed, though we have made long-term plans together: we have discussed, for example, boating on the lake in summer, and skating on the Seine when the ice returns. Given the current fractured status of our relationship, I try to convince myself that these were positive signs and I still tell myself that we have an ‘understanding’. Namely, that I shall complete my studies at the university this year after which I will join my father’s business full-time when I shall be in a position to formally propose marriage.

“Who is Antoine Mauroy?” I asked, when she first mentioned the name.

“You don’t know, Guillaume?” she replied in mock surprise. Her dark eyes widened, her mouth with its lovely full lips was pressed into a thin smile.

I kept my face stern. “No, Anne, I do not. Please educate me,” which caused her frown to deepen. “But the Mauroy affair has been the talk of the town!” she retorted.

“Really? I am afraid I have more important matters to consider than frivolous gossip.”

“Then I shall not bore you will such trivialities,” she responded and turned her back on me. Anne, I should point out, can be both headstrong and intimidating. There was a swish from her skirts as she began to disengage her arm from mine, but I forestalled her by putting my hand on hers. To make a theatre of my dismay I went down on one knee. “Please, my beloved, tell me about Monsieur Mauroy,” I begged.

There was a pause as she looked down at me. “Am I truly your beloved?” she whispered.

I took her hand and brought it to my lips. “Yes, you are. For now, and forever,” I said.

It was an idyllic moment. We were standing – or should I say I was kneeling - next to a flowerbed richly ablaze in yellow and blue. To one side an ornamental lake sparkled in the sunlight and the air was filled with birdsong. I heard Danielle cough a warning at such scandalous behaviour. Anne, on the other hand merely shuddered and I noted a pink flush had swept up into her face from her lovely neck as I stood up again.

“Guillaume!” she reprimanded, finally snatching back her hand then making a show of looking around to see if people were staring at us. Nevertheless, I could see that she was pleased.

“Antoine Mauroy,” I reminded her.

“Yes?”

“You were going to tell me about him.”

“Was I?” she said breathlessly.

I caressed her upper arm the back of my hand brushing against her breast and she pressed herself against me. The touch of her bosom sent a shiver down my spine.

I heard Danielle say, “My lady…” very quietly, causing Anne to step away from me. She took a moment to compose herself.

“Monsieur Mauroy,” she began, flashing her eyes at me, “was until recently employed as a manservant by the Marquise de Sevigne. As Madame’s servant, or so the story goes, he had developed romantic aspirations above his station. In other words, he was a handsome man of humble origins who should have restricted his marital ambitions to wedding a woman of his own rank, someone who carried washing down to the river each day, or who worked in the kitchens, for example. Unfortunately, he had foolishly set his sights on becoming betrothed to one of the high-born young women who visited Madame de Sevigne at her residence.”

“That seems a foolish thing to do,” I remarked, to which she replied stern-faced, “Even a cat may look at a king, Guillaume!”

Grinning, I gestured for her to continue.

In response, she turned a smile on me and suddenly it was as if the sun had emerged from behind a cloud. Her beauty is incandescent and I felt my heart lurch. For a moment I was speechless. “If the rumours are true,” she began, “he had eventually identified a young woman – his ‘victim’ as some described it - whom he intended to ensnare then marry. It seems that as a reckless young man in his early twenties he had assumed that love - and perhaps his own relentless ardour - would conquer all; that his chosen prey would surrender herself to his charms and then open doors that had previously remained closed thus ushering him into a world of wealth and privilege. This, of course, was a most foolish assumption since it failed to take into account the prejudices and strictures of the class system.”

“Sometimes a beautiful woman can make a man entirely lose his senses,” I said, gazing wide-eyed at her.

This remark caused her to give me a severe look and I expected a sharp retort of some sort, but instead she merely frowned and shook her head then continued with her story. “Not surprisingly, the young woman he had ‘selected’ not only scorned his advances but also soon after became betrothed to a man of her own social level, thus reminding Monsieur Mauroy in the process, of his own lowly status. It was this rejection, this shock, so the doctors maintain, that set in motion a series of most unfortunate events and caused an onset of lunacy that came upon him both quickly and with excessive brutality…”

“And you have heard all this from whom, may I ask?” I said.

“Why from Danielle, of course.”

Her maid, who had moved closer when she heard her mistress begin to tell the story, nodded seriously confirming the fact.

“According to the gossips, the first sign of Mauroy’s insanity was when he ran naked from Madame Sevigne’s apartments, though I confess I question the veracity of this story…”

“It is quite true, my lady,” Danielle interjected. “I heard it myself from the downstairs maid.”

“The downstairs maid?” I repeated incredulously.

“She is my cousin, sir!” she said, rebuking me.

Anne continued. “There is little doubt, however, that while in Madame Sevigne’s employ his behaviour became increasingly more erratic and unpredictable. At first, it appears Madame de Sevigne showed remarkable sympathy for her servant. Indeed, she summoned her very own physician who promptly bled the patient to remove the noxious humours from his blood that were causing such befuddlement…”

“So, he received medical attention?” I interrupted.

“Yes, but this treatment proved to be of no avail. Over the days and weeks that followed, his madness grew worse by leaps and bounds until he eventually began threatening with violence any male visitors to the house.”

According to Anne, it was this latter development that caused Madame de Sevigne to finally lose patience with her manservant and to dismiss him from his post. And it was this sending away that was also the final straw for Mauroy. On the night of the next full moon, he was discovered with a rope around his neck in front of the gallows at the old Marais temple threatening to kill himself. His condition, again according to Anne, went swiftly from bad to worse. It was at this point that a second dowager - Madame de Bussy-Rabutin - a cousin to Madame de Sevigne - chose to take pity on poor Mauroy. She had him brought to her house, where doctors were again summoned to treat his madness. This time a series of therapeutic immersions were prescribed. Unfortunately, after forty cold baths, the patient showed no sign of improvement. No doubt, confused and distressed by the treatments he had received, he escaped his confinement and was later observed dressed in rags, trudging through the mud along a bank of the Seine.

In the end, Anne said, Madame de Bussy-Rabutin having failed so ignominiously with Mauroy, quite wisely summoned the authorities who eventually captured him and had him committed to the Hôtel-Dieu, an asylum for the mentally deranged.

**Chapter 5**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

My first impression of Guillaume Varenne is that he is a foolish, pretentious young man, but then this is not surprising since my Chief Investigator, tells me that his parents are common people. I understand also that the family, through the father’s diligence, has managed to rise somewhat in society, but there are rumours that their star, long ascendant, is now on the wane. Again, I am not surprised: in my experience it is easy to take a man from the gutter; it is less easy to take the gutter from the man!

Gagnon, who I suspect has already determined Varenne complicit in the alleged murder, wishes to use torture to obtain a confession, but I have denied him that course of action. Given the people involved, I need to get to the truth, and it is common knowledge that a man will admit to anything - that day is night and night is day - should sufficient pain be applied. I have decided instead to indulge this young man a little - for the time being at least.

“That is all well and good, Monsieur Varenne,” I say quietly after listening to him speak about his first contact with Antoine Mauroy, “but I also need to know your opinion of Doctor Denis...”

He looks at me with alarm. “*My* opinion, sir?” he says.

I note that he has lost much of his swagger. “Are you not friends?”

He shakes his head. “No, sir, I would not say we are ‘friends.’” His eyes search the room for inspiration. “We are…we are…”

“Acquaintances?” I suggest.

He looks relieved, stupidly so, I think. “Yes, sir, more acquaintances…”

“Acquaintances, then. He is accused of murder, sir, and you have been in his company on a number of occasions, is that not true?”

He stares at me, takes a deep breath to give himself time to think then says cautiously: “Yes, it is true, my lord.”

“And you have observed him during his experiments on Mauroy…”

Cautiously again: “Yes.”

“Then I think you are eminently qualified to give an opinion as to his character.”

Instead of replying he falls silent, which is most annoying. When I can take his quiet no more, I say, “Have you discussed Doctor Denis and his experimentations with your friends or family, or perhaps with you fellow students at the university, Monsieur Varenne?”

He bends over, picks his glass, takes a sip of wine then puts it down again. “No, my lord, I have not.”

He is lying, but then, as I have said, he is a rather foolish young man. What I also know from my Chief Investigator is that when he and his dissolute friends are together and in drink, they are often in the habit of making fun of those in authority, myself included.

“If you try to deceive me, sir, you do so at your peril, sir,” I warn.

His eyes slide away from me and I see some colour drain from his face. I note too that his hands are shaking. “I may have mentioned the matter in passing, my lord,” he admits a moment later.

Stupid boy! What does he think? That he has not been investigated? That I have not had maids spying at his door, questioned every tavern-keeper at his drinking-houses, had his every move observed, every facile comment recorded? “I am still waiting for you to give me your opinion about Doctor Denis,” I say causing his eyes to flash.

“Well, my lord…” he begins then just as quickly stutters to a halt.

There follows another silence which is suddenly broken when my scribe bellows, “SPEAK, YOU IDIOT!”

Jerked back into life, he finds his tongue again. His words tumble out. “Doctor Denis is an ambitious man, sir.”

“What else?”

“Perhaps a little arrogant, too…”

Ah, the pot calling the kettle black. “Really? Ambitious and arrogant. Why ‘arrogant’?”

He hesitates, then says, “His actions have been strongly condemned by some members of the medical fraternity, but he brushes aside any hint of criticism of his work.”

“You are referring to some of our illustrious physicians from the University of Paris, are you not?”

He nods.

“Say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, Monsieur Varenne,” I instruct.

Varenne looks to the scribe. Sees that his quill is hovering above a thick leather-bound notebook. “Yes,” he says, prompting his response to be recorded on paper.

“Who is against him? I need names, sir.”

Another pause. His eyes are closed. I see my scribe open his mouth to remonstrate again, but I wave a finger at him, though I can feel the first stirrings of anger at this ridiculous young man.

Varenne opens his eyes. He appears to have come to a decision. “Henri-Martin de la Martiniere, and Doctors Perrault and Lamy, come to mind, sir.”

I sigh. Old, old news! It is common knowledge that all three men are vociferous in their condemnation of Denis’s blood transfer experiments. Martiniere has made his abhorrence known to all who will listen and Lamy, also a strident critic, has written numerous articles denouncing the practice. Perrault, I know, has attempted dog-to-dog blood transfers himself, though without success, and has since declared the practice against the law of Nature.

“Monsieur Varenne,” I say patiently, “I am aware that Doctor Denis has been denounced in many quarters.”

I chose not to add that earlier today, Martiniere and Lamy had visited me in my office and urged me to have Denis and his accomplices – Varenne included - condemned as murderers.

Of course, it is also common knowledge that many physicians from the University of Paris speak of Denis with derision and contempt. I think, however, that the main concern for many of these ardent detractors, these so-called men of science, is that Denis is an outsider, a graduate of Montpellier School of Medicine rather than their own esteemed faculty, meaning that what really worries them is not the controversial nature of his experimentations, but the fact that, by becoming celebrated, he is undermining their prestige and position.

He nods vigorously, suddenly, eager to please. “Yes, my lord, but Doctor Denis is not a man to be cowed by disapproval!”

Ah, we are finally starting to get somewhere. “So, what you mean is that he is a man who is prepared to do whatever is needed to get what he wants,” I say.

He rubs his arm to give himself time to think then glances at my scribe. He reaches down and takes yet another shaky gulp of wine, draining his glass in the process. Around the collar of his shirt, I notice that a redness has swept up onto his throat. “No, my lord,” he says shaking his head, “that is not what I mean. What I mean is that he is a very determined man. I believe that Doctor Denis, through his experiments, wishes to advance the cause of medical understanding.”

I confess that I dislike being contradicted, especially by someone I consider a simpleton. It is difficult to keep the disdain from my voice. “Really?”

“Yes.”

“So, in your opinion, Doctor Denis is both striving and determined. In other words, he is ruthless at times. Ruthless to the point of murder, is that what you are saying?”

His eyes widen and he opens his mouth to protest then thinks better of the idea and presses his lips together. He looks at me, at the files stacked high on my desk, glances again at my scribe. I can see that he is aware of his predicament. In different circumstances, I might even have felt sorry for him. “With respect, sir,” he says nervously, “I believe he is ruthless only in the pursuit of science. Why would he want to murder his patient, my lord?”

“But surely that is obvious, Monsieur Varenne. Doctor Denis selected his patient – a lunatic – then subjected him to a series of never-before-tried blood transfers in order to cure his insanity and when his experiments failed, he resorted to murder in an attempt to protect his reputation.” I decide not to add, ‘*with you as an accomplice*’.

I study Varenne who is now staring at the floor. I think he wishes to portray himself as blameless, that he is merely an innocent bystander in the whole affair, but I suspect that he is a devious young man. “Do you know how Doctor Denis and Mauroy met?” I ask.

He looks up at me. I notice that his forehead is damp with sweat. “I understand that they met some weeks before the first blood transfusion, my lord….”

“Yes?”

“I was told that Doctor Denis had heard about Monsieur Mauroy, who by that time had himself become well-known in the city…”

“Who told you this?”

“Doctor Emmerez.”

I write down the name and draw a circle around it. “Continue.”

“Doctor Denis identified Monsieur Mauroy as the perfect subject for his transfusion experiment. He called it his ‘revolutionary treatment’. New blood, he said, would cure his madness …”

“Where was Mauroy at this time?”

“He was confined in the Hôtel-Dieu, sir.”

“And you are certain of that, Monsieur Varenne?”

He again looks at the floor, considers his answer before speaking then looks up again. “No, I am not certain, my lord, but that is what I heard. I believe that Doctor Denis visited him there.”

I raise my voice a little because I suspect this sly young man has a faculty for cunning intensity “You *believe* Doctor Denis visited him there? That is not good enough, sir. I want facts. Facts! What you *believe* has no relevance here.”

“It was confirmed to me by the maid of a friend, my lord,” he answers hastily.

For the first time since this young man has entered the room, I laugh. “The maid of a friend!” I repeat then cast a glance to my scribe who responds by raising his eyebrows for a moment, equally amused.

“Yes, my lord. One who works in the house of Madame de Sevigne and has followed the events relating to Monsieur Mauroy with some interest.”

“And you believe this…this maid of a friend?”

“I do, sir.”

“And you have spoken to her personally?”

“No, my lord, I have not, but she is the cousin of Mademoiselle Turgot’s maid, whom I *have* spoken with…”

So now he is quoting the word of a cousin of a maid whom he barely knows! He is indeed a nonsensical young man. I wave a hand for him to continue.

“…As I said, my lord, Monsieur Mauroy was at this time an inmate at the Hôtel-Dieu. I understand that Doctor Denis arranged Mauroy’s release through the intervention of his patron Lord Montmor and it was His Lordship who had Mauroy moved from the Hôtel-Dieu and lodged within his own house where he was fed and watered and given a roof over his head…”

“The purpose being?”

“The purpose being, I understand, to study the patient in an attempt to ascertain the cause of his insanity, and to prepare him for treatment. Doctor Denis said that during his time at the Hôtel-Dieu Monsieur Mauroy had become severely undernourished, my lord.”

“Go on.”

“Doctor Denis said that Mauroy would soon become the subject of a medical miracle - a cure for madness through blood transfer…”

“…While the good doctor’s critics argue that Mauroy was merely the Christmas goose being fattened for slaughter!”

Before he can reply, from the courtyard below suddenly comes the sound of a disturbance; some shouting, a man calling out, a crowd jeering. An officer of the guard shouts an order, which is followed by the tramp of boots as a troop of soldiers begin to march. A tumbril creaks and begins to move away, its iron-shod wheels clattering over the cobblestones.

The young man glances at the window then looks to me for an explanation. “A murderer going to the scaffold,” I say. I see him pale at the thought.

“Tell me about the first experiment on Antoine Mauroy,” I say…

**Chapter 6**

**Guillaume Varenne**

Hearing the sound of soldiers in the courtyard I look at Monsieur de la Reynie. “A murderer going to the scaffold,” he remarks, and I know from his expression, from the way he smiles when he says those words, that he is a man capable of great cruelty when the mood takes him. I had acted arrogantly at the beginning of the interview, which was a foolish thing to do, but it had been prompted by hubris, fool that I am! Of course, I had been anxious, following my summons. But only anxious, you understand, not frightened, since I have done nothing wrong. Now I am terrified. In desperation I send a silent prayer to a God I barely believe in.

Monsieur de la Reynie is forty-three, a man in his prime, a person of almost limitless power who has been appointed to his present illustrious position by Jean-Baptiste Colbert, Minister of Finances to the King, whereas I am, by contrast, barely twenty and a nobody! I had stupidly paid no heed to my father’s warning that the Lieutenant-General’s composed exterior – my father had met him once at a guild meeting – masked a mind as sharp as a razor; that he was not a man to underestimate. Like a fool I had dismissed these warnings, but now I knew better. I was being humoured. More alarming still, it was clear too that he already knew a great deal about the Mauroy affair, which begged the question: why then was I being questioned? I could think of only two reasons: either because I was considered a valuable witness; or because I was suspected of involvement in the killing…

As these thoughts raced through my mind, the Lieutenant-General seemed to lose interest in me: he had picked up a quill and turned casually to his scribe to begin discussing the corn supply in the city. Then he began writing in a ledger on his desk while I remained silent and unmoving in my seat, hardly daring to breathe.

The room is freezing. When I breathe out my breath is like smoke. How can the Lieutenant-General work in such a place? I look out of the window behind him. The sky is grey and overcast but over the rooftops is a vista of spires and parapets, some of them touched with ice, stretching off into the distance. I become aware too of the smell wafting in from outside: an abominable mixture of tanneries and slaughterhouses, of piss and drying blood; and of the great Parisian sewers nearby that ooze filth into the river. It strikes me that the Grand Châtelet and its surrounds are a perfect reflection of the stink and squalor that is Paris.

The Lieutenant-General finally stops writing and looks up again. “Tell me about the first experiment on Antoine Mauroy,” he says.

My mind is in a whirl. I begin breathing rapidly. I am behaving like a guilty man, I think.

“I was…I was present on the night of the first blood transfer experiment, my lord,” I stutter. “The entire episode…it was surreal…”

“You remember it clearly then?”

“Yes, my lord. I remember everything...”

“Then describe it to me.”

How could I forget such an occasion! The two assistants dragged the bewildered Mauroy - his body jerking and twisting all the time - to the large wooden chair that Doctor Emmerez had positioned near the head of the table. Ignoring his whimpers and groans, Denis then supervised while Mauroy was fastened in place. His upper body was strapped to the chair by a thick leather belt around his chest, the buckle at the rear, his arms tied down with more straps, his legs fettered with rope. The two attendants then manoeuvred the chair, its legs screeching and scratching the hardwood floor until it was an arm’s length from the animal’s head.

By this time, Mauroy appeared to have fallen into delirium. His head flopped backwards and forwards, there was spittle on his lips and a look of madness in his rolling eyes. I remember casting a confused glance to Theo, whose gaze was fixed on the hapless victim.

Finally, Denis stepped forward again. “Gentlemen,” he said, “tonight I shall cure this poor wretch’s lunacy …”

I again looked at Theo who was frowning at the doctor’s words. There was an excited muttering in the room that grew in intensity. Theo returned my stare for a moment then shook his head and returned his attention to the table. That was when I first noticed that there were one or two other concerned faces amongst the crowd.

“As you can see,” Doctor Denis continued, “the patient is disoriented and is not of sound mind. Before the madness that you now observe made itself known, he was a manservant to the Marquise de Sevigne, but then his mind became charged with ludicrous and nonsensical thoughts. As a consequence of unrequited ardour his addled brain caused his blood to overheat and he has descended into madness.

“I should add that he has been treated by a number of eminent physicians, but clearly without success. In recent weeks he has been confined within the Hôtel-Dieu. Before that, he lived on the streets of Paris and slept beneath the bridges that cross the Seine, which explains his dishevelled appearance.”

I wondered why Denis had not dressed Mauroy in more proper attire than rags and scraps. Then it struck me: that would have limited the shock effect of his patient’s most pitiful appearance. It occurred to me also at that moment that Doctor Denis was as much showman as he was physician.

“Today,” he continued, “my assistant Doctor Paul Emmerez and I shall transfuse the blood of this calf into Monsieur Mauroy. This new blood will both calm his unhinged mind and reset the imbalance in his humours.” He paused to look around at the room, “After all, it is common knowledge, is it not, that humoral disparity is known to lie at the root of all madness, that the four humours – blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile – are essential to maintain a healthy body and mind.”

There were murmurs of agreement from the audience. “You are correct, sir,” someone shouted from the back of the crowd. Denis’s lips twitched into a smile. “Gentlemen,” he concluded, “as is clearly evident, this balance has been severely disrupted in the case of Antoine Mauroy.”

When Denis picked up a scalpel the crowd moved as one and some of those positioned in the front row were jostled by those further back and shoved up against the table, prompting an outburst of curses and cries of “hold back, sir” and “stop pushing!” Even near the back of the crowd I was most callously shoved forward.

Denis, who stood poised, blade in hand, was forced to take a step back. “Space, gentlemen, I need space,” I heard him say, but to little avail. A ripple of excitement had passed through the crowd which would not be denied.

Despite the two attendants forcefully shoving and pushing it took more than a minute for the uproar to abate. Eventually, the mob slowly settled back into a state of trembling excitement. At this point Denis approached the chair and the patient who appeared to have once again regained some of his sanity, began to struggle, shake his head and mutter incoherently.

“Monsieur Mauroy, this will cure your absurdity and this treatment is for your own good,” the doctor said calmly.

His colleague, Dr Emmerez, had, meanwhile, begun assembling an assortment of thin silver tubes and goose quills sharpened in such a way as to fit together into one long, flexible pipe.

The two physicians looked at each other and Denis nodded solemnly. Emmerez then turned to the calf and made a short incision into the animal’s neck. The animal moaned then there was a metre high spurt of blood which splashed against his apron. He stopped the blood flow with his finger then he picked up a bowl which he held against the calf’s neck. When the bowl was half full, he appeared satisfied.

“The blood is flowing freely, Jean,” I heard him say quietly.

“That is good, Paul,” the other replied.

Dr Emmerez then rather deftly fitted the thin goose-pipe he had previously assembled into the cut he had made in the animal’s neck. The calf struggled and wailed and blood poured from the open end of the pipe in throbbing spurts. By this time the mesmerised audience had finally fallen silent.

At a signal from his colleague Dr Denis made his move. Gripping Mauroy’s wrist with one hand, he pushed his patient’s ragged shirt sleeve up to the shoulder with the other then made a short, neat incision just below the elbow. Blood began to surge from the cut. As Mauroy looked down at his arm with wide-eyed fear, Denis then inserted the flooding goose quill, a hand on the arm of the struggling victim to restrict any movement.

Suddenly, the crowd was restive once more. First came a re-alignment, a tide of movement towards the head of the table as those at the back again pushed forwards for a better view. Those at the front were again elbowed and bumped. More shouts of protest went out, but the mob still surged. Even Emmerez was shoved from his position then Denis himself was for a moment propelled away from his patient. In the background Lord Montmor was shouting for calm and order. The room was in chaos.

“Get back!” Emmerez shouted, though given the disorder and volume of noise in the room his cries for calm and order had little effect.

The goose-pipe suddenly shot out of the calf’s neck sending a spray of blood onto those standing nearest to the animal, causing a group of them to push backwards. For a moment there was a further disordered ebb and flow within the onlookers. Again, the two attendants stepped forwards this time using angry blows to push back the crowd. Denis eventually managed to elbow his way back to his patient, shouted once more for calm. It was a scene of total pandemonium.

Emmerez, meanwhile, was struggling to fit the pipe back into the animal’s neck. Spurts of blood were pouring onto the table and splashing on the floor where they pooled around his feet.

At the same time, Doctor Denis had leaned forward to check the patient’s arm, holding the pipe in place with some difficulty saying, “Please remain still, sir,” while blood seeped from the pipe running over the wooden arm of the chair and onto the floor.

The noise in the room grew louder. The patient meanwhile appeared to have difficulty breathing. He moved erratically and in a moment of lucidity, complained of dizziness. Then he suddenly went red in the face and began to sweat copiously. At the same time, the animal on the table began to writhe and struggle. A huge volume of blood had poured onto the floor. The calf began to weaken, its eye opened and shut one last time before it gave a shudder and expired.

The two doctors looked at each other. Denis removed the quill from the patient’s arm and pressed a pad against the wound.

“The procedure is at an end,” he said.

Noise erupted as many in the room shouted questions at him.

With the help of the two attendants, Mauroy was untied and apparently weak and confused from the blood transfusion, was helped from the room. He was being taken, Denis explained, to the servants’ quarters where a room had been prepared, where he would rest and recuperate. In the background, Monsieur Caron was untying the calf, which he dragged from the table and hefted onto this assistant’s shoulders. With the assistant staggering under the dead weight of the animal, the two men left the room.

Meanwhile, the level of noise in the dining room had risen to a crescendo as everyone started shouting at once. Theo took hold of my arm and pulled me out of the crowd. “Wait for me,” he said then pushed his way back through the throng. I watched him force his way forward and speak briefly to Denis before he returned to me. “I’ve seen enough,” he said. I followed him out of the room. At the doorway we passed two of Montmor’s servants who were about to enter, mops and buckets at the ready.

“What did you say to him?” I asked when we were on the stairs.

“I said that I wished to know the fate of the patient.”

“And?”

“He said that I would be welcome to visit and that he would announce the results of the therapy as soon as possible. I have never witnessed anything so…so astonishing,” he added.

Neither had I.

At this point in my discourse the Lieutenant-General interjects. “What did you do after the experiment had ended?” he asks.

“We returned home, sir…”

The truth is we were both in a state of consternation. We walked out amongst a flood of men who poured from the building all shouting and calling out to each other. The noise in the courtyard was deafening. An assortment of gigs, landaus and broughams were arriving and departing in a steady stream, the drivers struggling to control horses that were restive and nervous in the mayhem. Such was the excitement that night it seemed the normal rules of discourse appeared to have been abandoned: fellow guests would come up to us, complete strangers sometimes, and declare their amazement, some shaking their heads with incomprehension before walking away again.

We had arrived on foot, however, and set out for home. My house was a twenty-minute walk away, Theo’s was in the same direction, but about half that distance.

Because the streets of Paris could be dangerous at night, we were accompanied by Gavroche, a massive bear of a man and one of Theo’s servants, who had escorted us to the meeting and then waited outside for us to emerge. Ten years before, Gavroche had been found bleeding and unconscious in the street and nursed back to health. Since then he had lived in a room at the back of Theo’s house and was completely devoted to his master. Despite his size and silent menace, it was comforting to know that we were under his protection.

The weather that evening was fine and dry, though somewhat chilly being December, but we were wrapped up in our greatcoats. For the first five minutes we walked in silence then I felt compelled to speak.

“That was quite a …”

“Circus,” Theo added.

I smiled. “That was not the word I was going to use, but it will suffice,” I said.

My companion was silent for a moment. “I am sure we have witnessed a most important event,” he said. “But I’m not quite sure what to make of it.”

“I had the impression that most of those in attendance were very impressed,” I said.

“Impressed by Denis’s audacity, you mean,” Theo answered.

It was the tone he used, not the words that caught my attention Theo was normally a quiet, thoughtful man who treated all those with whom he came into contact, with the same gracious courtesy. He was not one to criticise, to show prejudice, nor was he vicious or vindictive. I had never heard him say a bad word about anyone, neither king nor commoner.

“You consider the experiment audacious? Does that mean you disapprove?” I asked.

He needed a moment to consider his reply. “I confess that I disapprove of his treatment of the patient, and it was undoubtedly a dangerous experiment.”

“Dangerous in what way?” I asked.

“Doctor Denis has been stepping into uncharted realms for the last six months.”

I was confused. “I don’t know what you mean, Theo,” I said. “Six months? Are you saying that tonight’s experiment wasn’t the first?”

“No, it was not. On two previous occasions he has carried out similar blood transfusions…”

“What?” I halted so suddenly at this revelation that Gavroche, who was following close behind, almost crashed into me. I heard him mutter a curse before he stepped back again. Theo had also turned to look at me.

“Who? Where?” I stammered. “Do you know what happened?”

“Yes, of course I know what happened. I was present on both occasions. The first experiment involved a youth of fifteen, the second a local butcher. Both patients survived.”

“Mother of Christ, Theo! Why haven’t you mentioned this before?”

My friend merely shrugged. “You never asked,” he said. “I didn’t think it was important.”

I rolled my eyes. “Not important! Then what is so different about tonight?” I demanded.

“Tonight, the patient was incapable of giving his permission...”

“But Monsieur Mauroy was not harmed.”

“We do not know that Guillaume! He was tied into his seat and then cut! And, more importantly, I doubt he was given the opportunity to refuse the therapy.”

“Yes, there is that,” I conceded. Then, feigning a moment of deep reflection, added, “However, Doctor Denis is, I understand, highly regarded by many and his patron is reputedly a man of learning and discernment…”

This was my clumsy attempt to draw Theo out, to see if he had any more surprises lurking in the shadows.

“You are goading me, are you not?” he said, giving me a sharp look.

“I can’t remember the last time I saw you so agitated,” I grinned.

Theo grunted and walked on. A minute later he said, “The problem is, Guillaume, that I suspect that both men – Denis and his patron, Montmor - are determined to make names for themselves…

“At whatever the cost to the patient,” I interjected.

“No, I did not say that,” Theo replied sharply. “However, despite Lord Montmor’s reputation as a man of learning, I believe he is something of a dilettante and there is considerable opposition to Denis from some quarters.”

“So, you are opposed to blood transfusion then?” I said.

Theo is an easy-going man. He administers to his patients, both the rich and the poor, with the same consideration and care. “I am…uncertain,” he confessed. “I have the uncomfortable impression that Doctor Denis may be more interested in personal glory than scientific discovery. Also, as I have said, the patient did not give his consent. That is most troubling for me… And were you not aware of the scowl on the face of Henri Martiniere?”

**Chapter 7**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

I confess that Varenne’s description of Mauroy’s first blood transfusion made for compelling listening. Of course, I was aware of the night in question – there is little that goes on in this city that I am not aware of - but I had not heard the actual events described in such vivid detail. And as regards Denis’s erstwhile blood-transfer experimentations, I had received reports with regards to those some months ago, but since the good doctor’s previous subjects appeared to have suffered no ill-effects, the information had merely been of passing interest.

The Mauroy case was different. According to Gagnon, Mauroy had undergone three blood transfusions: the first and second last December in Montmor’s grand dining room, and the third – the one that caused his death - at Mauroy’s home barely a week ago.

It is this third therapy that interests me the most; not the location, but the time disparity. Why, if the victim survived two previous blood transfusions without ill-health or mortal affliction, did he succumb following a third?

Which brings me to the subject of doctors Martiniere and Lamy. These two learned gentlemen arrived uninvited at my office this morning demanding an audience and though I resented their effrontery, acquiescing to their request did give me the opportunity to question them about this inconsistency in more detail.

I should add that four months ago they also turned up at the main gate demanding to see me. On that occasion they insisted that I have Denis arrested for heresy and sedition. I remember that I was on the brink of having them thrown out of the building for such impertinence and it was only a cautionary glance from my Chief Investigator that caused me to adopt a more prudent approach. In the end I promised to investigate their claims. I later determined that no further action was required.

This morning, I noted their manners had not improved, which meant that I was ill-tempered from the start of the conversation and my mood did not improve.

Martiniere is a tall, loud-voiced scowling man who prefers to lecture rather than discuss and his companion, though shorter and less garrulous, attempts to hide his vitriol behind a toothy smile. I find both men equally objectionable.

After I had seated my two guests I offered refreshments, which Martiniere declined with a haughty sweep of his hand. He then demanded that I have Denis arrested, brought before a magistrate and arraigned for murder. His colleague, who had already spoken out declaring Denis to be a charlatan of the worst kind, claimed that he and his partner, Emmerez, had connived to conceal the vicious slaying of Antoine Mauroy to obscure the failure of their experiments. This condescension set the tone for the exchange that followed. Not surprisingly, when I raised the fact that the patient had received two blood transfusions without ill-effect prior to the one that preceded his death, my objection was dismissed out of hand.

“My dear, sir,” Martiniere responded, puffing out his chest, “as a non-medical man you cannot be expected to understand such therapeutic matters. Indeed, your ignorance is understandable…”

“Indeed, it is,” interjected his companion, “medicine is a science of such complexity it is quite beyond the intellect of the common man.”

I looked at the two men sitting across the desk from me and then glanced to Gagnon who was standing over to one side. He gave an almost imperceptible shake of the head. It was this small gesture that again caused me to refrain from taking up the issue. In the end I merely nodded as if conceding the point.

“The experiments we are discussing are both a travesty of science and an offence against God and the Catholic Church,” Martiniere continued.

Lamy smiled, though apparently with a heavy heart. “A farce, sir, a farce,” he added.

“That may be so, sir,” I replied. “Such experiments may be against God’s wishes and those of the Holy Church, but they are not illegal.”

They responded to this statement with looks of disbelief and mutterings of protest.

“Is not murder against the law?” Martiniere demanded.

“Indeed, it is, sir, if proven.”

It was at this point, no doubt sensing reluctance on my part that he appeared to lose patience. Having looked me in the eye and apparently failing to see any sign of concession there, he leaned forward then slammed his fist down on my desk, “Monsieur de la Reynie,” he hissed, “I have requested this meeting to condemn the foul murderer Jean-Baptiste Denis and to appraise you of the situation. It is your responsibility to act decisively.”

I looked at the fist, which he swiftly withdrew then studied the man behind it. “Did you actually witness the killing, Doctor Martiniere?” I asked quietly.

He exchanged a look with his companion before replying to my question. He really is a slimy creature. “No, I did not, my lord, but the evidence in support of my accusation is irrefutable…”

“What irrefutable evidence is that, sir?”

“Firstly, my lord, as my learned colleague and I have previously explained, these blood transfers go against the teachings of both the medical profession and the Catholic church. In addition, I have spoken with the victim’s wife, who has confessed to me that she observed a third blood transfer, which took place at her house and that her husband died shortly afterwards. Is that not irrefutable proof?”

“The victim’s wife?” I said, raising my eyebrows, though masking my surprise. “Who is…?”

“Perrine, my lord. Perrine Mauroy.”

I had heard the name mentioned before, but only in passing. I glanced inquisitively to my Chief Investigator, who had suddenly dropped his gaze.

“Have you never treated a patient only to have him or her expire a short time later,” I asked.

“Yes, my lord, of course, but when I or my colleague treat a patient, we are motivated by the desire to return the sufferer to health by using tried and tested treatments. We do not gamble with patients’ lives merely to advance our own careers.”

That, of course, was debateable, but I said, “Then should I not conclude that Doctor Denis did not murder his patient, merely that he, like you and Doctor Lamy here, used a new procedure in an attempt to make the patient well again.”

“No, sir, that is not what you should conclude,” he retorted angrily. “Doctor Denis was motivated by greed and self-aggrandisement. When his strategy failed, he murdered his patient in order to hide his failure and remove the patient from public scrutiny. He killed Antoine Mauroy in cold blood!”

“And the involvement of Doctor Chernier and his young friend, monsieur Varenne?

“Guilty, also my lord. They were actively complicit in the crime.”

“And you have evidence to prove these most serious accusations, do you?”

“They were present at every stage of the experiment on Mauroy. What more proof do you need?”

“Unfortunately, more than your unsubstantiated allegations,” I replied which caused him to give me a look of sheer disbelief. “Please remember, gentlemen that you are not well-versed in the law which is a system of such complexity that it is quite beyond the intellect of the common man. Indeed, you cannot be expected to understand such legal matters and your ignorance is understandable…”

I saw the two men recoil in astonishment. It was at this point that their demeanours changed and they became more subdued. Suddenly, Martiniere was at pains to explain that, in their concern for the sick and injured and the reputation of the University of Paris medical school, they may have inadvertently caused offence, for which he begged forgiveness. He also apologised for having conveyed the impression that they were attempting to instruct me as to my duties. I thanked him for his concern and assured them both that their intervention was welcomed and that no offence had been given, which was a lie, of course. I knew they were antagonised by me, but, for the present, I had no wish to alienate them even more.

It was clear at this point that the audience was over and the two men rose from their chairs, bowed deeply and were escorted from the room by my Chief Investigator.

“What would you like me to do, my lord?” Gagnon asked on his return.

“They mentioned the victim’s wife,” I said. “I have not heard you speak of her.”

“Perrine Mauroy…”

“What do you know of her?”

“It was she who laid the charge of murder against Doctor Denis.”

“Have you questioned her?”

“Not yet, my lord.”

I gave him a hard look. For once, he managed to look shamefaced.

“An unfortunate omission on my part, my lord,” he admitted.

“Yes, it is.” I was angry. I had hoped that this matter could be dealt with quickly and quietly, but it was becoming obvious that I had to take a more active part in the investigation.

**Chapter 8**

**Henri-Martin de la Martiniére**

There was a time when I had hoped for the wholehearted support of the Lieutenant-General in my quest to have Denis and his acolytes arrested and put on trial for murder. Unfortunately, our second meeting this morning was as disappointing as the first. On two occasions now I have been confronted by this man’s moral weakness, his objections and obfuscation.

It is a known fact that the practice of blood transfer is a sacrilege that corrupts the body and the immortal soul of both the recipient and the practitioner. That Denis has been allowed to continue carrying out Satan’s work is a travesty. Worse still, it is now obvious that the Lieutenant-General is a godless man who has failed to recognise that Denis is in league with the Devil and that his experiments go against both the teachings of Galen and Hippocrates and the precepts of the Blessed Catholic Church. I have no doubt that Denis and his advocates will burn in hell for their sins.

The outcome of today’s meeting was predictable, which is why I thought it wise not to mention to the Lieutenant-General that Lamy and I already have the support of His Eminence the Archbishop of Paris. His Excellency has declared our efforts to have Denis and his devotees held to account for their wickedness, a holy endeavour.

I declare, here and now, that I will stare Denis and his followers in the eye before I destroy them!

**Chapter 9**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

“Monsieur Varenne” I continue, “to the best of your knowledge, did Antoine Mauroy’s first transfusion cause him to become ill or suffer in any way?”

Before he can answer the door at the far end of my office opens quietly and Chief Investigator Gagnon slips into the room. I nod to him, indicating that he come forward. My guest turns to see who has entered then turns back to me a fearful look on his face, which I ignore.

Pierre Gagnon is a cold and distant man, a disturbing man even, dogmatic even, but he also has a merciless sense of justice and shows no preference for rich or poor, which is why I listen to his opinion. To him, the concepts of wealth and privilege do not exist. He knows only the guilty and the innocent.

Varenne again glances over his shoulder to where Gagnon has taken up station, next to my scribe. My Chief Investigator for his part merely stares back at the young man with total indifference.

I rap a sharp knuckle on my desk. “Answer my question, Monsieur Varenne,” I say.

His head shoots round and I see him swallow nervously. “No, it did not. Just the opposite, I think.”

“The opposite?”

“Yes.” He pauses to take a breath. He looks and sounds sincere, though whether that is artifice or genuine truthfulness is not clear to me. I suspect the former. “The next time I saw Monsieur Mauroy I thought his condition had improved,” he adds.

At this point my scribe interjects. “When you speak to Monsieur de la Reynie you will address him as ‘My Lord’,” he instructs in a loud voiced.

Varenne opens his mouth to apologise, but I hold up a hand. My patience with this ignorant young man is swiftly running out. “Explain what you mean by ‘his condition’?” I demand.

He looks ill-composed, but says after a brief pause, “His madness, his insanity; he seemed a changed man, my lord.”

“And this was where?”

“Doctor Chernier and I visited Monsieur Mauroy at Lord Montmor’s apartments a day after the first blood transfer. The patient appeared to be in robust good health, my lord.”

“So, you are saying that the first blood transfer experiment did not cause his mental or physical condition to deteriorate?”

“I saw no evidence that Monsieur Mauroy had suffered any ill-effects, my lord.”

“But that first blood transfer was not the end of the matter, was it?”

He shakes his head. “No, my lord, it was not.”

Clearly, he is discomfited and his earlier swagger has gone. Now his pretty young face is filled with anguish and he twists and turns in his seat at every question. At last, it seems, he finally understands the peril he is in.

“Explain to me how your involvement continued.”

“Doctor Chernier was asked to review the experiments involving Monsieur Mauroy. Doctor Chernier is…”

“I know all about Theo Chernier,” I interrupt sharply.

Varenne falls silent with his mouth open, shocked by this new revelation. I continue to be amazed by him: does he not realise that his doctor friend has also been investigated?

“Continue!” I say.

“Doctor Denis invited Theo…Doctor Chernier, to review the patient, my lord…”

“Why Doctor Chernier?”

He rubs a hand across his face. “I think because Doctor Denis wanted a physician who was neutral, my lord,” he says finally. “He wanted someone who held no prejudice to study his revolutionary course of treatment.”

“And Doctor Chernier had also been present during Doctor Denis’ two previous blood transfer experiments,” I add.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Is that what Denis told you…that he wanted someone neutral?”

The question causes Varenne to flounder again. “Yes….No…Well, not in so many words, my lord.”

I shake my head at this incoherent reply. “And is Doctor Chernier ‘neutral’, do you think?”

“Yes, my lord, I believe he is, though he had some reservations regarding Doctor Denis’s treatment of Monsieur Mauroy.”

“What reservations?”

“He was concerned that the patient was not able to give his consent, my lord.”

“But these *reservations* were not enough for him to put a stop to the experiments...”

Now he is red-faced again. He stares at me wide-eyed, “How could he do that, my lord?” he says then looks horrified at his own outburst, but I wave a hand, urging him to continue.

“What I mean is that Doctor Denis already has a number of powerful detractors, my lord, both in France and in England…”

“Yes, he has.”

“…especially from those who trained at the Medical School of Paris. Doctor Denis graduated from Montpellier University…”

“What? You think I don’t know that!” Sometimes it is difficult to keep exasperation out of my voice. I glance to my Chief Investigator. When I see the way that he is looking at me I make an effort to compose myself. “Your friend, Doctor Chernier, is also a graduate of the University of Paris, is he not?” I say more calmly. I see him take a deep breath.

“Yes, my lord, I believe that Doctor Chernier thought that his best course of action was to ensure that the patient was treated with due care and consideration. Also, Doctor Denis has admitted that his previous blood-transfer experiments had been conducted away from public scrutiny. That was why his ‘accomplishments’ – that was Doctor Denis’s word, my lord, not mine - had not been fully recognised.”

I have heard enough from this tedious young man. I put down my pen and shuffle some papers together on my desk. “Thank you, Monsieur Varenne, you are free to go,” I say, dismissing him. At first, he looks surprised at such an abrupt ending to the interview, then quickly gets to his feet. He picks up his hat and bows to me. “Thank you, my lord,” he says. I nod then look at Gagnon. “You, I need to speak to,” I say.

**Chapter 10**

**Guillaume Varenne**

I confess that I am relieved to be discharged. As I am leaving the room, I glance at the person who had come into the Lieutenant-General’s office while I was being questioned. He is a small, thin, unsmiling man with the face of an eagle. I knew immediately that this was Pierre Gagnon, Monsieur de la Reynie’s hated Chief Investigator.

It was as I when I am walking across the inner courtyard that I hear my name being called. For a moment I am confused then I see heads twisting in my direction, which is why I halt to see who knows me. I turn around to see Monsieur Gagnon leaving the main building accompanied by an officer of the guard. I immediately have a bad feeling.

“What do you want?” I demand, with all the bristle I can muster.

Gagnon smiles, at least I think he smiles, though it is a strange expression devoid of any warmth, more a grimace. “There are questions I wish to ask you, Monsieur Varenne,” he says.

“I have been dismissed, sir, as you know. Monsieur de la Reynie has already interrogated me.”

He stares at me for a moment and I note his demeanour - the casual way he clasps his hands across his belly, the intensity of his gaze, the tilt of his head – all suggestions of outrageous self-confidence. “Yes,” he finally replies, “but there are some points of your testimony that require clarification. Will you follow me, please?”

While this exchange is taking place the officer of the guard has slipped past us and placed himself between me and the main gate. I glance over my shoulder and scowl at him, but he merely regards me with cool indifference, a hand resting casually on the hilt of his dagger. The message is clear: refusal is not an option.

“This is a waste of time, sir,” I object, but Gagnon is already walking away from me. It has not escaped my attention that he has not bothered to introduce himself.

I expect to be escorted back to Monsieur de la Reynie’s office, but am instead led to a small arched doorway off to one side. Beyond the doorway a long flight of steps descend into the bowels of the building. I immediately become more alarmed. “This is not the way, sir,” I protest, but receive no reply. Instead, I am rudely shoved forward by the officer behind me.

I am taken down four flights of stairs and then along a damp, torch-lit passage and into a small room deep underground. At one point we pass an open doorway and I am able to glance into the brightly-lit chamber beyond. There is a small furnace in one corner burning red hot. On the walls are ring bolts at different heights, all hung with chains and shackles. I see a black-capped torturer speaking quietly to a young apprentice. They are leaning over a man seated in an iron chair bolted to the floor. The torturer regards me for a moment then turns back to his work but not before I see a glint of metal in his hand. A scream rings out.

The room the Chief Investigator takes me to is a cold and empty chamber lit by a single lantern and a spill of torchlight from the corridor. The bare walls run wet with moisture. My interrogator takes his seat behind the only piece of furniture in the room - a small desk on which sits a single file - while I am ordered to stand before him. The officer of the guard remains in the doorway, leaning casually against the door frame.

“Doctor Denis wanted your friend Chernier to validate his experiments on Mauroy, is that correct?” the Chief Investigator begins without preamble.

By this time my heart is hammering in my chest, my breath coming in short, ragged bursts. In an attempt at bravado, I hold my head high and make an effort to control my voice. “Who are you, sir?” I demand.

“My name is Gagnon. I am the Chief Investigator for the city of Paris. Now answer the question.”

I straighten my back a little more. “Doctor Chernier is a man of principle,” I declare. “He would not endorse a dishonourable practice.”

“And you are a true and loyal friend,” he adds cynically, his face twisted into a sneer of cruel amusement. “So, Doctor Chernier, who, according to you had ‘reservations’ about the practice of blood transfer – which he ignored! - though you claim him to be a man of honour and principle, yet he – and you – supported a murderer!”

I shake my head. “No, sir, that is not true. Doctor Denis is not a murderer! Nor did we ‘support’ him. We were merely observers.”

“Ah, *observers*! Then you observed a murder.”

I gasp. I know now that he is the hard, cruel man I have heard about: a dangerous man - it is evident in his tone of voice, his manner, his animus. “No, sir, we did not.”

He stares back at me unsmiling, his chin thrust aggressively forward. “Did not what? Ignored his ‘reservations’, or observed a murder?”

“Doctor Chernier acted in the interests of science, and to protect the patient,” I say.

“And you?” he demands, his voice suddenly shrill, “You cannot claim to have been protecting a patient!”

“I was merely observing, sir.”

“Oh, you were observing….”

His voice drips with contempt. I know then that my every answer, my every gesture could see me condemned. I smell the mould dampness coming out of the walls. Why, I wonder, would my interrogator choose such a cheerless place to question me? Then the answer comes to me: because he also is a creature of the dark, a being of shadows and gloom. The knowledge only serves to increase my terror. I am shaking when I say, “Sir. I am not a murderer. I accompanied Doctor Chernier whenever he visited Monsieur Mauroy.”

He barks his reply: “Why?”

“Why, sir?”

“Why did you accompany him?”

A sudden scream of pain echoes down the corridor, followed by a series of racking sobs. My mouth is dry; I cannot speak for a time. “I have an interest in the natural sciences, sir,” I whisper when silence once more descends.

“And are you also impartial?”

“I try to be, sir.”

“You try to be…?”

“Yes.”

“So, you and Doctor Chernier were present when Monsieur Mauroy was murdered.”

I gape at him. I try to keep a note of pleading from my voice. “No, sir we were not! You must believe me in this…”

“So, you were *not* present when Mauroy was murdered.”

“Sir, you must believe me, we had nothing to do with his death…”

“Not ‘death’ – murder,” he snarls. “One moment he was a young man in robust good health – those are your words, not mine – the next he was dead. How do you explain that, Monsieur Varenne?”

“I cannot, sir.”

I see the blood rush into his face as his anger mounts. I see him for what he is: a man with a violent soul. “You are a liar. A LIAR!” he shouts. “And believe me, Varenne, you will soon discover that lying to me can be very, very painful…”

**Chapter 11**

**Anne Turgot**

I argued with my brother today.

This morning, I received a note from Guillaume saying that he had been ordered to the Grand Châtelet for an interview with Monsieur de la Reynie, the Lieutenant-General. He did not say why he had been summoned, though I fear it is to do with the death of Antoine Mauroy since his connection to the Blood-Doctor affair - and that of his friend Doctor Chernier - has recently become the talk of the city. The trouble is that Guillaume can be reckless at times and has a habit of speaking without thinking. Nor does he always show the correct deference to those in authority, which makes me worry for him.

Some weeks ago, my brother demanded that I cease all contact with ‘that man’ as he now refers to Guillaume, which is why, of late, I have pretended that our relationship has ended, though I pray with all my heart that it has not. Sometimes, though, in the night, I awaken in a panic, my heart beating like a drum, my mind awry.

When, by early afternoon I had not received a note from Guillaume, I sent Danielle to his house for news. She was reluctant to go against the instructions of my brother, and only took pity on me when I collapsed into tears. She returned an hour later to inform me that he had not returned home and that his father feared he had been detained. I am now beside myself with worry.

Over dinner I hoped that Thomas would have some news of Guillaume, but that was foolish of me. When I said casually that a friend had informed me that Guillaume had been detained for questioning, mother and father looked up sharply from their food, and Beatrice, my brother’s wife, threw me a look of warning. Thomas, however, merely shrugged indifferently. I had expected him to question me about how I received this information, but he merely crossed his arms and rested them on his ever-expanding stomach. “You should not concern yourself with that man,” he said, returning his attention to his plate. “Your foolish infatuation…” he raised his gaze when he said this, “is to be regretted, but thankfully, that situation has now been resolved.”

“Resolved?” I said sharply. “What do you mean?”

“Father and I have invited the Vicomte Magnoac’s son to dine with us tomorrow evening. He is a more appropriate…suitor.”

I looked across the table. Father had turned away and appeared to be looking for a servant to order more wine and mother had dropped her gaze to straighten out a napkin.

I have met Auguste Magnoac. He is an odious bore, an empty-headed popinjay full of fluster and self-importance. How could any woman be attracted to a man who boasts his calves are the finest in Paris! My brother says that he comes from a ‘good’ family, by which he means they have a title handed down over generations, but very little money. I have overheard him tell my father that such a match would advance our family in society.

“Then tomorrow I will take supper in my room,” I retorted.

My brother looked up suddenly. “You will do as you are told!” he said quietly, though I knew from experience that this was the quiet before the storm. “Your previous imprudent relationship is now ended.”

I glared at him. “Imprudent?” I cried then before he had time to reply, “You have decided, have you?” At this remark, I saw Beatrice shake her head, but I was angry. “Why?” I challenged when he did not answer.

“Because I wish it so. And because he is detained for his involvement in the Mauroy murder.”

“He was not involved!” I snapped, though it is no secret that Guillaume had become ever-more obsessed over recent months. Receiving no response, I said, “How do *you* know he is detained?”

His smile was condescending. My brother is an arrogant man. “Because I have my spies!”

“Guillaume had nothing to do with Mauroy’s murder!”

“Then why has he been questioned?” Thomas sneered then seeing I had no answer, added, “Anyway, he comes from peasant stock,” like this trumped all argument.

I laughed at this remark. “Ah, yes we are of such noble lineage, brother, it would be foolish to taint our bloodline?” Thomas has delusions of grandeur. We are a wealthy family, possibly one of the wealthiest families in Paris, but that had not always been the case. Our great-great-grandfather had built the Turgot business out of nothing, just as Guillaume’s father has done more recently. But now we have the respectability of three generations of success behind us, which he does not.

My brother finds it very convenient to forget our roots and he hates to be laughed at. Red-faced and panting, I saw twin spots of red sparkle in his cheeks when I made the retort. I could see he was furious.

“Please, Thomas,” I heard Beatrice say softly, but he ignored her.

“Soon the Varenne family will go back where they belong,” he said.

“What does that mean?”

“It means you are fortunate that your relationship with that man has ended before it was too late.”

“Too late?” I demanded. “Too late for what?”

“I have acted in your best interests.”

My best interests, or your best interests, I thought. I opened my mouth to protest, but the words vanished in my throat when I saw the look Father was giving me. My brother, I know can be both cruel and ruthless. Suddenly my heart was pounding and I was in fear for my beloved.

“What have you done?” I said, but he had already turned away.

**Chapter 12**

**Guillaume Varenne**

“I am not lying, sir,” I retort.

The Chief Investigator appears calm again. He has returned to his chair where he sits hands stretched out on the desk, fingers splayed, staring at me. After a moment he laughs; an unpleasant sound since there is no humour in him. “Describe the second blood transfer,” he says quietly.

I look at him, confused. “Sir, I’m not….” I begin, then fall back into silence.

“The second transfer,” He growls. His mood has shifted again. “Describe it to me.”

His eyes bore into me. Terrified, I need a moment to gather my thoughts, but he is not a man to wait. “Speak, you dolt!” he shouts.

“The second blood transfer occurred two days after the first,” I stammer, “four days before Christmas. At six o’clock in the evening. Theo – Doctor Chernier - and I again went to Lord Montmor’s house…”

“That was the night of December the twenty-first last year?”

“Yes, sir…”

“Tell me everything…Everything!”

“Everything, sir?” *What does ‘everything’ mean?*

His gaze is contemptuous, but he does not reply, merely stares.

I take a deep breath and cast my mind back to that cold, cold night. The dark streets were all-but deserted, I remember.

“On that occasion, Doctor Chernier and I travelled to Lord Montmor’s house by carriage since it had snowed during the day,” I begin… He waves a hand at this trivia, urging me to continue. “The snow had melted into piles the streets were thick with mud and filth. On the journey I asked Theo his thoughts regarding the practice of blood transfer because I knew he had been present when Doctor Denis had carried out blood transfers on two previous patients.”

“How did he reply?”

“He said that the situation was very simple; that Doctor Denis had embarked on a radical new type of treatment and that, in so doing, had stepped on the toes of some very powerful men. He said that the method Doctor Denis had chosen to make a name for himself was controversial…that Doctor Denis had ambitions of moving in more elevated circles…”

*It’s like a dream, this re-telling, my head so full of images my brain fit to burst.* *Theo and I were standing on the steps leading up to the main entrance when he said that. I had put a hand on his arm, causing him to stop. ‘I still find myself baffled by so much bickering about blood transfer,’ I said. ‘There is so much claim and counter claim.’*

*I remember that before we entered the building, we had had to present our invitation cards to the guards at the gates and there was a great deal of noise and confusion in the courtyard where a multitude of carriages were arriving and disgorging their passengers.*

*Assisted by servants and watched by kitchen staff, groups of men were making their way into the building while we stood like rocks set amidst a swirling river of humanity. I remember too that Theo’s first reaction when I asked my question was to sigh heavily. ‘The good doctor’s ambitions may prove his downfall,’ he said finally.*

Monsieur Gagnon now appears to be studying the surface of his table. I try to control my shaking hands.

“Theo said that the affair was not only about medicine, that it was also about politics and religion,” I say. *Surely the advancement of science trumps all other considerations, I said at the time, to which remark Theo simply shook his head. I remember too, the look of puzzlement he gave me.*

Gagnon looks up, suddenly interested. “About politics and religion? How so?”

“That claims and counter claims about therapy matter little; that there is the competition between England and France, which have a history of war and antagonism; that such conflicts are not merely confined to the battlefield, that they are also at war over medicine…”

My interrogator blinks and raises a hand, causing me to stop. “Explain,” he says.

“Britain was the first country to do blood-transfer experiments, sir, but only from animal to animal. Now Denis, or should I say France, has gone one better.”

He considers this for a moment. “Yes, what else?”

“France is Catholic and England is Protestant. That is a war of dogma and belief. There are powerful men from both nations who believe that experiments of this nature go against the wishes of God, irrespective of creed or country…”

I expect him to interrupt me again, but he has become as stone again, so I stumble on. “…And, finally, there is the question of science itself - science versus superstition – not just ‘who was first’, but should these experiments be permitted to persist.”

*I remember telling Theo that scientific endeavour should transcend both politics and the church. His response was to look curiously at me, surprised, I think, by the naivety of my remark. “Since when has science done that?” he retorted. I recall too that I shrugged because I had no answer.*

“After that, we walked into the building where we were greeted by a scene of some confusion: a noisy group of men were gathered around the foot of the stairs where one of Lord Montmor’s servants holding a leather-bound book stood ticking off names on a list before allowing anyone to proceed. When we reached the front of the queue, Theo gave our names, which were checked against the register then we were invited to continue up the staircase to the same dining room where the previous blood-transfer experiment had taken place.

“A second servant stood at the top of the stairs guiding visitors to a horseshoe of chairs that had been arranged around one end of the massive dining table. It was clear that his lordship had learnt from the chaos that had ensued during the previous experiment. Organisation and method were the order of the day on this occasion.

“Before we entered the dining room, I saw Doctor Martiniere walked into the building. Ignoring the protests from Lord Montmor’s servants, he marched up to the first floor without pause. In the dining room he strode past us with barely a glance. Theo and I took seats over to one side. I remarked that Doctor Martiniere did not look happy to be there, that his mind was set against blood transfer.’…”

Gagnon has begun writing in a notebook he keeps hidden inside his jacket. I pause in my monologue and he raises his gaze to me. “And what did Theo say?” he asks, amused, I think, by his familiarity.

“He said that there were many who had voiced opposition to Denis and his experiments…”

“Unlike your friend,”

“No, sir, Doctor Chernier also had his doubts.”

Gagnon gives a thin smile at this remark, though it is easy to see he is not convinced. “Continue,” he says.

“We took our seats and waited for the proceedings to begin, sir.”

*I remember telling Theo that his daughter would have enjoyed such a spectacle, that she would have asked many questions.*

*Athénaïs, Theo’s 13-year-old daughter, is the apple of his eye: a beautiful young girl about to become a beautiful young woman. Unfortunately, she is also capricious and strong-headed and has ambitions of becoming a physician like her father, though being female, this is impossible. Nevertheless, Athénaïs believes that nothing is unattainable for a strong and determined woman. Her mother - Theo’s wife was two years dead – had she been alive, would have reigned in her in impetuous daughter, but her father indulged her every whim.*

“The crowd was much smaller than on our previous visit, Monsieur Gagnon,” I say, “and there was a more subdued buzz of conversation in the room. As before, the room was brightly lit and a massive fire was burning in the grate and there were one or two small groups of men who stood to one side talking animatedly. Our host was not to be seen though his servants flitted amongst the assembled throng carrying trays of sweetmeats and dispensing glasses of claret…”

“What was the mood in the room?”

“The mood, sir?” The interruption wrong-foots me again. “I would say the mood in the room was one of excitement. Soon after our arrival we were engaged in heated, though good-natured conversation with a small group of physicians.”

“And Martiniere?”

“At first, he kept himself aloof, sir. He sat in silence with a stern expression. After a time, he came over to us.”

“Did you speak with him?”

“Yes, sir. He said that he was surprised to see a physician of Doctor Chernier’s reputation at such a circus.” *His voice was surprisingly high-pitched and girlish, I recall*.

Monsieur Gagnon looked up at this remark. “Ah, so he called the proceedings a ‘circus’, did he?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And how did your friend respond?”

“He said: ‘Then why are you here, sir?’”

Gagnon chuckled. “To which Doctor Martiniere replied…?”

“He replied that he was there to protect the sacred reputation of science, that men of science should stay away from the charlatan Denis.”

I look at monsieur Gagnon to gauge his reaction, but he is writing in his book. “I thought his tone insolent and self-indulgent,” I say.

He looks up, surprised I think by my boldness. “And you remained a silent observer during this rather heated interchanged, did you, Monsieur Varenne?”

“No, sir. I felt the need to intervene…”

He chuckles. “I’m sure you did.”

“I said that to attend such a gathering, yet to deny the same opportunity to others smacked of hypocrisy.”

The Chief Investigator seemed to find this remark amusing. “And how did the good doctor reply to that, Monsieur Varenne?”

“He said that he was there at the request of real men of science…”

“Real men of science? What does that mean?”

“He meant members of the Royal Academy, sir. He said that he was there to observe, so that he could speak with authority when he condemned this disgraceful show.”

“To which you said…”

“I asked him why he bothered to observe when he had already made up his mind? I was offended by his show of bad manners.”

Gagnon was now grinning. “Wonderful,” he says, clapping his hands. “And how did he respond to *that* remark?”

“I believe he was angry, sir.”

“Very angry?”

“Yes.” *If looks could kill I would have withered on the spot.* “However, at that point our conversation was interrupted when a servant asked us to take out seats.” *We separated, but I had the strong impression that I had made a mortal enemy.*

“Continue.”

“The double doors at the end of the room opened and Lord Montmor entered followed by doctors Denis and Emmerez. There was the sound of plaintive mooing from out in the corridor then a calf was led into the room by Mr Caron, the butcher and his assistant. Together, the two men again began to manhandle the animal onto the dining table, but this time the mood in the room was more serious and the audience merely looked on in silence.

“Doctor Denis then addressed the assembled throng. He began by reiterating the many advantages that would accrue from the transfusion process. Unfortunately, however, he had to speak above the grunts and groans from the butchers as they lifted the animal onto the table and the loud mooing of the calf, so much so that he eventually had to cease speaking while they carried out their work. Instead, he started unpacking his medical bag laying out the surgical instruments he would use to carry out the blood transfer.

“The animal fought and struggled and the two butchers were soon red-faced from the effort. It took a further ten minutes to subdue the beast and strap it to the table. Despite the seriousness of the event there was about the whole procedure an element of farce. Nevertheless, when the animal was finally restrained Dr Emmerez set about assembling the pipe that he had used on the previous occasion. On this occasion, however, Lord Montmor said nothing. When the two physicians indicated their readiness to proceed, he merely bowed and stepped away from the table.

“At that point, the double doors at the end of the room were again thrown open and Mauroy was brought into the room and although he was again accompanied by two ‘handlers’ as on the previous occasion, he seemed calmer and was less restive. He bowed to the audience then…”

“He bowed to the audience?” Gagnon said incredulously. “Mauroy bowed to the audience?”  
 “Yes, sir. Then he took his seat at the head of the table without urging and placed his wrists on the arms of the chair in order that they be strapped in place. By the time he was settled in his chair and fully restrained an incision had been made in the calf’s neck and blood had begun to flow. Again, first blood was splashed into a bowl then the pipe was fitted into the animal’s neck and held in place by Emmerez. Blood was pouring from the other end of the pipe.

“Denis again made an incision just below the patient’s elbow and with Mauroy looking down with some concern, he fitted the spurting pipe into the wound. Blood was pooling both around the base of the chair where Mauroy was seated and seemed to be running freely from the table and onto the floor where an ever-widening puddle was forming. All the time Denis spoke soothingly to the patient, monitoring his vital signs and asking about his state of health.”

“Did you observe what Doctor Martiniere was doing during the operation?”

“He appeared to be making copious notes into a small notebook. Sometimes he would look up and the expression on his face could best be described as hostile. The two physicians knew of his presence, I could see that from the glances they occasionally threw in his direction, but they said nothing.

“Thank you. Please continue.”

“Mauroy eventually made a choking sound and threw his head back, red-faced and sweating. ‘Are you in distress, sir?’ Doctor Denis asked, but the patient merely shook his head. Denis then pressed his fingers to Mauroy’s wrist. ‘The patient’s heart rate has increased,’ he announced. ‘How do you feel, Antoine?’ I heard him ask quietly.

Mauroy’s head was whipping from side to side, though he had the presence of mind to say, “My back…” then he suddenly vomited, which caused Denis to leap back and a gasp of horror to escape from the audience.

“‘I think that is enough, Paul,’” I heard Doctor Denis say, though he did not seem in any way concerned that his patient had swooned in his chair. With a flourish he withdrew the pipe from Mauroy’s arm and pressed a pad against the wound. Doctor Emmerez nodded and removed the pipe from the animal’s neck. It was obvious that the animal was in its death throes. Suddenly the beast started to below and struggle then it shivered and expired. The operation was at an end.”

“What about Mauroy?”

“He was untied, lifted from the chair and helped from the room.”

“Helped or carried?”

“Helped, sir. He raised a weak hand to the audience as he departed.”

“So, he was not insensible?”

“No, sir, he was not insensible, though all the colour had drained from his face.”

“And Doctor Denis?”

“Doctor Denis declared himself well satisfied with the procedure. He explained that although the patient had experienced some discomfort, the balance of his humours was being restored. What is more, he added, the patient’s mental condition was similarly improved.”

“Did Doctor Martiniere offer a comment at this point?”

“No, sir, he did not. He merely stood up and marched out of the room.”

When I had finished my description, Monsieur Gagnon sat quietly for a moment before saying, “Mauroy had to be helped from the room, you say?”

“Yes.”

“Then despite Denis’s claim to the contrary, he had sickened and his health was compromised.”

“No, sir, it was not. I saw him a number of times after that.”

“Including on the occasion of the third blood transfer…”

“The third transfer, sir? What third transfer?”

“The one that occurred at Mauroy’s house fourteen days ago.”

“No, sir, there was no third blood transfer fourteen days ago.”

“You are lying again, Monsieur Varenne. There was a third transfer that occurred at Mauroy’s house and both you and Doctor Chernier were present at the time.”

“No, sir, that is not true.” I felt myself begin to tremble again. “It is true that Doctor Chernier and I, in the company of Doctors Denis and Emmerez, visited Monsieur Mauroy at his house two weeks ago…”

“…in order to carry out a third blood transfer.”

“Yes…No….That was the original intention, yes, sir, but on that occasion, a blood transfer did not take place.”

He sighed. “Monsieur Varenne,” he began with exaggerated patience, “I have been reliably informed that there *was* a third blood transfer at which you and Doctor Chernier were present after which Mauroy died. This was the act of murder.”

I shake my head, “No, sir.”

Suddenly, he leaps up from his chair his two fists crashing down onto the desktop. I stumble back in shock and hear the guard curse and crash into the door frame. Gagnon glares at me, “Do not try to deceive me you lying cur!” he shouts. “Make no mistake, I have evidence to prove that a third blood transfer took place at Mauroy’s house…”

“No, sir,” I gasp.

“…and that you are a murderer!”

My whole body is shaking, but I must be calm, I must be clever. “That is not true,” I whisper. “We are innocent of any wrongdoing, sir. I have answered all your questions, sir. May I leave now?” I ask foolishly.

He laughs at me, giggles with amusement then is deadly serious again. “No, you may not leave, you idiot. You are not an innocent man, Varenne, you are a murderer!

**Chapter 13**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

This evening my Chief Investigator comes to see me. It has been a long day for both of us and I offer him a glass of wine, which for once he accepts. For a time, we sit in silence gazing out of the window down onto the river; a dark ribbon set between flickering lights on the riverbanks. Bells are ringing throughout the city summoning the faithful for evening prayers when I chose to speak.

“Where is the young Monsieur Varenne?” I ask.

“I have put him in a cell, my lord.”

Gagnon is a hard man, some would say cruel, and occasionally over-zealous, but he is not impetuous. “Why?”

“I think he is lying.”

“You think…?”

He looks at me. “In order to get to the truth a gentle reminder is needed as to the perils involved in trying to deceive us, my lord.”

I am tempted to smile, but my Chief Investigator is not a man much given to humour. “I am confident you will teach him the error of his ways, Pierre,” I say.

He is quiet for a moment. “He denies that a third blood transfusion ever took place.”

“I thought that had already been established.

“Doctor Martiniere says there was, Varenne says there wasn’t. The one is a respected physician, the other a foolish youth…”

“That is true,” I agree, “but there are still aspects of this case that confuse me. I take it you will question him more…more *intensively* in the morning?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“I wish to be present.” I know that my Chief Investigator will not like this…intrusion.

He blinks. Takes a moment to consider his reply. “As you wish, my lord,” he says finally.

“Do you object?” I ask. He shakes his head. “Of course not, my lord.”

We both know he is lying, but I choose not to pursue the point and we fall back into silence. In the interim I watch a procession of torches along the riverbank: a sedan chair escorted by a contingent of militia: a rich lady enroute to the theatre, perhaps, or a courtesan visiting a client. I sit patiently because I know there is something more my Chief Investigator wants to say. Eventually, he speaks. “There is another matter that I find… confusing, my lord.”

“Yes?”

“Mauroy was buried the day after he died…”

“Is that so unusual?" I ask, to which Gagnon shrugs. “Where was he buried?”

“The church of the Holy Innocents. His body was placed in a crypt and a priest conducted a service…”

That is interesting. At Holy Innocents the poor are normally cast into an open grave and their bodies left to rot; only the rich, or the well-connected, get special treatment.

“I was not aware that Monsieur Mauroy was a man of means,” I say.

“He was not, my lord.”

“Then who paid?”

“I don’t know.” He has the good grace to look discomfited at this admission, as he should.

“Then I suggest you find out,” I say peevishly.

“Yes, my lord.”

For some reason, I am reminded of an incident that occurred when I was President of the Court of Bordeaux. I was standing at the edge of a grave-pit, where a robbery victim had been dumped unceremoniously, his body draped only in a shroud. Across from me, a young woman stood weeping. “I will find and punish the man who murdered your brother, mademoiselle,” I promised. When, a month later, after the robber had been identified and executed, she brought an apple cake to my office. It was a small gesture of gratitude, but even now it remains one of my fondest memories.

“Was Mauroy’s body examined before burial?” I ask.

“Examined, my lord?”

“By a doctor; to determine the cause of death.”

“Not to my knowledge, my lord.”

I look at him. “Pierre,” I say, “this case contains too many unanswered questions.” My voice carries a note of reprimand. “You need to dig deeper…”

He nods in acknowledgement. “I shall arrange for the body to be inspected, my lord. Perhaps one of our learned physicians can tell us how he died.”

We both know that is unlikely. Most doctors of my acquaintance have scant understanding of the living, even less of the dead.

“Good. And I want you to find out who paid, Pierre.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Keep me informed,” I say, dismissing him.

After Gagnon leaves, I return to the report he has so far compiled. I still think that Varenne is a devious young man, but I am not yet convinced he is a murderer. The problem is that if he is telling the truth then someone else is lying.

The Varenne family business is located in the commercial district of the city, between the Place de Greve and the Quai Saint Paul. It operates out of a large and impressive building consisting of a shop, some offices and warehouse on the ground floor with the Varenne’ private residence above. The family is reputedly wealthy and well-respected, though some rumours have surfaced recently suggesting that the establishment is in trouble.

The door to my office creaks ajar, moved no doubt by a draft of freezing air from the courtyard below. In the corridor someone walks past carrying a torch, a flicker of flame reflecting off the doorframe. A face appears in the doorway. “What?” I shout. There is a look of shock followed by a stuttered apology: the night-watchman. “I am sorry, my lord. I thought the building was empty.”

“I am at work!” I bellow and he shuts the door quietly. I return to my task.

Old man Varenne, I am informed, had started the business twenty years ago. His father had been a waterman, conveying passengers across the river, but the son was made of more ambitious stuff. His lucky break occurred when he was offered the opportunity to provision a merchant vessel that had been let down by its supplier. He had ferried tools and ropes to the ship, rowing them out to the vessel himself, working day and night. The story goes that he did not sleep for three days in order to complete the order. He had then used his profit to buy candles, and had begun supplying ships in the docks. From candles he had moved into oil and soap, then into tools - axes, hammers, chisels, and spikes – until now, a score of years later, the company he started with nothing is both vast and powerful.

Our young prisoner, it seems, comes from enterprising stock. He is also described as highly intelligent by those who know him, which I find surprising since I consider him merely a conceited, rather stupid young man. I do not need to be reminded that better men than him have been involved in murder…

**Chapter 14**

**Guillaume Varenne**

I tried to put on a bold face, but from the moment I was detained I was in fear for my life. For two hours I stood shivering in terror as the Chief Investigator asked his questions, his voice ever-frightening barely above a whisper: the same two interrogations over and over again: what was my involvement in the murder of Antoine Mauroy? How had I participated in the third and fatal blood transfer? The first accusation I denied; the second I refuted.

Ten times, a hundred times, I denied all knowledge of the indictments of which I was accused. In the end, the Chief Investigator pointed a warning finger at me. “You are lying to me, Varenne.” And when I protested my innocence for the thousandth time he merely scowled and shook his head. “You need a reminder, my young friend, as to the perils of trying to deceive authority,” he said.

After that a second officer-of-the-guard was summoned and I was put in ankle chains and bundled out of his presence; hustled, clanking, along dimly lit corridors, marched up and down stairs scalloped by centuries of footfalls and finally cast into a dank and dismal cell. “I’ve done nothing wrong!” I shouted before the iron door clanged shut and the bolts slid in place, but no one answered.

My gaol cell is four paces long and two paces wide. A freezing stone room with an iron door. I know its dimensions because in my misery I have stepped them out, hour after shivering hour.

Along one wall is a stone shelf covered by a foul, lice-ridden mattress. This is my bed. Next to the door, a stinking wooden bucket lined with ice – my toilet. To disturb the gloom there is one tiny, barred window high up on the wall. The window is too high to reach, but it gives a glimpse of grey sky and occasionally a scudding cloud; a reminder that somewhere beyond these walls normal life goes on.

Eventually, night descends and I am in total darkness. The cell is an icebox. The chill coming off the stones has reached into the marrow of my bones. Shivering and exhausted I sit on the bed, clasping my knees for warmth. Sleep won’t come and I dread what the morning may bring. I think about my parents, and I think about Anne whom I have not heard from or spoken to for a month.

Four weeks ago, I invited Anne, her brother and his wife, Beatrice, to the theatre. This was to be my peace offering to Thomas, who had made his dislike of me obvious from the outset. Perhaps, I thought, we could become friends if we spent time together away from the office. That, of course, was a futile hope…

On the day of the performance, we left Paris at three in the afternoon for the chateau where the play was to be performed ‘in secret’ since it had been banned in the city because it ridiculed the city fathers. The venue was outside the city limits, and I had hired a carriage for the journey.

The atmosphere in the carriage was not the best. Anne was at pains to be talkative and full of joy and feigned excitement, but her brother remained sullen and distant. He had barely grunted when I first greeted him. Thomas’s wife, Beatrice, pretended not to notice the cool atmosphere and made an effort to keep up a conversation with Anne. The two women prattled away during the journey, but for most of the time Thomas kept his face turned away looking out of the window seemingly fascinated by the countryside. I tried to be good humoured and engage him in conversation, but my attempts were met with monosyllabic replies so in the end I sat back and we completed the journey in silence.

I want to marry Anne, but before I can ask for her hand, I have to gain the consent of her father (and more importantly, her brother), which was why I had organised the outing: during the performance, I would build bridges, the next day I would put the question.

We arrived at the chateau, stepped from the carriage and were immediately surrounded by a busy throng of theatregoers. Thomas looked around, waved to someone in the crowd and walked away leaving the three of us alone.

A raised stage had been erected in the garden beneath a billowing canopy and set against a backdrop of tall elm trees. In front of it were rows of chairs arranged in a semi-circle. I escorted Anne and Beatrice to our seats, got them settled then looked around for Thomas hoping for a chance to speak with him, but he was nowhere to be seen. The play had already begun when he made his reappearance. Anne, I saw, threw her brother a sharp look, which went unheeded.

My plan was disrupted when, at the end of the first act, Thomas said that he wished to speak with me in private. I saw Anne give him a pleading look, which he again ignored, so I anticipated a less than agreeable conversation. We stepped away from the crowd, him marching in front, me following in his wake, around the side of the house to a quiet courtyard outside the stables where he turned and glared at me. He got to the point immediately.

“Monsieur Varenne,” he began, “your father owes my family a great deal of money. I require to know when the debt will be paid.”

This was not the conversation I was expecting. Tonight, I had hoped there would be no talk of business, but clearly Thomas had other ideas.

“That question would be best directed to my father, sir,” I replied evasively.

He had clearly anticipated that answer. “Your father is not here. I have sent him a number of messages, but he has not replied and as you seem to consider yourself in some kind of relationship with my sister, I am asking you.”

*Some kind of relationship*, I thought. He knew we were both devoted to each other. Anne had told me that she had spoken with him about me many times.

“I do not know, sir. The moment the *Jonkeer* returns.”

He looked irritated at that response. “And if the ship does not return?” It was spoken not as a query, but as a demand.

“Your family and mine are in business together, Thomas,” I answered, avoiding the question. “Both our houses are involved.”  
 His face darkened immediately. “No, sir, we are not in ‘business together’, as you describe it. Your father has taken out a loan with my company in order to finance a most speculative venture. That loan is about to fall due. It is my understanding that your father does not have the money to repay the debt, despite your foolish words…”

I stepped a little closer. My anger was growing by leaps and bounds at such calculated rudeness. “I urge you to be cautious with your choice of language, sir,” I warned.

He looked shocked by the vehemence of my reply and even took a step backwards. For a moment he was uncertain what to say then his arrogance returned. “Silence!” he shouted. “Do not interrupt me when I am speaking. You are involving yourself in matters beyond your knowledge and understanding.”

I gasped with outrage. His words could not go unchallenged. I recall clenching my fists just as Anne suddenly appeared around the corner of the building. “Thomas…” she said.

“Go back to your seat, NOW,” he shouted. She stood uncertainly; looked first at her brother, then at me, then back to her brother again. Beatrice arrived at her elbow, tugged Anne on the sleeve. “This is not our affair, Anne,” I heard her say quietly.

“When are you intending to pay the money you owe?” Thomas repeated raising his voice when the two women had departed.

“As you know, the *Jonkeer* is overdue. As soon as the ship docks, we will sell its cargo and repay our debt to you.”

“And if the ship is lost?”

This was my fear. My father had invested foolishly, overextended the family finances, gone into a risky joint-venture with the Turgots and had placed our future in jeopardy. If the ship returned fully laden then the profit would be enormous for both houses. If it did not return, we alone would face bankruptcy.

The last news we had received was that the ship had arrived safely in the New World and had been about to leave Virginia when the coast had been struck by a violent hurricane. The hurricane had made landfall just north of Jamestown and had lasted 24 hours bringing with it – if the stories were true - violent winds, heavy rainfall and a storm surge that destroyed over 10 000 houses, numerous ships and the colonists’ tobacco and corn crops. According to the latest information we had, rain had fallen solidly for 10 days after the storm. Whether the *Jonkeer* was a casualty of this disaster we did not know and reports were mixed. One account maintained that the ship was safe as it had left port five days before the hurricane struck and had sought safe harbour further up the coast, another that it had been destroyed at its anchorage. Even if the ship was still afloat it could be damaged or holed, possibly fatally, or on its way back to France. My father, I knew, had already been approached by his creditors anticipating a catastrophe. These he had been able to forestall, but the vultures were circling.

“If payment is not made in thirty days from today, I will call in our loan,” Thomas said.

I was mortified. Such an action would mean ruin. “You cannot be serious,” I replied.

“Yes, I am very serious. Please convey that message to your father. And as for your past relationship with my sister,” – *past relationship*, I thought, what does that mean? – “it will have no influence on this matter. Business is business,” he concluded.

If he did as threatened, we would be destroyed, as I suspected he knew. That was when it struck me: this had been his plan all along: force my father’s company into bankruptcy then snap it up. Not only would this addition to the Turgot’s vast empire greatly enhance business, it would also remove a potential rival. “You cannot do that,” I said.

He smiled, a cruel twisting of the lips. “Not only can I do it, but I will also do it,” he said. “Of that you can be certain.”

For the Turgot family the loss of one ship was not a disaster, for my family it was a death sentence. I silently cursed my father. “We may need a little more time,” I said, which I knew was a foolish thing to say. My father’s greed was threatening to bring catastrophe down on the family.

“You have had time, more than enough time and we refuse to put off the inevitable. The ship is lost so why delay. Can you pay what you owe?”

I made no answer, which was an answer in itself.

“I thought not. One month. Not a day longer, then we foreclose.”

“You are being unreasonable,” I said.

Again, the same cruel look. “No, it is you who are being unreasonable. Did you actually believe that a waterman could rise to become a merchant? Breeding will out.”

There it was: his conceit; his self-importance. This was not about business, it was about putting in his place an upstart, a man who had risen above his proper station.

“Then this is not about business,” I said. “You wish to destroy my family.”

Thomas laughed. “Did you really think that you would be allowed to rise out of the gutter and take your place in respectable society? Let this be a lesson to you.”

At this final insult my anger was such that I stepped forward intending to strike him down. I saw his eyes widen with fear. He started to raise his hands to protect himself at the very moment that Anne chose to reappear. “Guillaume!” she said, this time stepping forward. I held back the blow and Thomas moved swiftly to put his sister between us. “Come, Anne, we are leaving,” he said.

She looked at me. “Guillaume…?” she implored, but there was nothing I could say. I was outmanoeuvred. Her brother recognised his victory, took her firmly by the arm. “We are leaving,” he said.

“But Thomas, the play is not yet finished,” she pleaded.

“We are leaving!” he replied harshly.

“We do not have a carriage.” She tried to pull away from him. “I shall see the end of the play with Guillaume,” she said.

He wrenched her around and I stepped forward and took hold of his arm. His wife who had also reappeared looked at us in alarm. “Thomas,” she said quietly.

Thomas and I looked at each other then he dropped his gaze to stare at my hand on his arm. After a moment I let him go. His wife continued to look imploringly at him, but he was resolute. “We are leaving, Beatrice,” he said.

This was terrible, but there was nothing I could do, except, perhaps, be the greater man. “Take my carriage, sir, I have no wish to inconvenience the ladies,” I replied. What else could I do?

I could see he was about to refuse, but his wife spoke out first. “That is very kind of you, Guillaume,” she said. “Thank you. But are you not returning with us?”

I turned and bowed to her. “I am sorry, but no, I think it best if I do not,” I said, to which comment she nodded in acknowledgement. “Come, Thomas,” she said.

Anne was sobbing. “But how will you get home, Guillaume?” she cried out.

“I shall find a way,” I said.

She looked at her brother, shrugged off his arm. “I shall never forgive you for this,” she hissed and walked away. I could see that the vehemence in her words had shocked him. The last I saw of her she was in tears staggering towards the carriage.

“I will speak with you tomorrow, Anne,” I called out, a remark which caused Thomas to turn and glare at me with contempt. “You are no longer welcome at our house monsieur Varenne,” he said, then turned his back on me.

Of course, the play was spoiled and I could not retake my seat. Distressed, I sat in the garden until the grounds began to empty and the noises of horses and livery and bright chatter began to fade. Eventually, I returned to the stables this time to try to hire a horse. The ostler was not helpful but he eventually agreed to rent me a nag at an exorbitant price after I promised to return it to a stable in the city. Then it began to rain. I eventually got home drenched to the skin and covered in mud, my fine clothes ruined…

I spend a sleepless night in my cell shivering with cold, my brain wracked by nightmares. At times I pace the cell, stumbling from wall to wall in the darkness, fearful for my sanity, forced to listen to a cacophony of thuds and screams throughout the darkness. Just before dawn the building finally falls silent. At midmorning, I am brought a stale crust of bread and a jug of water to drink.

At midday the gaoler comes to collect me. “Where are you taking me?” I ask, but get no answer. In silence I am led back along corridors until I am delivered eventually to the one place I only glimpsed, but most clearly remember: the torture chamber.

**Chapter 15**

**Doctor Theo Chernier**

I was at work in my surgery when I was ordered to present myself at the Lieutenant-General’s office at 10 o’clock. I confess I was not surprised given that yesterday my young friend, Guillaume, was detained at the Grand Châtelet. On top of that, I have known for some time that my name has been talked about in connection with the death of Antoine Mauroy.

At the time the message was delivered, I was lancing a large boil on the rump of Madame Bisset, a corpulent neighbour who has an over-fondness for sweetmeats. She was bent forward over my examining table her skirts pushed up exposing her massive alabaster buttocks and dimpled thighs when a panicked Athénaïs rushed into my surgery to inform me that an officer of the Swiss Guard was at the door bearing a summons from Nicolas de la Reynie. Halted by the sight that greeted her I waved her away. “Tell our visitor that I will be with him shortly,” I said, trying to sound nonchalant. When I looked back to my patient, she was staring at me over her shoulder. I knew immediately that the news would be all around the district before lunchtime. I showed her the knife. “Be brave, Madame,” I said before she began to shriek.

Needless to say, Athénaïs, who knew of Guillaume’s detention, was greatly concerned, but I told her not to worry. I said that a misunderstanding had probably occurred, though the truth was I feared for both our freedoms. That was why, before departing for my appointment, I sent a note to Hugo Varenne asking him to look after Athénaïs, should I not return. That was the measure of my dread. I am innocent of any involvement in the death of Antoine Mauroy, but when dealing with those in authority when has innocence provided any protection?

When I am escorted into the Lieutenant-General’s office, Monsieur de la Reynie has his back to me and is standing at the open window his hands on the sill gazing down towards the river. After I am announced he turns and beckons me over. This warm friendly welcome is not what I expected: Monsieur de la Reyne and I have met three times, I think, over the last few years and I have always found him cold and aloof, which is not surprising since he moves amongst the rich and the privileged. We are certainly not close; indeed, we are hardly even acquaintances.

“Theo, look,” he says when I am standing awkwardly next to him, "can you see that fisherman?” he is pointing to a man with a blanket around his shoulders, standing on the far riverbank, preparing to cast his fishing line into the water. “He has just caught a massive eel. A tasty meal, would you not agree?”

I am in time to see the man’s rod whip through the air before he settles himself onto a small creel that serves as his seat. I notice too that upriver a dark brown cloud is pouring from a tannery and spreading out into the current. Not only that, but half a million chamber pots are emptied into the Seine each day.

“I prefer to eat fish caught far out at sea, my lord,” I answer.

He grins showing almost a full set of teeth. There is no doubt he understands the substance of my comment. “An excellent reply, sir,” he says. He ushers me to a chair that has been placed in the centre of the room then sits at his desk.

That is when I notice the dark lines beneath his eyes. He looks exhausted despite the youthful vigour of his movements. Behind me, a door opens and we are joined by his scribe. At his writing table he immediately begins sharpening a quill, which he then holds expectantly above a page. There is about his manner, I perceive, the expectation of a drama about to begin. A moment later a third man enters quietly; a thin, round-shouldered, sullen-looking individual dressed all in black. The new arrival looks at me for a moment then goes to stand in the shadows against a wall. My heart starts to beat faster. Although I had never met this person before I know who he is: Pierre Gagnon, the feared Chief Investigator.

When everyone is settled the Lieutenant-General gets down to business. “Do you know why you are here, Theo?” he asks.

I again note the use of my first name, but I am in no way mollified by this friendly tone.

“I suspect you wish to question me about the death of Antoine Mauroy, my lord,” I answer.

“Not ‘death’, murder,” he corrects me.

I sense that he I am being tested, to see how I react. I know, of course, of the accusation laid against Jean Denis, indeed, the whole city knows, but not about the evidence put against him. “Why is his death deemed murder, sir?” I ask.

“Antoine Mauroy died after receiving a blood transfer.”

I take a breath. “My lord, some of my patients have died after I treated them. Unfortunately, the study of medicine is not a perfect science. Are all such deaths at the hands of physicians now to be considered murder?”

I see his lips tighten with annoyance. “Well, let me be more specific then: Antoine Mauroy died shortly after he had received a third blood transfer, a method of treatment decried as a dangerous evil by the University of Paris, and a blasphemy by the Church, but one which your friend Doctor Denis persisted with despite the objections of his more learned colleagues. In other words, he wantonly and knowingly placed his patient in mortal jeopardy and caused him to die.” He pauses. “That, Theo, is murder,” he says.

“You say he placed his patient in mortal jeopardy after a third blood transfer, my lord?”

I think my question confuses him because he studies me for a moment before answering. “Yes. What of it?”

“Then why have I been summoned?”

He frowns, his eyebrows coming together, and he speaks more sternly. “You were complicit!”

“Complicit? How, my lord?”

“You were present at each blood transfer: the first, the second and the third.”

“No, my lord, I was not.”

He smiles, though there is no humour in his expression. “Doctor Chernier, do not test my patience,” he says softly.

I note that I am now ‘Doctor Chernier’. Our close friendship, it seems, was very short-lived. “I was neither witness to, nor involved in, a third blood transfer, my lord,” I reply.

“I was told you participated in the…treatment of Antoine Mauroy.”

“I did not *participate* in any of Doctor Denis’s experiments, my lord, nor, I must add, is Doctor Denis my friend, I only observed. I observed Doctor Denis’s first and second blood transfers involving Monsieur Mauroy and I observed the patient’s recovery. I did not observe, nor was I party to, a third blood transfer.”

“That is not what I have been told.”

“Then, with respect, my lord, you have been misinformed.”

In the ensuing silence the only noise is the sound of quill against paper. The Lieutenant-General stares at me. My remark, I realise, has released a burgeoning anger.

“The third blood transfer occurred at Mauroy’s house ten or more days ago,” he says more sharply. “Do you deny visiting Mauroy’s house?”

“No, sir, I do not deny it. I visited Monsieur Mauroy in the company of Doctors Denis and Emmerez, and my friend Guillaume Varenne…”

“That was the day before Mauroy died.”

“Yes, it was, my lord, but, as I have said, on that visit no blood transfer occurred.”

I see the Lieutenant-General’s face change yet again. He is confused and quickly becoming hostile. “Do not attempt to trick me with devious evasions, Doctor Chernier,” he growls.

I shake my head. “No, my lord. What I am saying is that no third blood transfer occurred at Monsieur Mauroy’s house on the day before he died. Perhaps your informant was… misinformed.”

I expect an outburst, but he merely eyes me intently for a moment. Then he looks over my shoulder, a quizzical expression on his face. I know he is looking to his Chief Investigator, though no words are exchanges, before returning his attention to me, Eventually, he says quite calmly, “You have witnessed Doctor Denis conduct blood transfers on two previous patients, have you not?”

I am surprised that he is aware of Denis’s earlier patients, but then I reproach myself for such foolishness: this man knows everything. “Yes, my lord, I have.”

“Tell me,” he says.

“Tell you what, my lord?”

“Tell me about these earlier experiments. I know that Doctor Denis has transfused blood into three men. The first two survived, his third –Mauroy - did not. Why would two patients survive and one succumb? The question is rhetorical. “The answer, Doctor Chernier, is obvious is it not? Mauroy was murdered.”

I choose not to point out the illogicality of such a remark - at least not directly. “It is correct that Monsieur Mauroy was the subject of two blood transfers. It is also true that he later died. What is not certain is whether these two events are connected. Am I also to be accused of murder, my lord?”

This time the Lieutenant-General’s grin is one of genuine pleasure. “You would not be accused of murder, Theo: complicity to murder would be a more accurate charge.”

He stares at me, gauging my response. I stare back at him. Murder or connivance to murder, the punishment is the same: death.

“I have known Jean Denis for over a year,” I begin. “We met at a lecture at the University of Paris. He had recently moved to the capital from Montpellier where he had completed his medical training and was hoping to make a career for himself here…”

“…And was faced with strong opposition, was he not?”

“Yes. Some of my colleagues tend to condemn out of hand those who have been trained in the provinces, but I do not share their prejudice. However, I did initially regard Doctor Denis with some reservation given his antagonism towards some of my colleagues, but over the months my opinion of him has changed.”

“Are you telling me that you support him?” He sounds incredulous.

“He neither wants nor needs my support, my lord.” I answer. “However, I confess that having followed his work over the months I now believe him to be an outstanding physician.”

For a long time, the Lieutenant-General stares at me, unblinking. I stare back, my hands clasped to stop them from shaking. I am afraid to drop my eyes lest he see this as a sign of deceitfulness.

“You confuse me, doctor,” he says finally.

“I don’t under…”

“Did you ever speak to him about this…antagonism?”

“Yes, once, my lord.”

“And?” he says impatiently.

“I remember his reply very clearly. ‘My dear, Doctor Chernier,’ he replied, ‘your colleagues have denounced me even before I have lifted a scalpel. In the face of such resentment, I am angry. I have studied hard and long to achieve my qualification, but it appears that my diligence is of no consequence. I have already been tried and found guilty in the court of public opinion …’”

“Is that true, do you think?”

“Yes…to some extent, my lord. Unfortunately, that is so.”

He considers this statement for a moment, then a small incline of the head tells me to go on.

“During our conversations I came to value his opinions and on numerous occasions, he showed himself to be a thoughtful and learned physician. Naturally, we would discuss medical matters from time to time, which is how I came to know of his plans to conduct blood transfer experiments as a way of curing sickness.”

“Clearly, a most dangerous decision.”

“No, my lord. Blood transfer experiments involving animals have been going on for some time, both here and in England. Transfusing blood into a man is merely a logical progression. Eventually, he identified a seriously-sick patient – a young boy - for whom conventional medicine had failed and asked me to observe the treatment.”

“And you agreed.”

“I agreed on one condition, my lord: that if I deemed the patient appeared to be in danger he must stop immediately on my command.”

“And he agreed to this condition?”

“He did, my lord.”

He begins to mouth a question, then thinks better of it. “Please continue.”

“The following day the three of us – Doctor Denis, Doctor Emmerez and myself – met just before dawn near the university and rode eastwards out of the city to a small hamlet an hour away…”

I pause to gather my thoughts. The Lieutenant-General is sitting back in his chair, arms-folded, staring intently at me. The only noise in the room is the sound of the scribe’s quill as he records my words. My mouth is dry, but I decide not to ask for water since that could hint at weakness. After a moment, I pick up the story…

“We arrived at the patient’s house at eight o’clock in the morning while the boy was still abed and before he had chance to stir up the heat in his blood. His mother, however, was already preparing for our arrival. A lamb was tethered outside the house.

“The boy was roused and brought to the kitchen where I examined him. There were swellings along his neck and beneath his arms. Doctor Denis believed he was suffering from scrofula. I concurred with this diagnosis.

“After my examination, Doctor Denis spoke to the boy explaining the treatment he was to receive. It was obvious to me that the patient’s state of health was poor. His face was pale, and the constant fevers he had suffered had taken their toll and he appeared both tired and listless. His arm when I examined it was blue with bruising in the crook of his elbow where he had been bled a score of times and there were further red marks on both arms where leeches had been applied.

“When he saw Denis lay out his scalpel, he physically recoiled, but then Denis took the time to calm his fears, explaining that this new treatment where he would *receive* blood would alleviate his illness. ‘It is the Lamb of God, as described in the Holy Scriptures,’ he added. Eventually, the boy became still, appeared calmed by the biblical reference and eventually nodded his acquiescence. His mother, meanwhile, said nothing and stood wringing her hands in the background.

“While I watched and took notes, Doctor Emmerez tied a tourniquet around the boy’s arm then bled three ounces of blood from him. After that, a butcher brought in a young lamb, held it firmly in place while Doctor Denis cut into its carotid artery and inserted a pipe which was used to relay blood into the patient’s arm. The transfer of blood went without hitch, the lamb expiring as the blood flowed from the cut in its neck. The boy, miraculously, seemed improved after the treatment, though he complained of ‘heat’ flooding into the arm in which the blood had been transfused.

Doctor Denis explained that the heat was a symptom that the imbalance in his humours was being corrected, which again seemed to settle the youth. However, in the twenty-four hours following this treatment, the patient’s condition failed to improve and his fevers continued unabated, which meant that the blood transfer was less effective than Doctor Denis had hoped. We returned to the boy’s house on two more occasions over the following week. After the third blood transfer, even Doctor Denis was forced to confess that his treatment had failed to achieve the desired results..."

“What was Denis’ explanation for this failure to you?” de la Reynie asks.

“He said that the young man was too far gone with his illness, that the imbalance of his humours was too severe, and could not be rectified, my lord.”

“Did you agree?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Simply put, the blood transfusions had not worked.”

“That is correct, my lord.”

“Was the boy’s health impaired by these treatments?”

“No, it was not. He is still alive today, though his original condition is not improved.”

“There was another patient, was there not, after this young man and before Mauroy?”

“Yes, my lord. Doctor Denis repeated the treatment this time with the butcher who had supplied the animals that were used in the blood transfers to the boy.”

“You mean, the man who provided the lambs which were bled to ‘treat’ the boy then became the second recipient?” He again sounded incredulous.

“Yes. On this second patient he again transfused lamb’s blood…”

“…into the arm of the man who owned the animal?”

“Yes.”

“Who paid for all these animals?”

“Doctor Denis.”

“And what happened to them?”

“In the case of the boy, his mother was allowed to keep the animals as recompense for her trouble. In the case of the butcher, the butcher kept it.”

The Lieutenant-General chuckles and shakes his head. “Incredible! Please continue.”

“After Monsieur Chevrolet – the butcher - had witnessed the boy’s first blood transfer he had challenged Denis to do the same to him, but Doctor Denis refused.”

“Why?”

“Because Monsieur Chevrolet was in good health. However, after the boy’s treatment had finally ended, the conversation resumed and Doctor Denis reappraised the situation.”

“And the butcher was eager, was he?”

“At first, yes, later he became reluctant.”

“And Doctor Denis?”

“He needed to continue with his research and the two men eventually came to an arrangement.”

“What kind of arrangement?”

“Monsieur Chevrolet was paid five livres to compensate him for any discomfort he might suffer and he was allowed to keep the sacrificial lamb…”

“The butcher was paid *and* he kept the animal, which he later sold a second time,” de la Reynie said dryly. “Normally, it is the doctor who makes a fortune. He is a lucky man indeed, this butcher. And you were party to all this?”

He shoots me a short, hard look.

“No, sir, I was not party to the negotiations. The decision was made during private conversations between Doctor Denis and Monsieur Chevrolet. Doctor Denis simply informed me one day that he was going to carry out a second blood transfer. I only learned the name of the patient as we rode out of the city.”

“So, he deceived you!”

“No, sir, he did not!” I spoke out strongly because the accusation distressed me. “I knew that the patient was a man in good health, but not his name until we were leaving the stables.” From the way the Lieutenant-General looks at me I have a sense that I am entering dangerous territory. He flaps a hand at me. ‘Continue,’ he says.

“The transfer took place in the meat shed behind the butcher’s shop. We were surrounded by the carcasses of sheep, cows and goats, all of which were hung on hooks around a central blood-stained table where Monsieur Chevrolet did his cutting…”

“Were you happy with this location?”

“Not at first. The smell of death was everywhere and the walls, floor and yard were splashed with blood, but this was the setting chosen by the patient. The only objection came from Chevrolet’s wife who complained throughout while preparations were being made. ‘I hope he is not being paid for this,’ she said, to which he answered, ‘Of course not my love, I act purely in the interests of science.’ It was only later that I would understand the reason for her unease.

De la Reynie claps his hands and laughs, says, almost to himself, ‘Stranger and stranger!’

“The blood transfer itself went off without a hitch,” I say, “but it later becomes evident that Monsieur Chevrolet has an over-fondness for ale. He spent all the money he was given at a local tavern, ended up in a drunken stupor and had to be helped home by his wife. This was the reason for her opposition to the experiment: not the procedure itself, but the fact that her husband was a drunkard.”

The Lieutenant-General is grinning. I see him shake his head and cast a glance over my shoulder.

“When Monsieur Chevrolet requested to be treated a second time, Doctor Denis refused.”

“Why did he refuse?”

“Because the butcher was a drunkard, my lord. And, again, the butcher’s health was not impaired, sir,” I respond.

“Doctor Chernier,” he says, after a moment’s thought, “Let us move on to Mauroy’s third blood transfer; the one which occurred at his house...”

I take a deep breath. “My lord, with respect, as I have said repeatedly, there was no third blood transfer….” The look the Lieutenant-General gives me is redolent with disbelief. “My lord, if you do not believe me then ask Perrine Mauroy, the deceased’s wife. She was present throughout the visit!”

“I don’t need to.”

I confess I was surprised. “You don’t need to, my lord? But she will confirm that there was no third blood transfer.”

“Doctor Chernier,” he says nastily, “Who do you think laid the charge of murder against Doctor Denis…”

**Chapter 16**

**Pierre Gagnon**

I watch with frustration as my lord questions a murderer because I witness not an interrogation but a gentlemanly conversation. Of course, it is no surprise to me that Chernier continues to insist that he is an innocent party, but I am not deceived by his falsehoods and pretend-virtue. What outrages me the most is that these conspirators persist with their lies and obfuscations. I have no doubt that the truth will out when they are put to the question.

I cast my mind back to when I questioned Varenne in the dungeon room. When I accused him of lying, he began shaking like a leaf. My first instinct was to strike him down as a weakling until I saw that in his panic, he was unable to speak. Terror, I have learnt over the years, is a powerful tool and I am its master craftsman.

“Do you deny, Varenne,” I said quietly, “that prior to your visit to Mauroy’s house, the visit where you claim no blood transfer took place, you and Doctor Chernier, had visited the victim on a number of occasions?”

“I have already acknowledged that, sir,” he stuttered.

“So, you admit that you were involved in this affair from the outset …”

“I am not sure as to your meaning, sir?” He looked confused though I suspected subterfuge since it is clear to me that he is something of a skilled performer.

“My meaning is that you are party to the murder of Antoine Mauroy.” I saw the colour drain from his face as his eyebrows shot up. “You look fearful, monsieur Varenne. Surely, only the guilty should show fear...”

“Please, sir…,” he stammered, but I cut him short. I did not know what he was about to beg for, nor did I care. “Did Mauroy’s health decline while at the Montmor residence?” I asked.

There was a pause as he decided which lie to repeat. Eventually, he said, “No, sir, it did not. He grew stronger by the day.”

With that one remark he condemned himself. “Ah, so you admit that Mauroy was in good health before he died.”

I watched a look of horror spread across his face when he realised his mistake. He made as if to speak, but I waved a hand at him and saw his head slump forward onto his chest. I was not surprised. He is a poor deceiver.

“Tell me about your visits to see Mauroy,” I instructed.

He hesitates for a moment. I watched him breathe, observed the rapid rise and fall of his chest as he contemplated a response. “The first time Doctor Chernier and I visited Monsieur Mauroy was the day after the first blood transfusion,” he said, but so quietly I could hardly hear him. “Speak up!” I ordered.

He lifted his head, dared, for a moment, to look me in the face then dropped his eyes again. A glimpse of backbone, I think.

“We arrived just after six in the evening and were greeted by a doorman who escorted us into a study where Doctor Denis and Lord Montmor were waiting for us. They were reclining legs outstretched on couches on either side of a roaring fire. They were drinking wine. Doctor Chernier and I remained standing in the centre of the room, despite an invitation to sit. Doctor Chernier asked to see the patient. Lord Montmor replied that Mauroy was doing well. ‘I wish to see the patient myself, my lord,’ my friend said. Doctor Denis sighed and exchanged a look with his patron before making a show of getting slowly to his feet and brushing down his breeches. ‘Clearly, you are intent on seeing our charge without delay, sir,’ he muttered.”

“‘That is why we are here, sir,’ Theo answered, sharply.

“He spoke *sharply*, you say?” I interrupted. “But you said they were friends!”

“No, sir, I never said they were friends…”

I was tempted to pursue the point but, instead, gave *him* a sharp look. “Carry on,” I said.

“After that we were conducted to a bedroom in the servants’ quarters at the back of the house. When our small procession finally halted, Denis produced a key which he used to unfasten the door. Doctor Chernier asked why the door was kept locked…”

“The reason being…”

“We were told it was to avoid disturbing the patient, sir.”

An unlikely answer. Mauroy was not a patient, but a prisoner. “Carry on,” I gestured.

“The room was in darkness, the shutters closed and Monsieur Mauroy was sitting up in bed, wide awake. He waved to us. ‘Welcome, gentlemen,’ he said. We all stood on the threshold, no one venturing to enter. After a moment Denis pulled the door to again and locked it again. ‘As you can see the patient is in good health,’ he said, then escorted us to the door. We found ourselves in the courtyard outside the building less than ten minutes after we had arrived. I had the impression that Doctor Denis was incensed by my companion’s manner.”

“So, you are saying that Doctor Denis was hiding something,” I said.

Varenne shook his head.

“Answer!” I demanded.

“No, sir, he was not hiding something.”

“Did Mauroy show signs of infirmity?”

“No, sir. He appeared wide awake, lucid and in good health. Nor was he any different on our subsequent visits.”

“Until his murder, you mean…after the third blood transfusion…”

“Sir,” he challenged, “as I have said many times, there was no third blood transfusion. Why do you persist with this accusation?”

“Because you are mendacious, sir!” I shouted and with such ferocity it caused the young man to stumble backwards with shock.”

“I am an honest and truthful man!” he asserted when he had regained his composure, but I was not deceived.

“Of course you are!” I laughed. “Not for a moment did I think otherwise.”

“Do not make fun of me, sir!” he growled.

“Such spirit!” I applauded. “I am impressed.”

He made to speak again, but I shook my head for silence. “I think it time you were questioned more forcefully,” I said. “Do you take my meaning, sir?”

His hands were trembling, his breath coming in short pants. “I do, sir,” he replied, “but I am not lying. Why are you doing this to me?”

“Because we want the truth.”

He drew himself to his full height. “What truth is that sir? Your truth, or the real truth? You have already deemed me culpable.”

I smiled at his white face. “Ah, yet another show of backbone, Monsieur Varenne! I am spellbound. But let me acquaint you of the facts: Your *acquaintance,* Doctor Denis, is guilty of murder...”

“…He is accused, not found guilty.”

“…yes, accused - for now, and you and your friend, Doctor Chernier have been linked to the crime.”

His head drooped again and he staggered to one side, put out a hand steady himself against the wall. I thought for a moment that he was going to faint, but then he gathered himself and found the strength to look me in the eye. “I am not guilty, sir,” he said breathlessly.

I shook my head and sighed. “You are a liar, Varenne,” I said. “And I know how to deal with liars…”

**Chapter 17**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

Pierre approaches my desk immediately after Doctor Chernier leaves my office. “Why did you let him go, my lord?” he asks.

I dislike his tone and I see my scribe raise an eyebrow and give the Chief Investigator a puzzled look. I am not in the mood for him today. “You get above yourself, Gagnon,” I reply sharply and am pleased to see him flinch. It is not the question that offends me, but the manner in which it is asked.

“My lord, I merely meant that while he remains in custody some pressure can be applied,” he says retreating.

“*Never* question my decisions. Is that clear? Do you understand?”

He nods. “Do you understand?” I repeat.

He looks uncertain, cowed even, but he is no fool. His hesitation tells me everything. He gropes for an apology, “Yes, my lord.”

“I take it that Varenne is still detained,” I say.

“Yes. I have made arrangements to question him again, my lord.”

“When?”

“Now, if it pleases you?”

“Yes, I wish to be present. Where?”

“The torture chamber.” I look at him. “I have made special arrangements,” he explains then I understand.

“Then let us not keep the young man waiting,” I reply, rising from my chair.

When we arrive at the torture chamber, I see that it is already occupied. The Chief Inquisitor, a short pot-bellied man wearing a leather apron, and his young assistant, similarly attired, are both sweating profusely in the heat, the stench of them reaching me even across the room. Without thinking, I withdraw a handkerchief and press it to my nose then as quickly return it to my shirt sleeve. Now is not the time for squeamishness.

They are fussing over a prisoner tied to an iron bench. In the corner of the room a roaring brazier is a pincushion of iron bars some glowing red-hot at the tip. When I enter this hateful place, they stop what they were doing and bow to me. The assistant leaves the room and returns a moment later with a stool, which I ignore and remain standing, arms-folded, just within the doorway.

When Varenne is brought into the room he looks around and begins to shake so much that the gaolers escorting him have to tighten their grip on his arms. He stares at me. “My lord…” he begs, but I turn my face away. His cheeks, always so quick to blush, are suddenly tinged with grey.

I should add that under normal circumstances the use of torture is not used *before* a person is convicted, only after and before execution, but this is not a normal case which is why I have been forced to become involved. It is not that I don’t trust Gagnon, merely that I think him a little over-zealous at times.

My Chief Investigator stands motionless as Varenne is dragged over to a wall. His arms are pinned behind him and a rope placed around his wrists then thrown over a high beam jutting from the brickwork. The two escorts haul on the rope, lifting his arms, tilting him forwards making his shoulders take the strain, forcing him up onto his toes. I hear him give a cry of agony just before the rope is secured to a ringbolt set in the wall. Gagnon goes over to him. “I am going to remind you about the importance of truth, Monsieur Varenne,” he whispers. Then he turns and motions to the torturer.

The other prisoner has been shackled into his seat. An iron bench is placed before him and his right leg lifted onto it then two curved metal plates with serrated teeth on the inside are clamped to his calf. Slowly a ratchet is tightened and pressure applied. First the victim begins to cry out, then beg, then scream as Gagnon quietly questions him about his involvement in a murder. Not Mauroy’s murder, another one: a killing outside a tavern. After an hour of torment, he confesses to the killing, something he has not done in the courtroom, but by that time his leg has been shattered, the blood pooling on the flagstones. Barely conscious he is carried from the room. Gagnon then turns his attention to Varenne who, gasping with fear, is brought to the same iron chair and the same *brodequin* fastened to his calf.

Varenne stiffens as pressure is applied. When he begins to cry out Gagnon touches the torturer on the shoulder and the man steps back from his subject, reluctantly, I think.

“Do you want your suffering to end, Monsieur Varenne?” Gagnon asks.

The young man is in pain. Already he is drenched in sweat and there is the smell of fear about him. “Please do not do this, sir?” he implores.

“Then answer my questions truthfully and all this will be over.”

“I have answered both truthfully and honestly, sir,” he gasps.

Gagnon shrugs. I can see that he is not convinced. He motions to the torturer who tightens the ratchet by one notch. Varenne screams. “Tell me about Perrine Mauroy,” Gagnon says.

This time Varenne seems not to hear. His chin is on his chest, his eyes tight-shut. He grips the bench with white-knuckled hands. “Who…why…” he stutters when Gagnon repeats the question.

“Perrine Mauroy. Do you know who she is?”

His eyes shoot open. “She is Antoine Mauroy’s wife....”

“She is Antoine Mauroy’s wife, *sir*,” he corrects. “Yes, she is. When did you first meet her?”

Varenne has become unmoored by the pain. I see a droplet of blood seep from the contraption on his leg and run onto his shoe. It is only when Gagnon turns to speak to the torturer that he opens his mouth to speak. “Wait,” he says. He knows without being told that silence is not an option. “It was after the third or fourth visit we made to Lord Montmor, sir.”

“Tell me about it,” he says.

He seems to be holding his breath in an attempt to contain the hurt, has to think for a moment. “We went to visit Monsieur Mauroy...”

“When?”

“After the second blood transfer. We climbed out of our carriage and began to walk across his courtyard…”

“We? Who is ‘we’?”

“Theo…Doctor Chernier and I.”

“Why did you go by coach?”

In the young man’s case, the suffering does not bring with it focus, a heightened concentration, but just the opposite: it brings distraction, a kind of delirium that arrives and departs without warning. His lucidity has gone, the question has escaped him. “Sir…?” he murmurs.

Gagnon moves closer to him, jabs his shoulder with a finger. “Why did you go by coach?” he hisses.

It is a pointless detail, but I know from experience that my Chief Investigator has method: first the easy questions to get the victim speaking then the difficult ones.

Varenne’s head comes up. Confused, he looks into the eyes of his tormentor then he understands. “It had rained that day. There was a cold wind too and there was still drizzle in the air…”

“Carry on.”

“When we got out of the carriage, I had noticed a young woman standing outside the gates, but I didn’t pay her any attention...”

“She was standing, you say?”

“Yes…her hands on the railings looking into the courtyard. I thought she was a street seller, or a harlot, but when we got to the front door, she was suddenly behind us….”

“How?”

“How what, sir?” He is panting, his voice barely above a whisper.

“How did she steal up on you?”

“I don’t know…Please, sir…” he motions to his leg. Gagnon shakes his head. “She must have walked next to the carriage hidden by the wheels…” His eyes flash to the brazier, which has flared when the torturer’s assistant stirs it with a poker.

Gagnon raises his voice. “Look at me!” he says.

“Theo…Doctor Chernier, knocked on the front door and then she was behind us…”

“How was she dressed?”

“Sir…”

“How was she dressed? Describe her to me.”

“She is young. Her hair is black. She was dressed in little more than rags. She was dirty…tired looking…”

“You knocked on the door then what happened?”

“The door was opened by a manservant. That was when Theo turned to Madame Mauroy. ‘Can I help you Madame?’ he asked.

“Can I help you, Madame? Is that what he said?”

“Yes…. Yes, sir.”

Gagnon chuckles; a strange sound in such a place. He gives a rueful smile. It seems he finds the doctor’s politeness both amusing and ridiculous at the same time.

Varenne’ head falls back. His eyes are closed and he’s panting like a dog. After a moment, Gagnon slaps his face hard, bringing him back to the present. “What happened?” he bellows.

The young man gives a single loud sob and tries to push back into the chair in a futile attempt to ease his suffering. “She was in two minds…” he hisses, “She studied us… shook her head. We turned away. The manservant put himself between us and her, told her to go, tried to shoo her into the street. Said, ‘You’ll get no money here…’”

“Did she go?”

“No, sir. She just…she just shook her head, said, ‘I want to see Antoine. I am Perrine Mauroy. My husband is living here…’

“Ah! So, she knew!”

Varenne is weeping with pain, but Gagnon is not a man to be deflected by another’s anguish. ‘Tell us more,’ he says.

“I think…sir, my leg…” Gagnon shakes his head again. “I think…I think she could see from our faces that her information was correct. ‘Then he is here,’ she said becoming bolder. She demanded to see him.”

Gagnon has narrowed his eyes, is watching Varenne intently, as am I. “Ah, so she became bolder, did she. Then what happened?”

“Please, sir, my leg…”

“I want to know what happened,” Gagnon says.

Varenne is puffing. His face is the colour of a winding sheet. “The servant went away,” he says weakly. “We decided to remain at the door with Madame Mauroy. She said she’d been looking for her husband.”

“Who told her where he was?”

“I don’t know.”

At this point, I decide to intervene. “Go back to your story,” I instruct.

Gagnon looks over his shoulder, bristling at my intrusion, though he has the sense not to say anything. When the torturer reaches for the *brodequin* again I wave him away. Varenne looks at me. There is pleading in his eyes, which I ignore. He groans.

“I want you to tell me what happened,” I say to him.

There is a pause. The brazier crackles. “Doctor Denis came to the door. He asked if she were Perrine Mauroy. When she said she wanted to see her husband, he invited her into the hall then asked Theo and I to follow him into a drawing room while she remained at the foot of the staircase flanked by two footmen.

“The study door had been left open. I could see Madame Mauroy standing in the vestibule. ‘This is quite a surprise,’ Doctor Denis said, but it was obvious that he wanted to find out what she wanted. Then we left the room. ‘I don’t fully understand why you are here, Madame,’ he said. ‘What is it you want?’”

“At these sharp words she seemed to shrink into herself. She was like a cornered animal. I saw her look around at the expensive furnishings in the corridor; the gold-leaf wall table, the red-silk couch, the massive gilt mirror on the wall. I think the display of such wealth intimidated her. She bowed her head. ‘I want to see my husband,’ she whispered. I remember that her hands trembled. ‘Speak up, woman!’ Denis shouted, causing her to jump. She repeated herself. ‘What if your husband doesn’t want to see you?’ he said.

“‘Why would you say such a cruel thing, sir?’ she breathed.”

“‘So, your sole purpose is simply to visit your husband to see that he is well?’ Doctor Denis said.”

‘Yes.’

‘To what purpose?’

“She appeared confused. ‘I don’t under…’”

‘Why do you want to see your husband? Is it money you want?’

At this remark her eyes flared. “‘No, sir! I am his wife. I wish to know if he is in good health, that is all.’”

“Doctor Denis waved his arms in the air in a gesture of frustration. ‘Then that request is easily satisfied,” he said. ‘Follow me…’

“He moved away, leaving her open-mouthed, then stopped. ‘Well, are you coming?’ he demanded so we all followed him; Doctor Denis in the lead, then Madame Mauroy and the two footmen with Theo and I at the rear. He led us to the Mauroy’s bedroom door, which this time he opened and walked in without knocking. Monsieur Mauroy was sitting up in bed though he appeared to be dozing. Hearing the door burst open he jerked with shock. ‘Yes, sir?’ he asked then caught sight of his wife.”

“What did he do on seeing his wife?” I ask.

“Nothing, my lord.”

“Nothing? What do you mean, ‘nothing’?”

“He just said, ‘Perrine?’ and looked shocked. Then she rushed into the room and ran over to him throwing her arms around his shoulders and kissing him on the face. It would have been an endearing reunion except that Monsieur Mauroy seemed as confused as anyone else. For a moment he remained rigid, staring at us over her shoulder, then he seemed to gather his wits and very tentatively put a hand on his wife’s shoulder. ‘Perrine, we are not alone,’ he whispered. At this remark, his wife disengaged herself and stepped back. ‘I was so worried about you,’ she said. ‘I have searched Paris…’

‘And now you have found him,’ Doctor Denis said, moving between them. ‘You said you wanted to see that Antoine was in good health, madame; and he is, as you have witnessed with your own eyes. Now you must leave.”

“So, she left…”

“No, my lord, because that was when her husband found his voice. ‘It is good to see you, Perrine,’ he said, though he did not look pleased.”

“‘Antoine, why did you not contact me?’ she asked, shaking her arm free.”

“‘I have been ill. What is it you want, Perrine?’

“‘I want to see that you are safe and healthy. I heard you were in… in sickness.’

“‘Yes, I suffered a mild collapse of the mind, but the good doctor here…’ he inclined his head to Denis, ‘has repaired my injured brain.’

“‘That is good to hear, Antoine, but now I want you to come home with me.’

“And this conversation occurred with them trying to peer around the good doctor who stood between them?”

“Yes, my lord.”

I imagine the scene, ridiculous as it was. At the same time, Gagnon finally steps away from Varenne. Out of the corner of my eye, I see him shoot me a quick, hard look, which I ignore. “What did Monsieur Mauroy reply when she said he should come home with her?” I ask.

“He said that he was still not recovered.”

“And you were witness to this entire, touching conversation, Varenne?” I say.

“Yes, my lord.”

“And then what happened?”

“Doctor Denis said that his treatment had cured her husband of his malaise. ‘Then he can leave with me now,’ she retorted, causing her husband’s head to whip round in horror. ‘This blood transfer is the devil’s work,’ she said, seeing his reaction, her voice suddenly becoming bold.”

“She sounds like a dangerous woman,” I remark, somewhat facetiously.

“Doctor Denis became angry. ‘Hold your tongue, woman!’ he shouted. ‘Your husband is still in my care. It would be foolish for him to leave now.’ Then she demanded to know when her husband would be able to go home.”

“*Demanded*?” I smiled. “What did Denis say?”

“He said that his patient could leave in a week.”

“And Mauroy? Did he answer?”

“He looked distressed, my lord. His eyes moved from the doctor to his wife then back to the doctor again. ‘I am not healthy enough to leave immediately, Perrine,’ he said, to which she answered that, to her, he looked as fit as a fiddle.”

“She seems a most persistent woman,” I say blandly.

“Yes, my lord, she is…After that, Doctor Denis said that she should return in seven days, which would give him time enough to ensure that his patient did not suffer a relapse. To prevent further discussion, he took her by the arm and though she was reluctant, he pulled her to the door. ‘My patient needs to rest, Madame,’ he said.”

“Did she not resist?” I ask.

“My lord, I am answering all your questions…my leg…Please….” He is whimpering like a child.

“After,” I say, shaking my head.

He shudders, his fists white-knuckled, but continues. “She did not resist, my lord. She was taken through the kitchens to a servant’s entrance at the side of the building and bundled into an alley. Doctor Chernier and I followed. When Doctor Denis moved to close the door on her, she spoke out. ‘It has been very costly for me to find my husband, sir,’ she said. ‘I have spent days looking for him in the city.’ I was surprised both by her effrontery and the anger in her voice.”

“Yes, clearly, she is a woman who must be brought to heel.”

“Doctor Denis threw her a Louis d’Or, which bounced off her chest and fell to the ground. She was bending to retrieve the coin when he closed the door. In the kitchen he turned to us. ‘Good riddance,’ he said and marched away.”

“And after that?”

“After that we returned to Mauroy’s room. Doctor Denis was angry. ‘I hope your wife will not return,’ he said.”

‘Did you give her money?’ Mauroy asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Then, sir, she will return...’

Gagnon is looking at me. I know that he is annoyed, but I am not ready to cease my questions. “This was before the third blood transfer, Monsieur Varenne,” I say.

I see his eyes open wide. “My lord, there was no third blood transfer,” he whispers.

I see my Chief Investigator stiffen at this remark. He turns to the torturer intending to instruct him to inflict more pain, but I forestall him. “That is enough for today, Pierre. Take him back to his cell,” I say.

Gagnon is livid but has the presence of mind to bow in deference to my instruction. The torturer, too, looks disappointed, but I have heard enough, at least for now. We can force a confession out of Varenne another day, if that is necessary. I am yet to be convinced that destroying this young man would bring us any closer to the truth.

I watch as the contraption is removed from his leg. Below the knee the skin is black with bruising and mottled with blood. He stands painfully, tests his weight on the damaged limb then limps a pace or two. I think it lucky that he can even stand after such an ordeal. At the doorway, he hesitates. “I am telling the truth, my lord,” he says before being bundled into the corridor.

**Chapter 18**

**Guillaume Varenne**

I want to fall into deep, dark oblivion, but my mind refuses to comply. Instead, in a black depression, I lie on the stinking mattress in my cell, my leg throbbing and plummet into nightmare. Every sound, every whisper, every creak brings back the terror. I have such a longing for home, I think I could die of it.

I keep replaying in my head the walk to the torture chamber, the two guards chatting as if on the way to a local tavern, my heart hammering. I replay baulking at the threshold; the roughness of the rope around my wrists; the excruciating pain in my shoulders as I am hauled up; the unconcern of the men around me. I think of my momentary flare of hope on seeing the Lieutenant-General, so quickly crushed when he turned his face away. I keep seeing the other poor victim dragged from that dreadful room, his leg destroyed.

When they fitted the *brodequin* to my leg I begged for mercy, then screamed when the ratchet turned. They laughed. “You must confess,” the Chief Investigator kept saying. “Confess to what?” I asked dry-mouthed. “Confess to your part in the murder of Antoine Mauroy.”

That is what they want me to do – to confess, to become a scapegoat, but I will not. “I cannot confess to something I have not done, sir,” I begged, which is when I saw his face change, from anger to something worse: resolve. The torturer and his assistant were indifferent to my suffering, bored even; the young one nibbled on a thumbnail, the older one stirred the brazier; and all the while the Lieutenant-General looked on with detachment.

The Chief Investigator ranted; the ratchet turned. Never in my life have I known such agony. And just when I was prepared to confess to anything to end the suffering, I was released and sent back to my cell. I ask you, what is the purpose of such torment? Why must I endure such pain when I am innocent? The answer, of course, is simple: I am the sacrificial lamb. And there is worse to come.

Eventually, the light dims as evening approaches. The building falls silent. No more banging, no more screams. Lying, shivering in the gloom, I think of Anne, recall her face, her eyes, her hair. She is become my anchor; the tether that I cling to, to stop me going mad.

It is close to midnight, I think, when I hear the gaoler limping down the corridor, the wavering light of his lantern bouncing off the walls. Then comes the rattle of his keys as they are fed into the lock. When the door swings open, I am shaking with fear. Now, I know myself for what I am: a coward; a weak man and I am ready to confess...

**Chapter 19**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

I stood in silence while Varenne was questioned by my Chief Investigator, until I felt the need to intervene. It is not a coerced confession I require, but the truth. A mere scapegoat will not do. Too many powerful interests are involved, not least of all the King.

Today, has been both long and difficult. It began just after dawn when I was visited by Jean-Baptiste Colbert. The First Minister marched into my office unannounced, shooed my scribe from the room, helped himself to wine from the table in the corner then plonked himself down before my desk. I could smell lavender water on him. “I want you to get to the bottom of the Mauroy affair, Nicolas,” he said to me. “His Majesty demands the truth. The truth, you understand. The truth!”

Colbert is forty-eight, tall and slender; a striking man who seems to exude energy and good health. He was, as always, dressed extravagantly in Rhinegrave breeches and plain jerkin, displaying, as is his habit, an elaborate lace collar, which, it is said, he wears, to promote France’s Royal Lace-Makers. Despite this small eccentricity he remains a hard, cold man, some would say haughty. He is not one to tolerate fools.

“Yes, my lord,” I replied.

“Good. You need to know that the King has taken an interest in the case. His Majesty has been petitioned by members of the Royal Society and His Eminence the Archbishop of Paris, both of whom have questioned the wisdom of blood transfer. This affair is politically charged, Nicolas. You understand that, do you?”

“I do, my lord.”

He stood up. “Then I will leave this matter in your capable hands,” he said, gulping back his wine. “The King wants you to get to the truth,” he repeated then left as abruptly as he arrived.

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It is almost midnight when I visit Varenne in his cell. He is sitting knees drawn-up on his bed, then seeing me, he jumps up from his cot shaking with fear. In the lantern-light, shadows move around the room which smells of shit. I turn to the gaoler, “Bring clean water and a cloth so that Monsieur Varenne may clean himself.” This instruction is as much for my benefit as it is for Varenne. My scribe, who has followed me, turns to the gaoler and repeats my command, adding that he also requires a worktable. The gaoler departs and the two of us stand in silence until he returns with a colleague, the two of them grunting with effort as they haul a battered desk into the cell. Then there is another delay while the gaoler fetches a stool, which I pass to my assistant.

“Please sit down,” I say to the prisoner. White-faced and sweating, he retreats, limping, to the far end of his bed. I hover near the door. My scribe sits at the desk laying quill and paper before him. The stool creaks ominously.

“How is your leg?” I ask when all is ready.

He bends forward and rubs his shin. I can see the bruising and there are speckles of blood on his hose. I think my enquiry has scared him, because I see his eyes flash. His chest is rising and falling. “I am able to stand, my lord,” he says.

“That is good,” I reply.

We fall back into silence until the gaoler returns a third time, this time with jug and cloth.

“I need the truth,” I say.

He stares at me.

“It was at the Mauroy home, was it not, that Mauroy received the third blood transfusion, the one that killed him?”

Varenne’s brow wrinkles. There is a look of concern on his face. I can see that he is debating his answer. “No, my lord, that is not true,” he answers finally.

“Do not lie to me, sir,” I warn, “or things will go very badly for you.”

“Things have already gone badly for me,” he replies boldly, showing more courage than I had expected. “And I am not lying. There was no third transfer that I know of,” he asserts quietly.

I sigh. “Monsieur Varenne,” I say, “if you continue with these untruths the consequences will be…unfortunate.”

“I am not lying, sir,” he shakes his head. “Why will you not believe me?”

Strangely, I am tempted to accept him at his word. Despite my earlier reservations about this young man, I am impressed by his fortitude, and – dare I say it – his honest demeanour.

He examines the jug then dips a corner of the cloth into the water and begins to wipe around his face and neck. There is about him the sour smell of old sweat.

“Monsieur Varenne,” I continue, “let us go back to the beginning for a moment: the first and second blood transfers. I want you to think about them. What were your thoughts after witnessing those experiments?”

He rolls up his sleeves and begins to work at his arms. “After witnessing the first experiment I was confused, my lord,” he says.

“Confused? Why?”

“I was confused about the treatment, and I was also confused by the reaction of those in attendance: during the first blood transfer the room was in chaos.”

“And the second?”

“The proceedings were better organised and Monsieur Mauroy appeared more lucid. He participated in the treatment…”

“Explain what you mean.”

“He walked to the chair unaided, my lord, and offered his arm to Doctor Denis; he showed interest in the proceedings.”

“And on the first occasion?”

“On the first occasion he was confused…befuddled. The entire episode was simply… bewildering…”

“There are many opposed to these experiments,” I say.

“Yes,” he nods quickly. He raises his eyes to me.

“Who?” I ask, but he looks away again. I sense he is reluctant to speak. “You mentioned Doctors Martiniere and Lamy,” I prompt.

This is a situation far beyond his experience and he thinks long and hard before speaking. It is clear he is choosing his words with care. “They made no secret of his strong opposition to the treatment, but there are many others share their views.”

He is very young to speak like a politician, I think. I notice too that at the mention of the two doctors my scribe has stopped writing and is looking intently at the prisoner. “Was Doctor Martiniere at Mauroy’s first blood transfer?”

“Yes, I think so. I’m not sure…”

“Did you not speak to him?”

“No, my lord. Not on that occasion.”

“What about the second blood transfer?

“Yes. On the second occasion he stood behind Doctor Chernier and I in the dining room. My friend had introduced us on the stairs. I knew that he was against blood transfer, which made me wonder why he had decided to attend the experiment.”

“Describe him to me.”

At first, Varenne looks surprised by my remark, but then he shrugs. “He is about thirty, my lord. He has a moustache. On that occasion he was wearing a burgundy jacket…” He hesitates, suddenly aware, I think, that this is not the kind of information I require. I gesture for him to continue. “…He looked displeased. I remembered him mainly because of the disdainful expression he had maintained throughout the evening. He had preceded us up the stairs when we first entered Lord Montmor’s house. On the landing outside the dining room Theo had greeted him and then introduced me, because in all the noise and confusion I had failed to notice him. I had bowed to him, but his response had been merely a look of total indifference. Nor had he replied to my ‘Good evening, sir’. He had simply nodded curtly then turned his back on me. And inside the room, he had remained at the back of the crowd, apparently either uninterested or unimpressed by the events unfolding, yet his demeanour had remained so contemptuous throughout the proceedings that I wondered why he had even bothered to attend…”

“How did he behave?”

“Behave, my lord…?”

“What did he do? What did he say?”

“He stormed out before the end, my lord.”

“Why did he do that, do you think?”

He looks at me then averts his eyes, uncertain how to answer.”

“Speak freely, Varenne, I say,” prompting him.

He stares at me, gathers his courage. “His mind is set, my lord. He is not open to reason.”

That, I think, is a very strong statement, particularly for a young man in his predicament, though I decide not to pursue the point.

“Have spoken with him since then?”

“Once, my lord… We met in a coffee house.”

I notice a hesitation. “An arranged meeting?”

“No, my lord, an accident. We had a disagreement. He spoke rudely….”

I put up my hand. “Thank you, Monsieur Varenne,” I say, “You may go.” He looks at me. He is confused, the scribe and the gaoler who is standing at the cell door, equally so. “You can go home,” I say.

“I don’t…”

“Go home,” I repeat.

When he finally understands the message he delays not a moment, but places the jug and cloth on the floor, stands up and limps out of his cell without another word.

“Thank you,” I say to the astonished gaoler and follow the young man out into the corridor.

**Chapter 20**

**Guillaume Varenne**

I am in a state of confusion when I emerge from the dungeon into the night. For a moment I stand in the courtyard breathing in the air and squinting up at the moon then I look around. The guards at the gate regard me with suspicion. I half expect to be rearrested at any moment and discover that this release is merely another trick, but when no one moves to detain me, I set off for home.

I decide to walk even though my leg is hurting, my clothes dirty and ripped and my hose in tatters. I want to be in the fresh air, cannot abide the thought of being inside, even inside a carriage. The ordeal has given me pause to think; to consider what is important. But then torture tends to have that effect on a person. Now, all I want to do is go home, see my parents and speak with Anne.

I limp along the riverbank with a heavy heart, fearful of cut-throats. The odd passer-by stares at my dishevelled appearance and sometimes there are whisperings and strange looks. I glare at those who dare to comment. I am concerned about why I have been so suddenly released. Is Monsieur de la Reynie playing some kind of cat-and-mouse game with me, or is it that he deems me innocent? I suspect the former given that his Chief Investigator has made it abundantly clear that he has judged me guilty.

It is in the small hours when I get home. There is a light in my father’s office, which means that he is still at work. I let myself in. I put my head into his room where he is pouring over some books and appears to be adding up figures. So engrossed is he that he has not heard the door open and close.

“Good evening, father,” I say.

His head shoots up then he gives a cry then runs over and embraces me. Mother has heard me enter and I hear her run downstairs in her night attire. “We feared the worst,” she says, throwing her arms around father and me. We stand in a huddle for a minute. “You are hurt,” mother whispers, but I shake my head. “I would really like some food and to change out of these dirty clothes,” I say quietly.

“Yes, of course, Guillaume,” mother says and the two of them step back. “We were so afraid,” she says, her voice breaking with emotion.

I try to smile, like my ordeal was no great thing, though it is difficult. I take a breath. “As you can see, I have been released,” I try to grin, but the muscles in my face remain frozen. The truth is, I desperately need to be alone and get the stink of the prison cell off me. “Please excuse me,” I say.

Father opens his mouth to speak, but mother puts a hand on his arm preventing further comment.

Upstairs, alone in my room, I sit on my bed and break into sobs. It is only when I have washed and changed my clothes and feel in control of myself that I go downstairs again. My mother has brought bread and cheese into my father’s office. They ply me with questions.

“I was interviewed about the death of Antoine Mauroy,” I say, though I decline from going into details. Eventually, my mother leaves my father and I alone.

My father is not an old man, but he looks old tonight. His eyes are clouded with fatigue and there are deep furrows at the corners of his mouth.

“Guillaume,” he says with a strained smile. “Your mother and I are so relieved to see you. We feared the worst…”

I can tell that he is trying to look upbeat, but his body gives him away. I see exhaustion in the curve of his shoulders and the dark lines beneath his eyes. I know that he is deeply worried and I know what he is worried about, though he thinks he has kept this knowledge hidden from me.

I start to describe my conversation with de la Reynie, but soon realise that my father’s mind is elsewhere. Eventually, I halt. I am irritated. “Are you well, Father?” I ask. I think it is the sharp tone I use rather than the words I say that gets his attention.

He looks up from the document he is studying. “Yes, of course,” he stammers.

“Is something troubling you?”

There is a pause. “I was worried about you.”

“We are not talking about me,” I say coldly. There is anger building inside me. In twenty-four hours, my world has been turned upside down. The time for subterfuge is over.

Pale-faced, he looks at me; considers the question, then considers the answer. “There are always problems in business, Guillaume.”

“Is it the *Jonkeer*?” I ask, though I already know the answer.

I see his look of bafflement. There is a long pause. “The *Jonkeer* is a little overdue,” he says.

I laugh at this fiction. “A little overdue,” I repeat.

He sees my face; sees, I think, the rage burning in me. “It will arrive any day now.”

“I think you are mad,” I say. The torture chamber has taught me not to bandy words.

He recoils, but it is an open secret that we are on the brink of bankruptcy. “The *Jonkeer* will finish us!” I shout.

He shakes his head, ever the denialist. “That is not true.”

Once, my father’s stubbornness was an asset, now it is become a liability. His reckless investment in the *Jonkeer* has overstretched the family’s finances. If the ship comes home from the New World laden with cargo, all will be well, if it does not, we will be ruined. Worse still, to finance the venture he has gone into business with the Turgot family, a dangerous gamble at the best of times, and with the King also looking to tax the merchant class to finance his Versailles folly, the future has now become doubly unpredictable.

For too long I have ignored the whisperings at the quayside; that he is yesterday’s man; that he is losing his touch; that he is a person risen above his natural station who is now about to fall. And there is no doubt that there are those who would celebrate his failure.

The *Jonkeer* is now two months overdue. There is talk of a storm in the West Indies, that the ship has been lost, and our creditors are gathering like wolves.

“Is there no news?” I ask, which is a stupid question since I have been absent for little more than a day.

Father shakes his head then he is gasping, suddenly red in the face, his chest heaving. When he grasps the edge of the desk, I rush to him. “I shall send for Theo,” I say, but he waves his hand to prevent me. Slowly, the torment passes and he slumps back in his chair, eyes closed, exhausted, his chest rising and falling. “I am fine,” he wheezes then looks at me. “I may have made a mistake when I entered the agreement with the Turgot family,” he finally admits.

This is the first time I have heard him utter any kind of regret, which makes me even more fearful. “The ship is only a few weeks overdue, father,” I hear myself say because I feel the need to console him. “That is not unusual. Winds and tide – the elements – often conspire to delay a vessel. The sea is a fickle beast. The ship will turn up in time,” I add though I do not believe it.

“We do not have the luxury of time. Our creditors are beginning to smell blood in the water. They are fighting to be first to demand payment.”

That causes a shiver of fear. “Can we pay our debts?”

“If the *Jonkeer* returns with its manifest intact we can pay everything. Indeed, we shall be wealthy. Otherwise…” He pauses and I hear him sigh, “We must sell the house and business.”

I knew the situation was bad, but not that bad. “Sell the house and the business?” I blurt out. “No, that is not possible.”

He raises his eyes from his desk. “There is no money. We must pray that the ship returns soon.”

I suffer a helter-skelter of emotions: a flurry of fear and more powerful still, resentment. I shake my head, as if to clear my thoughts while I try to keep my anger in check. My father has been reckless, dazzled, I think by the wealth of the Turgots. For them the *Jonkeer* is nothing more than a small gamble, a minor outlay and I have the suspicion that they have an eye on snapping up my father’s business. A less generous man would say that this had been their plan all along.

I laugh at his remark. “Praying will not help, father,” I declare.

The old man’s eyes widen. “How dare you blaspheme like that!”

“Your greed will be our downfall,” I yell. I cannot help myself. I am close to tears, too traumatised by recent events to think clearly. He is staring open-mouthed. “I must get a message to Anne,” I say and leave him shaking at his desk.

**Chapter 21**

**Henri-Martin Martiniére**

I remember the outrage I felt when I learned that Chernier and Varenne had visited the lunatic, Mauroy. I was not surprised by Varenne’s behaviour, him being a foolish, ignorant schoolboy, but I confess I had expected more of Chernier, a man of learning.

That was two months ago. I was informed of this development by Claude Perrault; my informant being a man equally opposed to Denis’s ungodly practices. I had also learned that Mauroy had been visited by his wife, which was a surprise since I had assumed that he was unmarried given his ludicrous attempts to ensnare a high-born lady with a view to marriage.

I gather that Madame Mauroy first appeared at the Montmor estate on 10 January - I have the date recorded in my diary – which was a week after Lamy and I first called upon the Lieutenant-General and around the time I had the opportunity to confront that simpleton, Varenne.

That encounter happened by accident. Lamy and I had met at a coffee house to review our campaign to have Denis’s blood transfer experiments proscribed. We had already publicised our opposition to his sinful experiments, of course, and our good friend the Archbishop of Paris had pledged his support for our crusade, but those were early days; days when we were confident – over-confident, it now seems - that Denis could be stopped.

We were about to leave, when I saw Varenne walk in and sit down at a table nearby. The place was crowded and noisy, the room filled with clouds of tobacco smoke. I waited for him to settle and call for coffee then nodded to my companion. “Follow me,” I said, “and I will introduce you to the enemy...”

We walked over to where Varenne was seated. He only looked up when my shadow fell on the table. “This is a man who supports the charlatan, Denis,” I said loudly, pointing a finger at the miscreant. Some faces turned to look at us.

I remember the look of shock on Varenne’s face before he gathered his wits. “It is true I have taken an interest in his experiments, sir,” he replied quietly, “as should any man of science.”

Pompous words, I thought. Lamy, I remember, shook his head at this remark and flashed me a look of annoyance. “You mean this fool supports Denis, even in the face of evidence that condemns his actions?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“And what evidence is that, sir?” Varenne retorted, raising his voice in challenge. I confess that I had expected him to cower. It came as a surprise to realise that he was a man with a backbone.

“The evidence of physicians both here and in England,” I shot back at him.

“But the English are also conducting blood transfers, as are you, sir. Is that not true?”

At that remark I pulled out a chair and sat down. Given Varenne’s youthfulness and inexperience I believe I had licence to treat him as the foolish child that he was.

“Yes, it is true,” I said clasping my hands and placing them on the table, the better to give him my full attention, “but we are driven by scientific endeavour and not personal gain. Our experiments are conducted within the bounds of scientific practice, and only from animal to animal, not animal to man. Nor are our experiments conducted in the manner of an entertainer in a bawdy house. Denis is a charlatan. He is toying with the forces of nature and your failure to recognise this fact serves only to show your ignorance.”

I noticed the narrowing of his eyes as his face flushed with anger. “I cannot remember inviting you to sit, sir,” he said.

Sighing, I stood up. Varenne was glaring at me. I shrugged to Lamy, making a show of my disappointment. “This laughable young man does not understand the implications of what he does,” I said.

My companion tut-tutted. “Such folly will reap its own reward,” he declared.

“Indeed, it will,” I said, returning my attention to Varenne. “Denis’s experiments are foolhardy. Not only do they go against the teachings of our Holy church, they also risk transmuting bodies and minds. Would you have your patients bark like a dog or grunt like a pig?” I asked.

“You will be pleased to know that Monsieur Mauroy remains hale and hearty; his skin has not yet turned to leather,” he replied curtly.

“As you say, not yet!” Lamy interrupted grinning. Then he shook his head and touched me on the arm, urging me away. Before departing, he leaned forward over the table. “You are a very stupid, imprudent young man,” he hissed.

“And one who is supporting a dangerous and wicked activity,” I added.

“I support nothing!” Varenne replied with sudden vehemence. “I merely observe, and I have observed an improvement in the patient. You see, sirs, I try to keep an open mind, nothing more. Perhaps you should do the same.”

Lamy blinked. “Ah, you have observed a change! Does the patient now moo for his breakfast?” he remarked, much to my amusement. There was also a titter of laughter from the people around us.

I leant forward to speak more privately. “This will not turn out well for you, Varenne,” I whispered. He opened his mouth to respond, then shrugged and said nothing.

“We must punish that young man for his impudence,” Lamy said angrily after we had stepped out into the street.

“We will, my friend,” I answered. “We will…”

**Chapter 22**

**Guillaume Varenne**

I am in a bad mood when I visit Theo the morning after my release from prison. I need to get out of the house where the atmosphere has become poisonous: my father is irascible, barking orders and snarling replies, my mother equally querulous. The two of them are hardly speaking to each other and the servants are creeping from room to room in anticipation of an explosion. To make matters worse, my father has declared that he will henceforth keep to his office, preferring, so he says, the comfort of a bench next to his desk, rather than the marriage bed.

I see a curtain move when I knock on Theo’s door, then a moment later, Athénaïs is standing on the threshold with Gavroche at her shoulder. She curtsies, her eyes downcast then her expression changes.

“Monsieur Varenne, I think your leg is hurt,” she says with concern.

“I am fine, Athénaïs. May I speak with your father?”

“Well…yes,” she says uncertainly then turns to look at Gavroche who reluctantly steps to one side, allowing me space to enter. She leads me along a corridor and into the drawing room where a large wood fire is crackling in the grate. Theo is seated at a low table on which stands bread and cheese on a platter and a bottle of wine, recently opened. He is taking a drink as I enter the room. Rising from his bench, he looks pleased to see me.

“Ah, Guillaume,” he says, “what a pleasant surprise.” Then to his daughter, “Athénaïs, please bring our guest some refreshments.”

“I am not hungry, but thank you, Theo. And please, do not interrupt your meal on my behalf…”

Athénaïs remains standing where she is: “Monsieur Varenne is injured, father,” she says.

Theo step away from the table and moves across the room, puts his arms around his daughter and kisses the top of her head. “Get our friend something from the kitchen,” he whispers.”

After Athénaïs has departed, he turns to me. “What happened to your leg?” he asks.

I shrug. “Questions were put to me,” I say evasively.

For a moment I think he is going to pursue the matter then shakes his head. “Sit down,” he says. “I need to examine the wound.”

He spends the next five minutes pressing and prodding, causing me considerable discomfort, but in the end he seems satisfied. “You will live,” he says finally.

By the time he has finished, Athénaïs has returned carrying a platter, which she puts down on the table.

“Thank you, Athénaïs,” I say, to which remark she blushes and responds with another curtsy.

She is a beautiful young girl, though I still think her somewhat capricious and strong headed.

“You may leave us, Athénaïs,” Theo says, causing her to throw him a sharp look. “Thank you,” he adds, this time putting a sharp note of warning in his voice. Reluctantly, she leaves.

“So, tell me what happened,” he says quietly when the two of us are alone.

I shake my head, not wanting to awaken such terrible memories. Theo stares at me. “I was interrogated by the Chief Investigator,” I say finally.

“How was your leg injured?”

“The *brodequin*...”

“Let me look again,” he says.

This time I roll down my stocking. Theo studies my shinbone then presses his fingers to the bruises. In agony, I grip the arms of the chair while he completes a second examination.

“You are lucky, there are no bones broken. What were you questioned about?”

I hesitate, feel my hands begin to shake, my heart begins to pound.

“You don’t…” he begins, but I silence him with a shake of my head and make an effort to calm myself. I relate the details of my interview and tell him also of the strange conversation I endured with Nicolas de la Reynie in my prison cell.

“The Lieutenant-General wanted to know about the third blood transfer,” I say. “His Chief Investigator said that Mauroy had been murdered at his home; that the third blood transfer did for him.”

“Yes, I know. How did you answer?”

“I told the truth! I said that there was no third blood transfer.”

Theo is nodding. “The same questions were put to me.”

“They are looking for a scapegoat, Theo.”

For a moment, my friend was contemplative. “Yes, they are,” he says finally.

“So, what must we do?”

“There is nothing we can do, Guillaume.”

I know the truth of it and for a moment we sit in contemplative silence. “Have you heard from Anne?” Theo asks.

“No. This morning, I sent her a message. I received an immediate reply, but from her brother: he said that she is ‘unavailable to me’, whatever that means.”

Theo stares at me for a moment. “Her brother is very opposed?” he says finally.

“Yes.”

“The Turgots are a powerful family, Guillaume. Maybe…maybe, she is not for you,” he says gently.

“She is my beloved,” I retort, but his remark still feels like a stab in my heart.

When I rise to leave, Theo sees me to the door. “I have been summoned again,” he whispers when out of earshot.

“When?”

“This afternoon.”

“Why?” I ask, though I already know the answer.

For the first time, I see fear in his eyes. “I think the snakes are gathering,” he says.

When we are standing on the threshold, he grips my arm and there are tears in his eyes. “I have asked my sister and her husband to take care of Athénaïs, should I not return,” he says before he closes the door.

**Chapter 23**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

When Gagnon informed me that arrangements had been made to have Mauroy’s casket opened and his body revealed for inspection, I immediately gave instructions that nothing was to be done until I was present. Then, against the advice of my Chief Investigator, I summoned Doctor Chernier again. Gagnon insists that he was involved in the conspiracy to murder Antoine Mauroy, but that is yet to be proven.

When Doctor Chernier is escorted into my office, I can see that he is trembling. “You seem nervous today, Doctor Chernier,” I say.

“I am, my lord.”

“Why? Surely only the guilty should be uneasy.”

“You imprisoned my friend Guillaume Varenne, my lord. He is innocent, yet was accused of murder, and tortured. Now I have been summoned…”

He leaves the sentence unfinished. “Not murder,” I correct him, “an accessory to murder, but let us not split hairs.”

“He is innocent of any crime, as am I.”

“Innocent?” I say, “But you have not been accused of anything. What are you innocent of?”

“Innocent of any involvement in the death of Antoine Mauroy.”

I cannot resist a smile at this reply. “*Murder*, not death,” I correct him, “and everyone in the Bastille claims innocence, my friend, and everyone in the dungeons below is blameless, at least according to them,” I add.

“Guillaume is merely a young man interested in the science of medicine, my lord.”

“And what or yourself? Or Doctor Denis? Or Doctor Emmerez? Even Lord Montmor? Are you all equally innocent?”

“Yes.”

Behind me, I hear Gagnon grunt with amusement. “So, everyone is blameless, is that what you’re saying, doctor? Yet Mauroy has been murdered…”

“With respect, my lord, a murder has been alleged, but not confirmed.”

“Ah, so now you are a lawyer,” I say brutally. “Perhaps you are involving yourself in matters beyond your skill or experience, Doctor Chernier.”

I see his head drop for a moment at this rebuke then he looks up again. “You are correct, my lord, I do not have training in the law, as do you, but I still ask, ‘Where is the evidence of murder?’”

“There is much opposition to the practice of blood transfer, is there not?” I say.

“Yes, but opposition is not proof.”

“And you and Varenne visited the victim, Mauroy, after each blood transfer?”

“I prefer the word ‘patient’ to ‘victim’, my lord.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“Visiting a patient after treatment also does not constitute evidence of murder, my lord,” he continues.

“Why?”

He is confused by my question. “I don’t understand, my lord?”

“Why did you continue to visit Mauroy after his…treatments?”

“For two reasons: firstly, I wished to observe the procedure to evaluate its effectiveness, and, secondly, to protect the interests of the patient.”

“Was that necessary?”

He takes his time answering. “What I witnessed at Lord Montmor’s was a performance…a show.”

“Then you condemn the practice of blood transfer, doctor,” I say.

“No, my lord, that is not what I am saying. In my opinion, the two blood transfers that were carried out at Lord Montmor’s apartments were somewhat theatrical, but the actual procedures were carried out with due care and consideration. Despite his tendency towards showmanship, Doctor Denis is a fine physician.”

“There were three blood transfers to Mauroy, Doctor Chernier,” I say angrily.

He shakes his head, “No, my lord, there were only two.”

I chose for the moment not to contest the point. “Did you relay your concerns about these…performances to Doctor Denis?”

“Yes. He argued that given the criticisms levelled against him, the public nature of the blood transfers was of scientific merit.”

“Did you agree with him?”

“The argument has some validity, but I was not convinced.”

“Yet you still continued to work with him, despite your misgivings?”

“I continued to observe – as I have said, in the interests of the patient. I think that Doctor Denis is as much interested in fame as he is in science, but – I repeat – he is a fine physician and he is not a murderer.”

“What concerns me, Doctor Chernier, is that you did not stop the experiments from continuing.”

“Why should I have done that, my lord?”

“Because these experiments have been condemned by the church, the University of Paris and eminent physicians too numerous to mention.”

“There is always opposition to new procedures, my lord.”

“Yet you describe Doctor Denis as a man bent solely on self-glorification.”

“Then I have not explained myself well. I have much respect for Doctor Denis. I accept that his treatments are controversial, but that does not mean that they may not advance medical science. There is risk associated with all new treatments, but that does not mean they should be summarily dismissed….”

“Semantics, doctor,” I say sharply.

“No, my lord! Consider Ambroise Pare: a century ago his revolutionary innovations were criticised and condemned. Now he is considered a pioneer of battlefield medicine.”

“And you still deny there was a third blood transfer?” I see a vein throbbing in his temple.

“Yes, that is correct. There was no third blood transfer.”

“But Doctor Martiniere says that there was, and that you were present.”

“Then he is…mistaken.”

I have heard enough. I get up from my chair and gesture to an Officer of the Guard. I see t the doctor flush under the contempt of my gaze. “I am innocent of wrong-doing, my lord,” he gasps.

I shake my head at him. “We will see about that,” I bellow.

**Chapter 24**

**Athénaïs** **Chernier**

I am worried about Guillaume. I find him very handsome and I sometimes think that I behave in a way that is too forward when in his presence. I confess that I try to impress him, but he does not see me as a woman, only as a girl, which is why I sometimes get carried away and become angry and say too much. My father has warned me about this: that my behaviour is sometimes unladylike, but it makes no difference. And now Guillaume is going to marry Anne Turgot, who everyone knows is a great beauty, so why would he even look at me…

**Chapter 25**

**Anne Turgot**

Guillaume can be such a fool at times, but I love him with all my heart. My brother is determined to destroy him and I will fight him over this, but I am merely a woman and this is a man’s world.

I had not heard from my love for many days, then out of the blue, he sends me a note saying he has been summoned to a meeting with the Lieutenant-General! I knew he would be required to answer questions about his interest – no, I should say obsession – with Doctor Denis and his blood transfer experiments. I only learned that he had been detained when he sent me a second note after his release. I now know that my brother was aware of both these notes and was much angered by what he considers to be my show of treachery and Guillaume’s obstinacy. I fear for the future because my brother is a cruel and vengeful man.

This morning, Thomas burst into my sitting room where I was at work with my embroidery, waving a piece of paper at me. “He has sent you another note!” he shouts. Of course, I know whom he means, but I pretend ignorance, “Who is ‘he’, Thomas?” I ask quietly. Out of the corner of my eye, I see that Danielle had retreated into her sewing and appears quite deaf. I have no doubt that she is my brother’s informant.

My brother’s face is a mask of anger. He does not tolerate defiance. “You know who I mean! Do not play the innocent with me, Anne: Varenne!” he snarls. “I warned you not to have anything to do with him.”

“What does he want?” I ask quietly, still with my head bowed over my embroidery, as if uninterested in the conversation.

“He is not to contact you again. Do you understand?” he hisses.

I look up and shrug, like this is a matter of little importance to me. “Yes, brother, as you wish.”

He comes to stand over me, leans forward to whisper. “Do not play games with me, Anne,” he says very softly, his breath against my ear and I am reminded of the spoilt boy he once was, now the spoilt man.

“Yes, Thomas.”

His hand comes down heavily on my shoulder, grips hard for a moment, then he walks to the blazing fire, tears up the letter, throws it into the flames then storms out of the room.

I am enraged by my brother’s conceit, though I have managed to keep my face composed throughout the exchange. And when I look to Danielle, she avoids my eye. She truly is a snake in the grass.

Thomas has made his opposition to our relationship clear from the start. At first, I looked to my father for support, but he now holds his son in such thrall, I must act with care and caution since Thomas is planning to have me married before the summer and will have me sent away to Venice should I defy him. Even so, after Thomas has departed, I write a letter to Guillaume’s parents, which I will attempt to have delivered in secret. I must try to speak with my beloved as soon as possible.

**Chapter 26**

**Nicolas de la Reynie**

Against the wishes of my Chief Investigator, I have decided to take Doctor Chernier to the ancient burial ground of the Holy Innocents church so that he may examine Mauroy’s body.

What I find most interesting is that Mauroy’s corpse has been placed in a vault, which is unusual since the bodies of common people are normally cast into open pits. Only the rich or the well-connected are given the privilege of a crypt. It is this anomaly that raises a number of questions.

The day is freezing. At the entrance to the graveyard, Gagnon, who is wrapped up against the arctic chill, awaits my arrival. As I climb from the coach, he is stamping his feet to keep warm. He introduces me to two men who stand shivering with him: Father Didier, a local priest, and Doctor Patin, the Dean of the Medical Faculty of the University of Paris. Like Gagnon, both men are cloaked against the cold, their faces white and pinched. I have ordered that Perrine Mauroy also be present. She is wearing a flimsy dress and shawl and is shivering violently with a guard at each elbow.

When Doctor Chernier steps from the coach, he looks bewildered. Then he spots Madame Mauroy and his confusion increases. “I don’t understand why I am here,” he says.

“You are here to examine Mauroy’s body.”

He absorbs this information with a frown. “Was he not simply put into a grave-pit?”

“No.”

I see that his dark eyes are intent, that he wishes to ask more questions, but I raise a hand to forestall further comment. The priest, I notice, is smiling and puffed up like a cockerel, no doubt pleased to find himself in such illustrious company, whereas Doctor Patin in his dark gowns, remains stern-faced and serious. “My lord,” he wheezes, bowing low then nods to Doctor Chernier, who responds in kind. Finally, I turn my attention to Madame Mauroy, who looks terrified. “You are here as a witness,” I say. She whimpers on being spoken to then suddenly collapses to the ground in an untidy heap. I am unmoved as she is hauled unceremoniously to her feet by one of the guards. “You must bear up, Madame,” I say then turn to the priest, "Lead the way, Father.”

Along one wall of the cemetery is a long, narrow building with a sloping roof. This is where the private crypts are housed.

We are taken to door number seven and the priest produces a set of keys. “Do you wish me to open?” he asks. I nod, and he works at the heavy padlock then the gate creaks open. Father Didier moves to step into the chamber, but Gagnon grabs him by the arm and hauls him back. “You are to stay outside,” he says, much to the man’s astonishment. “Just tell us where the body is.”

The priest, clearly taken aback by such rough treatment, opens his mouth in protest then closes it again. “It is on the right,” he says deflated. “The new one…”

The two doctors and I file into the gloomy interior and stand in the centre of the room while the others remain outside. The vault is much deeper than it looks from the outside and is stacked from floor to ceiling with caskets of various shapes and sizes, perhaps as many as fifty in number. Dust swirls around our ankles. It’s everywhere; on the floor, on the walls, on the coffins; everywhere. There is in the room a smell of death and decay.

“Who is entombed here?” I ask.

Father Didier has taken up station at the entrance. “This is home to many families, my lord,” he answers.

“I assume there’s a cost for such special treatment.”

He gives a small, obsequious bow, his mouth a thin line, like acknowledging an unpalatable truth. “Families of substance often wish to make a donation to the Church, my lord…”

“And in return?”

He frowns at me. “In return we pray daily for the souls of the departed, my lord.”

“By name?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Do you also pray for those less fortunate; for those thrown into the pit?”

Clearly, the question offends him, but he pretends careful thought. “Yes, they are also mentioned in our prayers, my lord,” he lies.

“By name?”

He gestures indifferently with his hands. “There are so many, my lord…”

Or, to put it another way: the Church, ever avaricious, compels the rich to buy their way into heaven, while the poor are condemned to purgatory.

Mauroy’s coffin, I see, is set on top of a pile of similar caskets and being shiny and new is easy to identify. “Who paid for this, Madame Mauroy?” I call out, but it is again the priest who answers “The blessed church paid, my lord. It was the least we could do for someone exploited by the unscrupulous.”

“Who is unscrupulous, Father?”

“The blood doctor, my lord.”

“So, the Church has deemed him guilty as charged?”

“His Eminence the Archbishop of Paris has decreed his actions heretical, my lord. Is not his guilt obvious to all?”

“Not to me,” I reply shortly, unguarded for a moment, but have the satisfaction of seeing colour rush into his face. Aggrieved, he puffs out his chest and I prepare for another outburst, but he surprises me by falling back into silence.

“Let us move the casket to the entrance where it is light,” I say.

Four soldiers are brought into the room. They lift Mauroy’s coffin from the stack and set it down near the doorway. When Gagnon steps forward, hammer and chisel in hand, Father Didier comes to life again. “This is sacrilege,” he shouts out, but apart from Perrine Mauroy, who gives a squeak of alarm, no one pays him any attention.

The moment when the coffin is cracked, Doctor Chernier does a most strange thing: he steps forward, pushes Gagnon out of the way and goes swiftly onto his knees. He runs his nose along the edge of the casket, sniffing repeatedly. Gagnon stares at him as if he has gone quite mad and Doctor Patin appears totally perplexed by such eccentric behaviour. Then Chernier looks over his shoulder at me. “Arsenic, my lord,” he says.

At this remark Doctor Patin looks shocked then he also gets on his knees, similarly sniffing. The two physicians look at each other.

“Well?” I say.

“I believe my learned colleague is correct,” Doctor Patin replies.

Gagnon, I observe, is staring at Madame Mauroy who has lost all her colour then he switches his gaze to the priest who is regarding the scene with horror. Without another word, he levers off the top of the coffin, which clatters noisily to the floor.

Mauroy’s corpse is wrapped in a shroud. Without another word, Gagnon draws a knife from beneath his jacket, slashes at the cloth, wrenching at the pall like a man possessed, tearing it apart, exposing first a thin, naked chest, then a face marbled by veins. “Now we can see properly,” he mutters then he steps back to give the two doctors access to the body. They lean forward, bending over the casket, totally absorbed.

“There is some discolouration of the skin,” Chernier says, “but the cold has retarded decomposition.”

“Yes.”

Doctor Chernier turns to Madame Mauroy. “What were your husband’s symptoms before he died, Madame?” he asks.

She has gone even paler, if that is possible, and is shuddering. She looks about to faint and does not answer.

“Speak up!” I say, and she begins to gasp for breath. “He was very sick, sir…” she whispers.

“Did he puke? Did he shit himself?” Patin asks.

When she collapses again, I turn my attention back to the corpse. “Close the coffin. We are leaving.” At the doorway I turn to Madame Mauroy, who is being supported, a soldier at each arm. “You have some questions to answer, Madame,” I say and see her convulse with fear.

**Chapter 27**

**Anne Turgot**

For my afternoon stroll I choose the Tuileries gardens. As always, I am chaperoned by Danielle and, more recently at my brother’s insistence, a male servant, who walks ten paces behind us. Near an ornamental fountain I spot Guillaume, who is hiding behind a chestnut tree. I glance in his direction, give a tiny shake of my head and see him nod in response. I stroll down the central avenue for a time then turn and head for a bench near to where he had been hiding. Pointing to a fruit stand in the distance I ask the manservant to fetch a drink for Danielle and I. “We will rest here and catch our breath for a while,” I say.

“You can come out now, Guillaume,” I call out when the two of us are seated. As he steps into the open, I see Daniella’s eyes widen in surprise.

“Mademoiselle,” she says with alarm, “this is not permitted.”

“Silence,” I snap. “Guillaume is my friend. I will talk with him.”

“Your brother will be angry.”

“My brother is always angry,” I say. “I shall not tell him of this meeting, will you?”

Danielle drops her eyes but says nothing. She looks guilty, as well she should. “I know you have betrayed me, Danielle,” I say, and see her jolt with shock. She is suddenly flushed with embarrassment. “I suggest that you walk over to the lake to feed the ducks then you can honestly declare that you know nothing of what was said.”

She glances at me and I can tell she is uncertain what to do, but after a moment she gets up and walks away. I know, however, that Guillaume and I will only have a short time to speak.

“My brother is planning to marry me to Auguste Magnoac, Vicomte Magnoac’s son, but I will not do it,” I say, the moment he sits down.

My beloved looks distressed. He takes my hand; a touch so gentle it leaves me breathless.

“Have arrangements been made?”

“Yes, I will be married at the end of the month.”

I am amazed that I can speak so cooly with my heart beating like a drum.

My beloved kisses my hand then I kiss him on the lips. “I don’t want…” he begins, then closes his eyes. “Why?” he asks.

“He has a title…And a name two centuries old.”

“And your father? Can he not intervene?”

Once I could appeal to papa, but those days have gone. “He will do what my brother says.”

Guillaume falls back into silence and stares into the distance and I look across the gardens. I place my other hand over his. My heart is pounding. Overhead, a fleet of scudding clouds sail across the blue-blue sky.

“What of your mother?” he asks finally.

“She is against the match, but she is only a woman…As am I.”

“Why is your brother so against us?”  
 “You know why!” I exclaim. “This is business. If the *Jonkeer* fails to return, your family will be ruined, and my family will profit from your disaster …”

“Thomas has never liked me…”

“He dislikes your family and he thinks you too headstrong.” I feel my eyes fill with tears, which I try to dash away with the back of my hand. “I am betrothed,” I whisper and he raises my hand to his lips. I give a sob. I can’t help it. “I will not marry him,” I repeat defiantly, the words drying in my mouth.

“We will find a way to be together,” he says, though his voice lacks conviction.

“I don’t love him!” I shout. “I hate him. I love…” I leave the sentence unfinished because my world is collapsing. Guillaume puts his arm around me and suddenly, I am sobbing, my whole body shuddering. “I love you,” he says.

“Perhaps if your business…” I manage to say, but this is another futile hope and tears overtake me. I try to compose myself then a shadow falls over us. I look up to see the manservant has returned, Danielle behind him. “Master expressly forbade this meeting, my lady,” he says sharply, glaring at Guillaume.

Protest is useless. I stand up and brush down my dress. I try to hold my head high when I say, “I love you Guillaume, but I think we shall not meet again.” I pull him forward and kiss him on the mouth, a kiss so full of desire and anger I am forced to push him away. I am trembling so much my hands are shaking.

He stares at me with a face so weary and so sad that I feel my heart break. Desolate, I turn and walk away.

**Chapter 28**

**Guillaume Varenne**

After I had spoken with Anne, I walked home in a state of shock. That evening, I sit in my room dispirited, not knowing what to do. Eventually, I rouse myself enough to write a letter begging her to resist her brother, but an hour after it is delivered it is returned unopened.

To make matters worse, the atmosphere at home has become impossible. My father has received a letter from the Turgots demanding repayment of the loan he took out with them. They have given him twenty-one days to repay the money, after which they will foreclose. He is now in the foulest mood imaginable since if the loan remains unpaid, we will be both ruined *and* homeless.

I again set off for Theo’s house. As before, Athénaïs lets me in and takes me through to the parlour where I wait impatiently for Theo, who is attending to a patient. When I eventually limp into his consulting room, he puts down his book he is studying and motions me over to an examination couch. “I told you to rest your leg, Guillaume!” he says sharply.

“My leg is fine,” I say, at which remark he shakes his head, bids me lie down and proceeds to examine my shin yet again. Athénaïs, who has followed me into the room, throws me a stern look.

“So, to what do we owe this pleasure?” he asks as I flinch and gasp at his prodding.

“I… came to find out… what happened … when you met de la Reynie,” I stammer in reply. My answer, of course, is only half the truth: I also needed to get out of the house for my own sanity.

Having finished his examination, he goes back to his desk, where he sits, arms folded and looks at me. “Have you had breakfast?” he asks.

Up until that moment, food was the last thing on my mind, but suddenly, I am ravenous. I realise have not eaten for almost twenty-four hours. I shake my head.

“Will you get our guest some broth, Athénaïs,” he says, then draws out a chair for me to sit next to him. It is only when I have a bowl of broth in front of me that he deems to continue, “I accompanied the Lieutenant-General to the church of the Holy Innocents.”

“Why?” I say, tearing off a hunk of bread and stuffing it into my mouth.

“To witness the opening of Mauroy’s coffin…”

“What?” I manage to get out.

“I was required to examine the corpse,” he says flatly. “Madame Mauroy was also there,” he adds, “as was a priest and Doctor Patin a member of the Order of Physicians. The moment the coffin was cracked I smelt arsenic, as did my colleague. I think that Madame Mauroy now has some questions to answer.”

I have questions of my own, but it is Athénaïs, who has been listening to our conversation, who speaks out before I have a chance to voice them. “I feel sorry for her,” she says.

We both turn to stare at her.

“She is a woman and is now at the mercy of powerful men. Things will not go well for her.”

She is right, of course, but callously, my first thought is not pity for the poor woman, but a flaring of hope that this new evidence would deflect attention from me.

“She must explain herself,” I say coldly.

Athénaïs blinks at me and opens her mouth to argue but is prevented from speaking by Theo who holds up his hand to her. “That is enough, daughter,” he says quietly. She abruptly goes bright red, looks angrily from her father to me, then back to her father. “Things will turn out badly for her whether innocent or guilty,” she declares, before giving her father another black look. “I apologise for showing such womanly weakness as to speak out of turn, Monsieur Varenne,” she says glaring at her father. When she leaves the room, I see that her fists are clenched.

After the door closes with a crash, Theo sighs and turns back to me. “I’m sorry, Guillaume. My daughter’s pride carries her away at times. I think I may be guilty of indulging her too much.” I shrug. “And she can also be sometimes headstrong. That is a quality she got from her mother, I think.”

“But she is right, all the same.”

At this remark he drops his gaze and falls silent, but not before I see his eyes fill with trembling tears. “Yes, she is. Athénaïs reminds me very much of Madeline,” he says softly.

The loss of his wife has been a most telling blow, one from which he is yet to recover, which is why I choose not to respond. Instead, I return to my food, so he has time to compose himself.

“So, why are you really here, Guillaume?” he asks finally.

I sigh. “I needed to escape from the house…my father…the business is in trouble.”

“The ship?”

“Yes. if the *Jonkeer* fails to return soon, we will be ruined.”

“Does your mother know?”

“Yes. The atmosphere at home is intolerable...”

“And Anne?”

“She is to be married…” I suddenly find it difficult to breathe. “I will not survive another visit to the torture chamber, Theo,” I confess.

He puts his hand on my shoulder. Words, we both know, are pointless. “I have been ordered to again present myself before the Lieutenant-General, tomorrow,” he says quietly.

**Chapter 29**

**Henri-Martin Martiniére**

Despite the irreverence and indifference, I have experienced from de la Reynie, I have decided to again petition for the arrest of Doctor Denis and his associates. My friends, Lamy and Perrault are otherwise engaged this morning, so I must go alone.

Yesterday, I received a message from his Eminence, the Archbishop, informing me that the Lieutenant-General had visited the Church of the Holy Innocents, where he had ordered the opening of Mauroy’s casket and that there is now talk of poison. I wrote back immediately: ‘I clap my hands at this news, Your Eminence. Here is yet more evidence of foul deeds to condemn the heretics.’

When I am escorted into de la Reynie’s office he is seated behind his desk writing in a ledger. Over to one side the hated Pierre Gagnon, his Chief Investigator is standing arms folded. Why, I wonder, does he never sit down? A scribe is also in attendance. When de la Reynie finally looks up I glare at him, determined to convey the seriousness of the matter. He barely nods his head in acknowledgement of my presence.

“You wish to see me, doctor,” he says. He does not invite me to sit.

“Yes. I have been informed that Antoine Mauroy was poisoned.” I wait for a response, but his countenance remains unreadable, so I continue. “I think that you have failed to grasp the gravity of the matter, sir. Denis and his cohorts are clearly murderers and heretics and abominations to the Holy Catholic Church, King Louis XIV and our lord God himself.”

He raises an eyebrow. “Really? And is there anyone else they have offended?”

This is a bad beginning and I am truly shocked by such flippancy. I throw out my arms in a gesture of amazement. “My lord, Denis and Emmerez are nothing less than foul assassins. They should be arrested and charged with murder today before they bring the entire medical profession into disrepute.”

He puts down the quill he has been holding. “Doctor Martiniere, we have had this conversation before. You again claim murder. On what grounds do you make this charge?”

“Mauroy has been poisoned. You have seen that evidence with your own eyes, have you not?”

“Have I?”

Is this man a fool, I think? “Arsenic has been used, sir.”

“Who told you that?”

“Father Didier reports to His Eminence, the Archbishop…”

“Ah, the priest…”

I expect him to continue, but he falls silent again.

“I am merely carrying out my sacred duty as a physician, my lord,” I say.

“Doctor Denis would make the same claim,” he retorts, and I feel my anger rise, though I do my best to suppress it.

“Then he is lying, my lord,” I say calmly. “His motivation is personal gain.”

“And Doctor Chernier…”

I grit my teeth. “He is misguided,” I say grimly. “I attended Mauroy’s blood transfers at the behest of my learned colleagues purely in the interests of science so that I may condemn all that I see. Chernier, however, is giving his support to this heterodoxy. His actions will not go unpunished.”

“And Monsieur Varenne?”

“A foolish young man, who through ignorance and perhaps misguided loyalty, has become embroiled in evil.”

The Lieutenant-General leans back to stare at the ceiling in thoughtful pose. After a moment he picks up his quill again and makes a note of something on a square of paper. I take the opportunity to look around. Gagnon is standing with his hands clasped on his belly. He is staring at me, though his expression is unreadable.

“Is not Doctor Denis supported by his patron, Monsieur Montmor?” de la Reynie asks. “Is he also to be condemned?”

“My lord, my opposition to Monsieur Montmor is well known. I have requested that he cease his support of Denis…”

“That is not an answer to my question, sir.”

I huff before replying: Lord Montmor is a man of power and influence, whatever his failings. I must tread carefully. “Despite his many virtues, his lordship is not a trained physician. He may have misunderstood the situation…”

“He would claim to be acting purely in the interests of science, Doctor Martiniere.”

I have never heard such rot! Denis is a criminal and Montmor his enabler. He must be made to answer for his crimes.

“Then he is mistaken, my lord,” I reply with a smile.

I see de la Reynie glance to his Chief Investigator. “Both Doctor Chernier and Monsieur Varenne say that no third transfusion took place…”

“That is a lie.”

“Then you witnessed this third experiment yourself, Doctor?”

“No, I did not.”

“Then how can you be so certain.”

“Because I was informed by someone who did, my lord.”

His dark glance flares with interest. “Really? Who?”

“Mauroy’s wife, sir. The transfer occurred at Mauroy’s house. Perrine Mauroy was present throughout. She saw the whole thing.”

“So, she is merely an innocent observer. Then why has she absconded?”

“Absconded, my lord?”

“After we left the cemetery yesterday, she vanished. I have my men out looking for her.”

**Chapter 30**

**Theo Chernier**

I have decided to visit my good friend Hugo Varenne this morning, under the subterfuge of checking to make sure that Guillaume’s leg is recovering.

A servant opens the door and leads me to my friend’s office, where papers and documents are strewn in untidy abandon around the room and there is a spill of ink across the desktop. Hugo, who is standing at a window when I enter, turns but makes no effort to greet me. There is no colour in his face, he has dark rings under his eyes and looks exhausted. “I have come to check on your son’s leg,” I say.

“Upstairs,” he grunts then turns his back again.

Later, I return to my friend’s office on the pretext of delivering a report. “Guillaume’s leg is recovering well,” I say.

He has remained standing at the window. “Good,” he manages to say, though it is clear that his mind is elsewhere. There is a tenseness about him that is unmistakeable. I know that he is watching a group of merchants who are gathered in a huddle on the quayside at the front of the building.

“Is there trouble, Hugo?” I ask.

I see him freeze then slowly turn. “Trouble?” he queries. “What trouble?”

“There are rumours…,” I say cautiously.

“You now listen to rumours, do you, Theo?” His stare is hard and malevolent, his eyes blazing.

“Listening is not the same as believing.”

At this remark he suddenly cackles with laughter and in that moment, I fear for his sanity. Then, as swiftly, his mood changes. “Lies, all lies.”

“There is talk of a ship that has gone missing…”

“Must I listen to this…this…poison in my own home! I did not expect this of you, Theo.”

I open my mouth to protest, but he speaks again before I have chance to respond, “Get out!”

“Hugo…”

He points to the door. His hand is shaking: “GET OUT!”

“As you wish,” I say sadly and leave the room.

**Chapter 31**

**Guillaume Varenne**

Ten minutes after Theo leaves, my father storms out of the building, raging about interfering doctors. The moment he steps outside, he is accosted by a gaggle of creditors, all baying for their money. Pushing through the crowd, he strides off towards the waterfront, creditors in tow.

An hour later, I am sitting at my father’s desk pretending to work when I hear a commotion in the outer office and recognise the angry voice of Thomas Turgot. With sinking heart, I go to the door. The tableau I see is disturbing, Thomas is berating the Chief Clerk who is attempting to bar him from advancing on the master’s office while the junior clerks at their writing tables look up in alarm.

“Thank you, André,” I say to the Chief Clerk stepping out of the office, much to his relief. “Please, come in, Thomas.” I throw a stern look around the room. “The rest of you, return to your work.”

Thomas follows me into my father’s office and I move behind the desk. “Please take a seat,” I say. I mean to sound kind, but my voice is cold and he remains standing. I watch him as he takes in the confusion of the room; a fat, arrogant man, red-faced and perspiring who *thinks* *to bestride the world like a Colossus.*

“I have spoken with your sister,” I say.

He smiles at this remark. “Yes, I know. A *secret* meeting in the gardens,” then his gaze moves to the clutter on the desktop. “I shall enjoy seeing you ruined and thrown out of this office,” he sneers.

I feel my own anger rising, but try to remain calm. “Is that what you have come to tell me, Thomas? We used to be…I was going to say, ‘friends’ once, but that isn’t true, is it?”

“No, we were never friends. You were pursuing my sister. She liked you. I simply chose not to intervene.”

“But now you have.”

“Yes, you have no future. Your company is ruined. I cannot allow my sister to marry a man without prospects.”

“The *Jonkeer* may yet return. We still have a breathing space. My father is at the docks now because we have heard the ship has been sighted,” I lie.

He grins at this fiction. “Your father gambled and the gamble has failed…”

“Not yet,” I retort.

“…he had ambitions above his station. For my company the failure of one ship will be a loss, a great - and costly - disappointment, but for you it will be a disaster.”

“If the ship fails to return, we will recover.”

He chuckles at this remark. “If you think that then you are a fool! Your creditors are already knocking at your door. Soon you will be bankrupt.”

I bristle at this remark, but we both know that my father has borrowed all that he can, that no one will lend us any more money, that everything is mortgaged…

“I love Anne and Anne loves me,” I say foolishly.

This time he guffaws. “What has love got to do with anything? You cannot support a wife. I doubt if you can even support yourself. She is to be married within the month. I am here to tell you to stay away from her. Do you understand? STAY AWAY FROM HER!”

I try to keep the shock from my face as he turns to leave. I think of arguing with him, but know it would be futile. With his hand on the door, he says, “We will not speak again, Varenne.”

When he opens the door, two militiamen are standing stony-faced in the outer office. In front of them, arms clasped upon his belly, is Pierre Gagnon.

“Guillaume Varenne, you are under arrest and are to come with me,” the Chief Investigator says.

“Well, well, well,” Thomas grins on seeing them. “I think you have an appointment with the rack, Varenne.” Then he laughs and pushes boldly past them.

**Chapter 32**

**Theo Chernier**

When I am escorted into the Lieutenant-General’s office he barely acknowledges my presence, which is not a good sign.

“I consider myself well read in matters of the law and science, but I am not knowledgeable about blood transfer, which is why you are here,” he says curtly. He does not invite me to sit, which I perceive to be another slight. “Your colleagues at the University of Paris are against the practice, is that not correct, Doctor Chernier?”

“Some of them, yes, my lord.”

“Some of them, or most of them?”

“Most, my lord.”

“But not you.”

“I think it is too soon to form an opinion.”

“Really?” he says sceptically.

I take a deep breath. “Those in favour sometimes cite Medea, the sorceress of Greek mythology; she was alleged to have rejuvenated her father-in-law through blood transfer. And in the 14th century, a travelling priest named Friar Odoric, wrote that he met various hybrid creatures on his journeys, including a hirsute, harp-playing woman and a hog-faced, cloven-footed gentlewoman. Both, he claimed, had been transformed by foreign blood… ”

“But you are not convinced.”

“They are just stories, my lord. Superstitions, not modern science.”

“So, if you are against the practice, why have you supported Denis?”

“I have neither supported nor condemned the practice, my lord. I have only observed.”

“A lawyer’s excuse,” he says brutally. “That will not save you from the gallows!”

I feel my legs begin to tremble. The comment is like a blow that leaves me breathless and panting for air. The clerk, I see, is writing furiously.

“It is true that the practice of blood transfusion is controversial,” I gasp, only to hear him guffaw with amusement.

“It is a lot more than controversial,” Doctor,” he laughs cruelly.

“It is not only in Paris that these experiments are taking place, my lord,” I reply. “They are happening in England, too. Recently, members of the English Royal Society tried to discover whether transfusing blood from one animal to another would change the recipient’s behaviour and appearance – whether a fierce dog would become a cowardly dog, for example.”

“And did it?”

“The English claimed that the recipient dog became more vigorous.”

“So, now you claim that blood transfusions are good!” Everything about him now is full of scepticism.

“No, my lord, that’s not what I am saying; that’s what the English are saying. Following these assertions, our own Monsieur Perrault of the French Academy, formed a committee, which met in the King’s Library, to investigate the matter of transfusions. He also decided to go a step further and join two dogs so they would trade blood. That is, each would transfuse into the other...”

“What happened?”

“The dogs died. Now he has declared that the English have either exaggerated or are lying about their claims, and he has many supporters and a war of words has broken out between the English and French and which is why such vitriol is directed at Doctor Denis by so many of my eminent colleagues, both here and in England…”

“But those are beast-to-beast experiments! They have nothing to do with medicine.”  
 “No, my lord, they have everything to do with medicine. But it is also about reputation, and not least of all, ego.”

He scowls, then allows himself a smirk. “So, where does murder and poison fit into this complicated picture?”

I am confused by the question. “Fit in, my lord? I’m not sure what you mean…”

“You claim to have smelt arsenic. Therefore, you have proof, do you not, that Mauroy was poisoned – murdered - that his death has nothing to do with blood transfer?”

“No, my lord, I do not have proof.”

He stares at me, and I see his flash of annoyance. “Why not? Yesterday, you were convinced that arsenic was present when you examined the body.”

“Yes, that is true, but I cannot give you proof that he died from arsenic poisoning, only a conviction…”

“Convictions have no place in a court of law, doctor,” he snaps.

“Yes, my lord, but that is the best I can offer: a conviction based upon knowledge, experience and medical training.”

“And does Doctor Patin agree?”

“You must ask him, my lord.”

“I am asking you, doctor,” he growls. He is angry, I can tell that. I feel I must show no weakness. “No, he does not.”

“Why not?”

“Doctor Patin is bitterly opposed to the practice of blood transfer. He contends that it is a mortal sin and undoubtably the cause of Mauroy’s death.”

“Not poison.”

“Not poison.”

The Lieutenant-General suddenly raises his fist and bangs it down on the desk with such ferocity, I see an inkwell jump. “Good God, man! You have no idea what killed him, have you?”

I try to remain calm. “The manner of Mauroy’s death – the vomiting, the stomach upsets, the dermatitis and skin discolouration - suggest arsenic, but I cannot be certain.”

“This is not helping!” he bellows.

I stay silent.

“What can you tell me about Perrine Mauroy?” he says a moment later. “You had met her before yesterday, had you not?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“So?”

“I’m afraid I can tell you very little.”

I see him blink then he fixes me with a malevolent stare. “That is not good enough, doctor. You observed her when she visited her husband, did you not?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Then tell me something about her. What was their relationship?”

“I have only seen them together briefly, my lord. Their relationship appeared a little strained, but perhaps that was to be expected given the circumstances…”

“What circumstances?”

“They were under scrutiny all the time. I did not see anything to suggest their relationship was not that of a normal married couple.”

“Whatever that means,” he mutters wearily.

Clearly, the Lieutenant-General is not satisfied with my responses, but I refuse to manufacture answers when no answers present themselves. He stands up and moves away from his desk to stare out of the window.

“You visited Mauroy four times at Lord Montmor’s estate, did you not?” he says eventually.

“Yes, my lord.”

“The day after the first blood transfer and three times after the second.”

“That is correct, my lord,” I stammer. This man has spies everywhere!

“Tell me about your last visit,” he orders.

I take a moment to cast my mind back. The Lieutenant-General has turned around to glare at me. He has folded his arms and his look is brutal.

“Guillaume and I were taken to the library. Lord Montmor, I recall, appeared to be in an ebullient mood. ‘This man creates miracles,’ he said, slapping Doctor Denis on the shoulder. Then he herded us back into the corridor and led us to Mauroy’s room. At Mauroy’s door Doctor Denis took a key from his pocket, unfastened the lock and entered without knocking. Despite it being late morning, the room was in darkness. Doctor Denis immediately, went to the window and cast back the heavy grey curtains. ‘It is too sombre in here,’ he said.

“Describe the room.”

“It was drab and in need of painting.”

“Was there any furniture?”

“Yes, a bed and side table plus a small writing desk near the window where the remains of a meal – a chicken carcass by the look of it and an empty bottle of wine – had been abandoned. There was a single chair pushed back against the wall.”

“And Mauroy?”

“He had been sleeping, but grunted as the door was thrown open then sat up in bed, blinking. ‘Good day, doctor,’ he said calmly as if such interruptions were commonplace. He looked in surprisingly robust health and the madness that I had observed at the time of the second blood transfer appeared absent. Indeed, he looked bright-eyed and alert. ‘You look well today, Antoine,” Doctor Denis said. ‘I see you have had lunch.’ ‘Yes, sir,’ Mauroy answered, gesturing at the table. ‘I have eaten half a capon washed down with a glass of His Honour’s fine claret. I am making an effort to regain my strength.’ Doctor Denis then introduced Monsieur Varenne and myself, even though we had visited before…”

“Did Mauroy recognise you?”

“Oh, yes, my lord. He remembered seeing us at the blood transfers, which I confess surprised me.”

“Carry on.”

“Varenne and I bowed to the patient, who responded similarly while sitting up in bed. ‘I have summoned these two gentlemen so that you can describe to them your present condition,’ Denis said. At this statement, Monsieur Mauroy paused to think then pushed himself up in bed, smoothing his hair and tugging at his nightshirt. ‘My condition, sirs, is excellent, as you can see,’ he said. ‘I have been treated extremely well and I am in the best of health.’ Denis then invited me to examine the patient, which I did. I went to the bed and took hold of Mauroy’s wrist checking his pulse, which remained strong and steady. Then I looked into his eyes and asked him to put out his tongue. Mauroy complied without complaint. He also held up his arm, the one into which the blood transfer pipe had been fitted, which I examined for any signs of infection. There were none. I also noted the rich colour in his cheeks. He did indeed look a picture of health. He also held out his arm to Monsieur Varenne to show how well the incision was healing.”

“Did you ask him any questions?”

“Yes, my lord. I asked him how he felt and if there was anything he wanted. He replied that he wished to be visited by a priest so that he could confess his sins, which I confess astonished me. He said that his behaviour had not been exemplary in the past, that he recognised the folly of his ways and now wished to unburden his soul. Doctor Denis said that his madness was the result of his over-hot blood, but that this condition had been rectified and the balance of his humours had been restored. Then Doctor Denis stepped forward and offered his hand to Mauroy, who shook it strongly. “Thank you, sir,” the patient said.”

“So, are you are saying that the blood transfers had been a success?” the Lieutenant-General interrupted.  
 “My lord, one success – or failure - does not prove anything. After that, we departed the room.”

The Lieutenant-General looks thoughtful as I finish my story and I stand awkwardly, uncertain what to do. “During one of your visits to the Montmor estate, Madame Mauroy was arguing with her husband, was she not?” he says quietly.

“No, my lord. Who told you that?” I ask, but he ignores my question. His expression is suddenly hard and cold. “Did they argue when he was given a third blood transfer? You visited Mauroy at his abode two weeks ago…” he says.

I am baffled by this sudden change of subject. “Yes,” I manage to say.

“So, you were present when Mauroy received a third blood transfer the day before he died.”

“Yes…no, my lord…”

“Yes? No? What in God’s name does that mean?”

“Yes, I visited Monsieur Mauroy the day before he died, my lord…but there was no blood transfer.”

He shakes his head and walks back to his desk. “You are lying to me, doctor,” he shouts and suddenly I am breathless again and shaking with fear.

**Chapter 33**

**Henri Louis de Montmor**

I resent the fact that I am being slandered in the streets. How dare these little, unimportant people speak of murder and cast aspersions on my name and that of my good friend, Jean-Baptiste.

I remember the last time Madame Mauroy, odious creature that she is, called upon her husband. At the time, I was alone in the house. That was four months ago. She arrived shortly after lunch and hammered on the door demanding entry. She was no longer the timid creature she had been on the occasion of her first visit.

My doorman attempted to send her away, but when she refused to leave, he directed her to the servants’ entrance around the side then sent a message to me. Infuriated, I instructed that she be escorted to her husband’s room.

When I arrived, Mauroy was sitting up in bed with a scowl on his face and his wife was standing next to him with her back to me, which is why she was not aware of my presence until I spoke out. “It is time you disciplined your wife, Mauroy,” I said.

When she spun round, I saw from her expression, quickly concealed, that she was very angry about something. Then she did a most ridiculous thing: she threw herself on the ground crawled towards me on all fours and put her arms around my knees. It was a most undignified scene and I kicked out at her and bellowed at my doorman to pull the repulsive woman from me. He literally had to prise her fingers off my person. Eventually, she stood up, stepped back and pressed herself against the wall, like some cornered animal. Her sudden changes of demeanour are quite amazing.

“Why are you here, madame?” I demanded when I deemed her in full control of herself.

“I wished to see my husband, sir,” she whispered.

“Well, you have seen him and now you must leave,” I said. I turned to my servant. “Remove this person!” I ordered then watched as she was dragged from the room.

“Your wife is not welcome here, Mauroy,” I said.

He was looking out the window. “The weather is improving today,” he answered, “which is good since turnips like both rain and sun. “Do you grow turnips, sir?” he said looking at me.

I had no idea what this idiot was talking about. “No, I do not!”

“Then you must raise pigs! It is the nature of the educated man to spend time at his country house. Is that not so, sir?”

The man was nonsensical. What could I say? He was raving and humming a tune to himself. A moment later, Jean-Baptiste stormed into the room, accompanied, to my dismay, by Mauroy’s wife.

“I have just had her removed, sir,” I protested, but he was not listening because he had taken one horrified look at his patient then turned angrily to Mauroy’s wife. “I gave strict instructions that he be left to recover, Madame,” he shouted. “Did I not say that your husband needs time to gather his strength to regain his place in ordinary society? Did you not understand me, Madame?”

She stared back at him, defiantly I thought.

Suddenly, what seemed like a wave of mild terror swept through Mauroy’s body. Uttering a shriek, he began slapping his hands down on the bedspread with all his force. Then he wrenched up the blankets to look beneath the sheets. “I have killed them all,” he grinned.

“My husband is in need of me,” Madame Mauroy declared, but Denis would not hear of it.

“No, Madam, you are the cause of his distress, not the cure. You must leave immediately.”

I had been silent during this brief exchange. “Yes, Jean-Baptiste,” I said, “I have already ejected her once.” Then I rounded on this dangerous woman. “You have spent too much time with your husband, and you have disturbed his equilibrium. You must leave!”

She glared at me and I expected her to argue, but instead, she brushed down the front of her dress curtsied to us both then quietly left the room. Jean-Baptise immediately took hold of his patient’s arm and helped him get back into bed. Mauroy was sobbing, his face streaked with tears and his shoulders heaving.

“Now, come, sir,” Denis said soothingly, “Let us have less of this. I can see that your wife has inflamed your blood, which is not good for your health. I shall have some laudanum brought to you so that the balance of your humours may be restored. Is that to your liking?”

The patient stared at him, though what he was thinking was anyone’s guess. “Yes,” Denis continued, “that will be the answer. Now, lie back, sir.”

Mauroy had finally calmed and allowed himself to be encouraged to lie back in bed. Denis pulled the sheets back up around his chin.

“It is time for you to leave also, Henri,” he said turning to me, “I need to bleed my patient.”

I confess, I did not like his imperious tone, but chose not to argue. Back in the kitchen Madame Mauroy awaited me. She was chewing on a crust of bread. “I must administer to my husband’s needs, sir,” she said, spraying crumbs at me. I glared at the cook.

“I am his wife, sir.”

I regarded this bedraggled creature with contempt, but most of all, I wanted her away.

“This is to speed you on your way,” I said, giving over a silver coin.

She regarded the coin for a moment then dropped a curtsy. It was clear that she was disappointed and had expected more. “It is the wife’s duty to attend to the needs of her husband, my lord,” – she again looked down at the coin in her hand - “this will not answer.”

“No, Madame. You have inflamed your husband and caused a relapse. I require that you leave my house and never return.”

“No, sir…” she looked defiant again.

I felt the surge of my own anger. “What? You dare defy me, woman?”

She stared back at me, at which point my manservant stepped forward and grasped her elbow. At a nod from me he began to drag her from the room. At first, she resisted until the cook stepped forward and took her other arm. A moment later she was gone.

I returned to the patient’s room, where Jean-Baptiste was in the process of putting away his instruments. “Do not be concerned,” he said to his patient “Your wife will not return,” at which point Mauroy came suddenly to life.

“Did you give her money again, my lord?” he asked me. His lucidity seemed to have returned as suddenly as it departed.

“Yes, I gave her a silver coin.”

“Then she will return,” he replied, shaking his head.

**Chapter 34**

**Perrine Mauroy**

I am forced to go into hiding because of my useless husband! I remember his courting of me, his turning my head with stories of his greatness to be, while all the time having his hand up my skirt. Me, the simple milkmaid; he a man risen high above his station and working in a grand house in the city.

He made promises and I believed him. Before we were married, he promised me a house; a fine house, he said, with a view and with a servant to do my bidding and a stable for our animals. After the wedding, he set me up in a hut with a leaking roof and a mud floor where he fucked me every day for a month. Then went away to the city, and I saw him only rarely. When he came home, he used his cock first then his fist. Sometimes, he would give me money.

I laughed in his face when I learned of his scheme to marry a high-born lady. I told him he was a fool, a delusional fool, and, of course, he denied everything, as I knew he would. I called him a liar, which he is. “Once a liar, always a liar!” I said.

Then he went mad, and people told me he had been taken into care by a great lord in a grand estate where I was not welcome. Antoine should have been richly paid, but, in the end, he was just a simple fool used by rich men and received nothing.

Finally, after his usefulness had ended, he came home; a beggar, a drunkard and a wife-beater, which is why I have been forced to take things into my own hands…

**Chapter 35**

**Pierre Gagnon**

After Doctor Chernier was dismissed with a warning not to leave Paris, my lord sent for Doctor Denis. I witnessed the interview that followed.

It was after lunch when Denis marched into the Lieutenant-General’s office, strode up to the desk where his lordship was at work and demanded an explanation for the summons. “Sir,” he protested, “I am here is response to your bidding. I have been slandered and accused of the murder of Antoine Mauroy, which I deny in the strongest terms, and I have also been instructed to attend the office of Commissioner le Cerf, who is to hear my case. These groundless accusations have disrupted my work. I have patients to attend to, sir, and my absence puts their health in jeopardy!”

I would have had him flogged for such insolence, but my lord merely regarded him with cool detachment. “Step back from my table, doctor,” he said softly and when Denis appeared about to ignore this instruction, he put a little more iron in his voice, “If you do not step back, doctor, you will be put in irons until you learn the meaning of respect. DO YOU UNDERSTAND?” he roared.

Denis jerked back in shock and flushed with embarrassment. It was only then, I think, that he realised where he was.

“A charge of murder has been laid against you, sir,” de la Reynie continued quietly. “How do you respond to his charge?”

Denis, who is a tall, arrogant man, shook his head. “I refute the charge, my lord,” he said.

“But Mauroy died the day after you conducted a third blood transfer, Doctor Denis.”

“There was no third blood transfer, my lord,” Denis answered.

“But I have witnesses who observed this procedure.”

“Then they are lying.”

Denis is nothing if not defiant.

“Before he died, your patient had slipped back into madness, did he not,” the Lieutenant-General continued.

“There was a temporary relapse, yes,” Denis conceded, “but it was merely an aberration and was not indicative of Mauroy’s general state of health. If any criticism must be levelled then it should be directed to Madame Mauroy, who is a most dangerous person. She caused his blood to overheat and this upsets the balance of his humours.”

“Your patient is dead, Doctor Denis.”

For the first time, the doctor looked troubled. “Yes, that is unfortunate.”

The Lieutenant-General regarded Denis as if he were a half-wit. “You think it ‘unfortunate’, sir?”

Denis did not answer, though he had the good grace to look discomfited. I saw my lord sigh. He looked to the entrance where an Officer of the Guard stood waiting. The soldier stepped forward and snapped to attention.

“Sergeant, arrest this man!” he said and I watched as Doctor Denis was hustled, protesting, from the room. Then the Lieutenant-General turned to me. “Arrest them all!” he bellowed.

**Chapter 36**

**Anne Turgot**

Guillaume has been arrested. When I heard the news, I was in such distress, I went to speak to my brother. He was in the parlour with Beatrice, but when I tried to raise the subject, he would not listen and turned his face away.

“You must help him,” I said.

“Help him? Help him? Why must I help him?” he laughed.

“Because he is innocent.”

He shook his head. “That is for the court to decide. He has brought catastrophe on himself, Anne. There is nothing I can do.”

“You have influence…you have friends…”

“Friends…influence?” he sneered. “He is accused of murder, and he will hang for his crimes. Do you not understand that?”

I felt my legs begin to shake. “But I love him,” I whispered. “I love him with all my heart.”

At this admission, his face turned hard and cruel. “Then you are a fool. Fortunately, however, I have made arrangements. In time, you will thank me…”

“You expect me to marry that idiot, Magnoac? Never!”

At this remark, Thomas rounded on me red faced and with such brutal fury I stepped back in fear he was about to strike. “You will do as you are told, Anne!” he hissed.

“Thomas…” I heard Beatrice caution.

“You were against him from the start,” I shot back.

“Of course, I was against him! This is business, Anne, nothing more. Business! What do you think buys all your fine dresses, your expensive linens? Fresh air? Wishful thinking?”

“Business that will destroy my betrothed!” I screamed.

Both Thomas and Beatrice looked at me aghast. “Betrothed?” my brother said incredulously. “Betrothed! To Varenne? No, Anne, not in a million years!”

I realised that in my pain I had blurted out the wrong thing and tried to recant, but it was too late. “We have an understanding,” I whispered. Feeling tears well up in my eyes, I dashed them away with the back of my hand.

Thomas grinned. “Have you told father about this ‘understanding’?” he enquired quietly. “Has Varenne formally requested your hand in marriage? Well, Anne, has he?”

“He….”

“Of course, he has not, you stupid girl! If he even dreamt of making such a ridiculous request, he would be thrown out on his ear…”

I could not hold back the tears. “But I love him,” I cried out.

“Love,” my brother sneered, “What has love got to do with anything! Do you not know that his father is about to lose his business? Then how will your *betrothed* support you when he is destitute?” He stared coldly at me. “Well, Anne? Tell me. How?” but I had no answer to give.

Beatrice stepped forward and put her hand on my arm. “It is for the best, Anne,” she said trying to console “He is not a good match for you.”

That is when the room began to swim before my eyes. I vaguely recall Beatrice calling out in the instant before a terrible, terrible darkness swept over me…

## PART TWO

The Trial

**Monday 17 April 1668**

DAY 1

In the cells below the Grand Châtelet, Guillaume Varenne lies curled up and shivering on a bed of damp straw, arms clutched around his knees. In the dimness, the walls glisten wetly.

For a week he has lain in filth, each day interrogated by Pierre Gagnon: the same questions over and over, the same threats, the same scorn, the same answers repeated. Each hour he has expected to be taken to the torturer, but the summons has not come. Food and water arrive haphazardly, but he has received neither visitors, nor news. Now, he fears, he has been forgotten.

Stirring from a doze, the light from the barred window high up tells him it is mid-morning, knows the time from where the tiny square of sunlight has reached in its walk across the wall. He has been brought awake by the sound of footsteps approaching: two men, one booted, *clack-clacking* down the corridor, the other soft-shoed. The booted man is a newcomer, the other his limping gaoler; knows that from the step and scrape of his footfalls. The key grates in the lock. The door swings open, and the warder enters. He is holding a jug of water in one hand, a lantern in the other. There is a scrap of cloth draped over his shoulder. “You must clean yourself up,” he says loudly. Behind him, an officer of the guard with a brutish face stands in the doorway, hand on sword-hilt.

Slowly, Varenne uncurls. “Why?”

“You are called as a witness to murder,” the officer says.

Varenne shakes his head. “I think you are mistaken, sir, I am a prisoner, an accused, not a witness,” he says.

The warder also looks to the officer for the answer to this conundrum. The officer, however, merely moves his weight from one foot to another. “I am ordered to bring you to the court,” he says.

Varenne takes the cloth and wipes the grime from his face and around his neck, while the two men look on. His torn hose is beyond repair, his jacket smudged, a button missing. He wipes from the collar the worst of the stains, knowing that whatever he does he will still carry with him the stink and squalor of the gaol cell.

“Tell me, sir,” he says, pausing for a moment in his ministrations, “whose murder have I witnessed?”

At this remark, the guard reveals a burgeoning temper. He takes a deep breath as if to dispel his irritation. “Are you an idiot? Move!” he roars, causing the warder to snatch back the jug.

“I thought you had come to take me to the torture chamber,” Varenne says to the gaoler as they are making their way down the corridor. The man is ahead of him carrying the lantern. At this remark, he looks over his shoulder. When he grins, Varenne sees that his front teeth are missing, and the others are nothing more than brown and rotting pegs. “That will come later, my young friend,” he whispers gleefully.

Varenne is led through a labyrinth of passageways until he is brought eventually to the foot of some stairs where a black-robed lawyer is waiting. At the top of the stairs there is noise and light. “What took you so long?” he admonishes the guard, then turns to Varenne without waiting for an answer. “You are to go up,” he says, indicating that Varenne should climb.

Varenne emerges squinting into the hustle and bustle of a packed courtroom. At the top of the stairs is a long pew on which sit the three accused: Jean-Baptiste Denis, Paul Emmerez and Theo Chernier. His friend smiles when he appears from below. “Come sit with me,” he says, patting the bench beside him. “It is good to see you, Guillaume,” he adds, but Varenne finds he cannot answer, cannot understand Theo’s levity because he is still in a dream, or better still, a nightmare.

To the left of the accused is a large table at which sit three black-robed lawyers. Guillaume Lamy and Claud Perrault at one end, both of whom, Varenne is aware, are his avowed enemies, and at the other, a corpulent, bored-looking, middle-aged man.

“Who is defending us, Theo?” Varenne whispers nervously.

His friend nods towards the fat man. “His name is Chrétien de Lamoignon.”

Suddenly, Varenne feels exhausted, finds himself trembling. When a court official calls for silence, he realises he is wringing his hands and forces himself to be still. The case has become a *cause celebre* and seats in the courtroom are at a premium. Some have changed hands for vast sums of money.

At the head of the court is a raised platform with an empty chair at its centre. On the left of the chair is the Clerk of the Court, whose responsibility is to keep formal record of the proceedings, and on the right, the Judge-Assistant, Andre d’Ormesson, a renowned legal scholar.

There is an expectant hush and all rise as the Honourable Judge-President Jacques Defita enters and takes his seat. This is followed by much shuffling and murmuring as the crowd settles down. A moment later, Varenne feels his heart lurch when he sees Pierre Gagnon staring at him from the shadows.

“The court is against us,” Varenne whispers to his co-accused, but none reply.

When the crowd has settled, d’Ormesson rises to his feet and takes a deep breath. “This court is now in session,” he says loudly then nods to the Clerk of the Court, to indicate he should write. He then turns his attention to the four accused.

“It is the responsibility of this court to establish the truth or otherwise of the claim of murder laid against Doctor Jean-Baptiste Denis and his co-accused, Doctors Emmerez and Chernier and Monsieur Guillaume Varenne.

“It is alleged that Denis and his three accomplices, not having the fear of God, and being instigated by the Devil, did maliciously and criminally cause the death of Antoine Mauroy, a citizen of this city, through the illegal practice of blood transfer.”

There is murmuring in the court, causing the Judge-president to use his gavel to call for silence. D’Ormesson continues when the court is stilled once more. “Jean-Baptiste Denis, you are accused of the murder of Antoine Mauroy. How do you plead?”

Denis stands up and stares boldly round at the court before answering. “I am not guilty,” he shouts.

The scribe makes a tick in the court record. The same question is then repeated to each of the other three accused. All declare themselves Not Guilty. Four questions, four answers, four ticks.

At this point, de Lamoignon rises lazily to his feet as if uncoiling, raises a finger to summon the attention of the Judge-Assistant then begins to adjust his gown by pulling casually at the cuffs with what appears to be calm assurance. When d’Ormesson finally becomes aware of de Lamoignon, he looks scornfully down from the table. “You have something to say, my learned friend?” he asks.

“The practice of blood transfer is not illegal, sir,” de Lamoignon says quietly, which prompts the Judge-President to intervene. “Yes, what of it?” Defita growls.

Surprisingly, de Lamoignon does not recoil, nor does he look intimidated by the judge’s cold stare. “Monsieur le Judge-President, I wish to point out that the learned Judge-Assistant has stated that the accused did cause the death of Antoine Mauroy through the *illegal* practice of blood transfer. The practice of blood transfer has not been declared illegal, nor was it illegal at the time when the alleged crime occurred. I require that my learned colleague withdraw that comment and amend the charge accordingly.”

Defita looks angrily at d’Ormesson, who huffs with annoyance before once more addressing the court. “The accused did maliciously and criminally cause the death of Antoine Mauroy, a citizen of this city, through the” - he pauses for effect – “*disputed* practice of blood transfer,” he says.

De Lamoignon considers the retraction, then finally inclines his head. “Thank you, Your Honour,” he says and resumes his seat.

Ever the showman, Denis is beaming at the crowd: It is a victory, a small victory perhaps, but a victory, nonetheless. Varenne, however, is less sanguine. That is when he takes his first look at the packed gallery, filled as it is with gawking spectators: ordinary citizens attracted by the peculiarity of the case at the back of the room, members of the Royal Court and scientists and physicians from the Paris medical school at the front.

In the centre of the front row sits de la Reynie himself, arms folded and serious. On his right is a sneering Henri-Martin de la Martiniere, but it is the woman to de la Reynie’s left that causes Varenne to fall into breathlessness: Anne Turgot, who is doing her very best to smile at him. Varenne looks to see who has accompanied her - her mother, perhaps, or her father, but no, she sits alone. Though he is aware of both the shabbiness of his appearance, and his predicament, he holds up his head and tries to look confident and return the smile, but then sees that she is weeping. For the first time since he arrived at the court, he compares his own ragged attire to the fine clothes of his three co-accused. “Have the three of you not been imprisoned, Theo?” he asks.

Denis and Emmerez have heard the question and both shake their heads. “No, only you,” they answer.

Varenne is of a mind to pursue the question, but d’Ormesson is clearing his throat to speak again…

“There will now be an opening address by counsels for the prosecution and defence,” he says and takes his seat. There follows a shuffling of papers as Prosecutor Lamy rises to his feet, applauded by his colleague. He is smiling and self-assured as he looks around the packed courtroom. Varenne remembers his arrogance and the contempt he showed in the coffee house.

“Monsieur le Judge-President, learned counsel, citizens of Paris,” he begins, “this case is quite simple: the accused, Jean-Baptiste Denis, aided and abetted by his three co-conspirators…” – he pauses to point first at Denis then at Chernier, Emmerez and Varenne – did, on the first of April this year, together, maliciously and with the intent of protecting their own worthless skins, murder Antoine Mauroy by subjecting him to blood transfers that were in direct conflict with the renowned teaching of the Paris medical school, the precepts of the Holy Catholic Church and the wishes of Almighty God.

“My colleague Doctor Perrault and I shall prove that Denis – with the help of his three co-accused did, with malice and aforethought, cause the death of his patient, Antoine Mauroy, in order to protect his failed reputation. The accused is a cold and heartless killer. The co-accused are his accessories. These facts we will prove.”

As Lamy returns to his seat, Perrault rises to shake his hand and there is a renewed buzz on conversation from the gallery. De Lamoignon, however, who is making a note, at first appears to be lost in thought. It is only after prompting by the Judge-President that he gets to his feet. He waits for the court to fall silent before he begins to speak.

“Monsieur le Judge-President,” he begins, “my learned colleague,” – he gestures to Lamy – “has claimed that the defendant and his co-accused are murderers. He claims also that he – they – acted contrary to the teachings of the Holy Catholic Church, the Paris medical profession and even the wishes of Lord God Almighty. To be proved, all of these allegations must be supported by evidence and to allege that the accused acted against the wishes of our Lord God is a most grave accusation. To support this allegation, I assume that my learned colleague is intending to call the Lord God Almighty as a witness. If that is the case, then, reluctant as I am to do so, I reserve the right to question our Heavenly Father…” A smattering of laughter goes around the courtroom, to which Defita responds by glaring down at de Lamoignon. “Be careful, sir,” he warns, “you border on blasphemy.”

“My humble apologies, sir,” de Lamoignon says and bows deferentially. “However, I am honour-bound to protect the interests of my clients.” Then he turns his attention back to the court before continuing. “My learned colleague has alleged that murder has been committed. However, I shall prove to the court that this is not true. On the contrary, Doctor Denis is a renowned physician who cares only for the health and vigour of his patients. The same can be said of Doctor Emmerez and Doctor Chernier. Monsieur Varenne was merely an observer. The main accused, Doctor Denis is not a taker of life; he is a giver and protector of life, as are all of his co-accused.

“But let me turn now to the facts of this case…” He holds his hand up to the court and raises a finger. “Fact one is that Antoine Mauroy is dead. Of that there is no dispute. This is a fact, but to allege that his death was murder…no, that is not a fact.”

He holds up a second finger. “Fact two is that he was subject to blood transfers twice before he died. On two occasions - not three as the prosecution will allege - the deceased was subject to blood transfers to cure his insanity in the months preceding his death. Twice! And both times Monsieur Mauroy not only survived, but his condition improved! Let me repeat: Antoine Mauroy was treated only twice by Doctor Denis using his revolutionary new treatment, and his health improved. That is a fact number two.

“Fact three” - three fingers are held up to the court – “Doctor Denis and his co-accused have been subject to malicious and systematic character assassination by those who oppose the revolutionary treatment of blood transfer. That is fact number three.

“Fact four,” – he raises four fingers – “Doctor Denis and the accused have been accused of murder based on the flimsiest of evidence. Flimsy evidence based on ignorance, rumour and lies.

“And, finally, fact number five – he stretches out his hand in the air, fingers spread for all to see, “On every occasion – every occasion - when the accused met with Antoine Mauroy, their motivation was to cure not kill. Doctor Denis and the accused did not try to kill Monsieur Mauroy, they tried to cure him. These are the facts of this case that I will prove…”

There follows an outburst of applause from the spectators, to which a scowling Judge-President silences by hammering on the desk with his gavel. “Do not test my patience, sir,” he warns Lamoignon, “This is not a bawdyhouse play-act.”

“Never, my lord,” the other responds with a dip of his head, though he looks anything but contrite.

“Where is Madame Mauroy?” Varenne whispers. “Why is she not here to defend us?”

It is Emmerez who answers under his breath, “Because she has absconded. Soldiers are out looking for her, but we will not receive help from that quarter: she is our accuser!”

Varenne is stunned. “Why…” he begins but is prevented from pursuing the point by the Judge-Assistant who appears eager to begin. “Is the Prosecution ready to proceed, Advocate Lamy?” he enquires.

“Yes, my lord, we are ready and willing,” Lamy says, then, throwing back his robe, strides away from the table. Hands on hips, he stands looking out over the public gallery. “The Prosecution calls Gabriel Babin.”

The name is repeated in the corridor outside the courtroom and eventually a stooped old man is escorted into the court and taken to the witness stand, where he stands shaking like a leaf. He is given a Bible to hold.

“Do you promise by almighty God to tell the truth and nothing but the truth?” the Officer of the Court asks.

The old man is in a trance, until the Office of the Court repeats the question. “Yes,” he answers, though his voice is barely above a whisper.

“Please state your name to the court.”

“My name is Gabriel Babin.”

Lamy frowns at him. “Speak up, man!” he bellows.

“My name is Gabriel Babin,” the old man repeats.

“What is your profession?”

“I am a member of the leather-workers guild, sir.”

“On the first of April this year were you in the vicinity of the Mauroy residence?”

“Vicinity, my lord…?”

“The Mauroy house. Were you *near* Antoine Mauroy’s house on the day before he died?”

“I was delivering a skin to the Seven Stars, that day, my lord.”

“The Seven Stars?”

“A tavern, sir.”

“Where is it?”

“Opposite where Mad Antoine lived.”

A ripple of laughter goes through the court.

“Are you referring to the deceased…the dead man…Antoine Mauroy?”

“Yes, my lord - Mad Antoine.”

More laughter, causing Lamy to glare angrily at the public gallery. “You will desist from referring to the deceased as ‘Mad Antoine’, Monsieur Babin,” he instructs. “Do you understand? From now on, you will refer to him only as Monsieur Mauroy, or ‘the deceased’. Is that clear?”.

Baffled, the witness stares at the Prosecutor.

“You must stop calling him ‘Mad Antoine’,” the Judge-President roars from on high, resulting in yet more laughter and causing the old man to gasp and bow his head. “As you wish, your grace,” he manages to say.

Lamy sighs. He stands motionless and appears to be considering a matter of most serious concern. “Let us continue,” he says finally. “On the day in question, you were visiting a tavern opposite the Mauroy house. Is that correct?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“So, you knew where Antoine Mauroy lived?”

“Yes, my lord. Everyone knows where ma…Monsieur Mauroy lived. Perrine used to stand at the front door of the house and shout at him when he was in drink. Many times, I’ve seen…”

“Did you see the accused on the day in question?” Lamy interrupts irritably.

“The accused…?”

Lamy points to bench where Denis and his co-accused are sitting. “Those men…”

“Yes, my lord. I seed them arrive on horseback as I was leaving the tavern. They got off their horses and that one” – he points a hesitant finger at Denis – “told me to look after them while they went inside…”

“So, you saw those men arrive at Mauroy’s house, and they left their horses in your care while they went into the house?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“How long did they remain inside the house?”

“I don’t know…not so long...”

“Did you know why they were visiting?”

“No, sir. Not my business. I was paid fifty sous…” For the first time since he had entered the courtroom the old man grins at the memory, displaying in the process, a mouth completely devoid of teeth.

“A goodly sum!” Lamy agrees.

“Yes, sir. That’s why I recall them.”

“This visit happened on the day before Monsieur Mauroy died. Is that correct?”

“Yes, my lord.”

Lamy then turned to the court. “Let it be recorded that this witness has testified that the accused were present at the scene of the murder…” When he sees Lamoignon raise a hand in protest, he corrects himself, “…at the scene of the *alleged* murder on the day before the victim died. “The evidence of monsieur Babin places the accused at the scene. Thank you, Monsieur Babin. I have no more questions.”

“Thank you,” d’Ormesson says, then turns his attention to the defence. “Do you wish to question this witness, Advocate Lamoignin?”

“Yes, my lord,” de Lamoignon says stepping away from his desk, “but first will you please remind the learned counsel that Monsieur Mauroy’s death has not been proved to be murder. He must immediately refrain from making that allegation.”

Above the court, Judge-President Defita shakes his head and glares angrily at Lamy. “Monsieur Lamoignon is correct, sir. Murder has not yet been proved. You are instructed to desist from imputing otherwise.”

For a moment, Lamy frowns and appears discomfited, though he quickly regains his composure and bows deeply. “I stand corrected, sir.”

Following a shuffle of papers, the scribe makes a note of this amendment in the court record, before attention once more shifts to the defence. Lamoignin smiles. “Thank you for your testimony, Monsieur Babin,” he says kindly. “I merely wish to clear up one or two small points, if I may. You say you saw these four men arrive at the Mauroy house on the day in question. You are certain about that?”

The old man nods. “Yes, my lord, it was the day before he died.”

“And you held their horses for a time while they were inside the house. Is that correct?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“So, you remained *outside* the house?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“This means you did not see what occurred *inside* the house during that time.”

“No, sir, but Perrine said…”

“Monsieur Babin,” Lamoignon interrupts, “you can only speak about what you saw, not what someone told you. Let me repeat the question: Did you see what occurred inside the house while you were looking to their horses?”

“No, my lord.”

“So, you have no idea what happened inside the Mauroy house on that occasion?”

“No, sir. The horses were frisky, you see, and…”

“Thank you, Monsieur Babin. You may step down now.”

Uncertainly, the witness remains in place, until a court official takes him by the arm and leads him away.

Attention now shifts once more to the Judge-Assistant. “The Prosecution will now call its next witness?” d’Ormisson announces.

Lamy and Perrault exchange notes and there is a short, whispered conversation before Advocate Lamy marches purposefully to the front of the court. “I now call Auderic Roche to give evidence,” he says loudly.

This time the witness is a tall, broad-shouldered man. His thick black beard is wild and unruly, his tunic mottled with scratches, his leather breeches stained. A common man, like his predecessor, but one who strides proudly to the witness stand, swears to speak the truth and only the truth, then grins broadly at the public gallery.

“Please state your name and profession for the court.”

“My name is Auderic Roche. I am a herder.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Roche. Please cast your mind back to the first of April this year. That was the day before Antoine Mauroy died. Can you recall that day, sir?”

“Yes, sir. Indeed, I can,” he says loudly, giving a wide, white-toothed smile. Clearly, Auderic Roche is a man who relishes the limelight.

“Please tell the court what happened that day.”

“At terce, I was called to the house….”

“Called to the house by whom?”

“Perrine, sir…”

“Perrine Mauroy. Antoine Mauroy’s wife.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“For what reason were you called to the house?”

“I had to deliver a calf, sir.”

“You had to deliver a calf?”

“Yes, sir.”

“For what purpose were you required to deliver a calf?”

“Perrine said it was needed to cure Antoine of his sickness.”

“Were you paid for this animal?”

“Yes, sir. Calfs ain’t cheap, you know!”

“I’m sure they are not,” the other says patiently. “Who paid for this calf?”

“It was paid for by that man…” he points at Denis.

“Let the record show,” Lamy declares, turning to the scribe, “that the witness pointed to Doctor Jean-Baptiste Denis.”

“Monsieur Roche, was Doctor Denis alone on that occasion?”

“No, sir, those other three was with him.”

“The other three accused?”

“Yes, them sitting there,” he is pointing.

“Thank you. Please continue.”

At this point, the witness draws a breath and leans forward slightly like he is about to impart a confidence. “I took a calf to Mauroy’s house and waited outside until called. I brought it inside when asked…”

“The calf was to be used in a blood-transfer experiment.”

“Er….”

“Was the calf’s blood to be taken and given to Antoine Mauroy?”

“Perrine said so...”

“Was Antoine Mauroy in the house when you delivered the calf?”

“Yes, sir, he was sitting at the kitchen table.”

“And the others…”

“Those two,” – he pointed at Denis and Emmerez – were making a pipe thing…There were knives laid out on the table …”

“And the other two accused?”

“They were standing by the door…”

“The ‘pipe’ you referred to, Monsieur Roche…It was to be used to carry blood from the animal to Monsieur Mauroy…”

Lamoignon, gets wearily to his feet. “Judge-President, my learned counsel is leading the witness.”

Lamy appears frustrated by this interruption. “Let me rephrase my question, Monsieur Roche,” he says frowning. “Do you know what the ‘pipe’ was for?”

The witness stares uncertainly. “I was not told, my lord,” he says. “No one was talking when I went in.”

“What did you see?”

“I saw Doctor Denis pick up a knife and cut into Antoine’s foot…He said he was going to bleed him first then give him some new blood.”

“New blood from the calf you had bought?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Did you actually see the blood transfer take place?”

“No, sir. I left before it happened, but Perrine told me what had happened the next day.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Roche.” Lamy turns to the defence counsel. “Your witness, sir…”

Lamoignon stands, but remains behind his desk. At first, he appears to be studying some papers in front of him. “Monsieur Roche,” he says, finally looking up. “I only have a few simple questions. I must say, you are a very important witness.”

Roche straightens his back and looks pleased with himself. He again grins at the public gallery.

“Question one, so I can be completely clear on this matter: did you bring the calf into the house with you when summoned by Madame Mauroy?”

“No, sir, I was told to leave the animal tethered outside.”

“Thank you. Next question: did you see blood transferred from the calf to Antoine Mauroy?”

“No, sir, I did not.”

“Question three: you mentioned when questioned by my learned colleague that you were asked to leave the room. Why was that?”

“The doctor said the room was too crowded.”

“Thank you. So, again, just to be clear; you did not witness a blood transfer from the calf to Monsieur Mauroy…”

“That is correct, sir.”

“Now my final question: what happened to the calf?”

The witness looks perplexed. “The calf, sir?”

“The calf, Monsieur Roche. The calf you had brought to the Mauroy house…What happened to it?”

He shrugs. “We ate it, sir….”

“‘We’ Monsieur Roche…?”

“Neighbours, sir…friends…family… Perrine gave a party after Antoine’s death… It was her calf. Bought and paid for with a gold coin!”

“Yes, of course it was. A gold coin indeed! But when the four accused departed, where was the calf?”

“It stayed at the house.”

“Where it had expired…”

“Expired, sir…?”

“Where it had died during the blood transfer….”

“Oh, no, sir. I killed the calf…”

“*You* killed it?” Lamoignon frowns deeply, making a theatre of his perplexity.

“Yes, sir.”

“After the four accused had left?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then it was not used for a blood transfer.”

The herder is confused. “I don’t know, sir. I’m not a medical man, sir.

“Then let me ask the question in a different way: After the four accused departed, did you discover that the calf had been cut, hurt or injured in any way? In other words, was the animal alive and healthy?”

The witness considers the question by raising his gaze to the rafters for a moment of inspiration. “Oh, yes, sir. It was fine until I took an axe to it!”

This causes another outburst of laughter from the gallery. The herder grins, apparently pleased to be the source of such amusement.

When the laughter has died down, a smiling de Lamoignon continues. “Let me be clear, sir. What you are saying is that on the day in question, you delivered a calf to the Mauroy house for the purpose of conducting a blood transfer. Is that correct?”

“Yes, sir.”

“However, you did not see Doctor Denis transfer blood from the calf into Antoine Mauroy’s arm because you had to wait outside. Is that also correct?

“Yes, sir, but I know it happened because Perrine told me the next day. She said the doctor had given Antoine blood from the calf and that made him poorly.”

“Monsieur Roche,” Lamoignon says kindly, “you may only testify about what you saw, not what you heard. Finally, the calf was still alive and in good health when the four accused departed?”

The courtroom has fallen silent.

“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Roche. You have been an excellent witness.”

Just as the witness was about to step away, Lamoignon raises a finger as if a sudden thought has just occurred to him. “Forgive me, Monsieur Roche, but I have one more question, if you don’t mind…”

“I don’t mind, my lord.”

Lamoignon inclines his head graciously before continuing. “Thank you, sir. Now, you mentioned earlier that Madame Mauroy held a… well, you used the word ‘party’ …to mourn the death of her husband, which, of course, is only to be expected. After all, she was very distressed by the demise of her beloved and needed the support of friends and neighbours to help her get over her devastating loss. Is that not so?”

The witness is shaking his head. “Oh, no, sir, she wasn’t upset, she was happy he’d gone. Always fighting they were.” Then, in a stage whisper, “I reckon she was glad to be rid of him.”

“Glad to be rid of him…Oh, thank you Monsieur Roche,” de Lamoignon says smiling. “You may step down now.”

When Varenne looks to the public gallery, he sees Anne’s brother enter the courtroom and make his way down to the front row, where his sister is sitting. He speaks briefly to Monsieur de la Reynie, who shrugs, then leans over and whispers to Anne, who shakes her head. He reaches over and takes her arm, forcing her from her seat much to the consternation of those around her, though no one tries to intervene. Henri Martiniere, who is sitting on the other side of the Lieutenant-General, watches this drama unfold with obvious amusement, then turns and grins at Varenne. When Varenne starts to rise, Theo puts a hand on his shoulder. “Now is not the time, Guillaume,” he says quietly, causing the young man to sink back into his seat. The last thing he sees is Anne being bustled from the courtroom.

The third witness for the Prosecution is Father Emanuel, the priest who had been called to Mauroy to administer the last rites.

On being questioned he describes how he had been summoned to the house by Perrine Mauroy and that when he arrived Antoine Mauroy was *in extremis* and at the point of death.

“Was this the day after Monsieur Mauroy had received a blood transfer carried out by Doctor Denis, Father?”

“Yes, sir, it was.”

“And shortly after you arrived, he died?”

“Yes. I barely had time to administer the viaticum.” The priest then bestows on the court a beatific smile. “However, I am confident that, given his suffering, he now resides with our heavenly father.”

When it was Lamoignon’s turn to ask questions, he begins by bowing respectfully to the witness.

“Father Emanuel, when you spoke with my learned colleague, you stated that the deceased died the day after he received a third blood transfer…”

“Yes, sir, I did.”

“Did you personally witness this blood transfer?”

“No, I did not, sir.”

“Then, with respect, sir, how can you testify to this fact when you were not there to witness it?”

“I was told by Madame Mauroy, who swore on the Holy Bible that a blood transfer had taken place. I believed her. Why, sir, would she lie and put her soul in mortal jeopardy and suffer eternal damnation?”

“That is not for me to say. However, let me be clear on a most important fact: you did not personally witness the blood transfer that allegedly took place on the day before Mauroy died.”

“That is correct, I did not.”

“Thank you for clearing that up. Now, I wish to ask you about Monsieur Mauroy’s appearance on the day he died. Would you please describe to the court his condition when you arrived at his bedside.”

“His face was grey as slate, sir. He was shaking violently and it was clear to me that he would soon be in the presence of our Lord God Almighty.”

“Had he been vomiting? Had there been a weakening of the bowels?”

Clearly discomfited by the nature of the question, the priest frowns and looks sharply at Lamoignon. “Yes, both: most copiously. It was…it was… evident that he had soiled himself.”

“Did you observe any skin discolouration?”

“I did. His tongue was black. His face and neck contained red blotches, and there appeared to be lesions on his arms.”

Lamoignon strides before the court, apparently deep in thought and seemingly bemused by the answer. “Then it is clear that Monsieur Mauroy died in the most unpleasant circumstances.”

“Indeed so, sir.”

“Did he appear to be in pain?”

“Yes. Although he drifted in and out of consciousness, he was groaning continually. He complained about stomach pains. He was suffering greatly. His death, I believe, probably came as a relief.”

“Did he complain about the blood transfers he had received?”

“No, sir, he did not.”

“In fact, the symptoms you describe could be ascribed to many causes, could they not, sir? Poison, for example…”

Before the priest has time to reply, Judge-President Defita brings his gavel crashing down his face quite aghast. “You do not have to answer that question, Father,” he says. Then he turns his attention to Lamoignon. “Do I need to remind you, sir,” he barks, “that the witness is not a physician and cannot be called upon to comment on medical matters!”

De Lamoignon bows contritely. “My apologies, Monsieur Judge-President,” he says, then to the priest, “Thank you, Father. You may step down.”

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After the court session has ended, de la Reynie summons Gagnon to his office. The day is bitterly cold and there is a weak sun, but the windows are standing wide open, to let in light. Behind his desk, the Lieutenant-General sits in shirtsleeves, impervious to the chill. Gagnon stands before him. He bows low.

“You wished to see me, my lord,” he says.

“Why was Varenne kept in prison? I had released him.”

“You ordered him arrested, my lord. You ordered them all arrested.”

“Arrested, not imprisoned! Denis was arrested then allowed to go free, was he not? Why was Varenne alone imprisoned and not the other three accused? Explain this discrepancy, Pierre,” de la Reynie says quietly when the answer is slow in coming.

“I thought him the weak link, my lord, that he would confess…”

“Did you have him tortured?”

“No, my lord. I questioned him at length, but he was not tortured.”

“And did he confess?”

“No”.

“So, you have decided that he is guilty…! It was not a question, more a statement.

“The evidence…”

“What evidence?” de la Reynie demands, his voice icy.

“I have questioned many witnesses…”

“Like those this morning, all discredited.”

“There are others still to come.”

De la Reynie takes a deep breath, sits back in his chair and sighs. He looks furious. “We want the truth of it, Jacques, not some scapegoat… some false confession. If they are guilty, they will go to the scaffold. If they are innocent, they will go free. Do you understand?”

The other nods. “I understand, my lord.”

“Release Varenne immediately.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“And where is madame Mauroy? There are questions she must answer.”

“She has gone into hiding. I have men looking for her.”

De la Reynie closes his eyes and shakes his head. “I suggest you find her, and find her quickly, Jacques. That’s if you know what’s good for you, I mean…” he says bluntly.

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As night is falling, the door to de la Reynie’s office opens. “Go away! I’m working!” the Lieutenant-General Reynie bellows, without lifting his face from the desk. What follows is like a scene from a bad play: he looks up, sees King Louis XIV stroll into the room, followed by Jean-Baptise Colbert and two officers of the Royal Guard and his face crumples into a look of horror. For a moment he is frozen, a man lost for words, then has the presence of mind to leap to his feet and bow deeply. “My apologies, Your Majesty,” he says.

It is Colbert, brows furled, who is the first to speak. “Good evening, Nicolas,” he says. “His Majesty is interested in the Mauroy case.”

In puffed breeches, a short doublet, red stockings of African cotton and buckled shoes, the King in his kilo of wig, is the height of fashion. At thirty years of age, he is also at the height of his power.

In a fluster, de la Reynie rushes around his desk and brings two chairs to the centre of the room. The King ignores them, however, and wanders over to the window, where he stands hands clasped behind his back, looking down onto the river through the sleety rain.

“It is as the Comptroller-General says, Monsieur de la Reynie,” he says slowly. “We are interested in this case. Is Doctor Denis guilty of murder, do you think?”

De la Reynie looks to Colbert for an answer, but the other merely shrugs and looks away.

“I don’t know, Your Majesty.”

At this reply, the King turns and gives de la Reynie his full attention. “But four men have been accused of murder. Is the evidence not sufficient to convict them?”

“The case is… complicated, Your Majesty,” he replies, immediately regretting his choice of words.

The King, however, appears intrigued. “Complicated in what way, sir?” he asks.

From the corner of his eye, he notices that Colbert is grimacing.

“The prosecution has based its case on the fact that the deceased died after receiving a fatal third blood transfer. The defence contends that no third transfer occurred…”

“Yes, that is what we understand. But did not today’s witnesses confirm the fact of a third transfer?”

“No, Your Majesty, they did not.”

The King considers this statement for a moment. “Mauroy’s wife has gone missing, has she not? And there is talk of poison…”

“Yes, Your Majesty, she has absconded. But I have men out looking for her. And you are also correct that there is a suggestion that the victim was poisoned…”

“A suggestion, you say?”

“Doctor Chernier…”

“…Who is one of the accused…”

“Who is one of the accused, maintains that he could smell arsenic when Mauroy’s casket was opened. I was present at the time, and he was supported by Doctor Patin…”

“Who has since recanted…”

“Yes, Your Majesty. He argues that since arsenic has a variety of uses in the household, its presence in the coffin is not sufficient evidence in itself, to prove cause of death.”

Considering this for a moment, the King turns his face to the window again where he stands motionless, arms folded and deep in thought. Eventually, he turns back to de la Reynie. “As you say, sir, the case is complicated,” he says. From below the window, a troop of cavalry is heard manoeuvring in the courtyard. Prompted by the sound, the king moves towards the door, but then halts on the threshold. “We wish to know the truth of this matter, Monsieur de la Reynie. If the accused are complicit in murder, then they must be punished. We want to know who is guilty and who is innocent. We are concerned that our Royal Society is being maligned and it is important that we establish the veracity or otherwise as to the question of blood transfer.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

“If blood transfer is not the cause of death, then the procedure may advance the cause of medicine, but I have men whispering in my ear, sir. They suggest that I ban the practice, that it is ungodly and evil. What do you think I should do?”

De la Reynie finds he can hardly breathe. The King has asked for an opinion, which he is spectacularly unqualified to give. He chances a glance to Colbert, who is now staring at him wide-eyed with alarm. It is moments such as this where careers are made or destroyed.

In the end, de la Reynie chooses the only avenue that seems open to him: honesty. “You have said that you wish to know the truth of the matter, Your Majesty, then I would suggest that you allow the court to complete its work…Let the court decide…”

The King looks amused by the suggestion. “That is a most interesting proposal, Monsieur de la Reynie. Let the court decide…Yet we are assured by members of our Royal Academy that blood transfer is dangerous and unscientific...” He turns suddenly to Colbert. “What is your opinion, Jean-Baptiste?”

Colbert, caught unawares by the question, straightens his back. He takes a moment to think before answering. “I believe the Lieutenant-General is correct in this matter, Your Majesty,” he says gravely.

The King, clearly puzzled by the reply, stares at his first Minister. “And why do you say that, Jean-Baptiste?”

“Your Majesty, by allowing the court to complete its enquiry, the Royal Academy is vindicated because it has raised concerns regarding a new medical practice. On the other hand, if the accused are found not guilty then the Academy will still be vindicated for pursuing the truth…”

While the King considers this reply, de la Reynie’s heart is beating like a drum. “Thank you, Jean-Baptiste, your suggestion is well-considered,” the King says finally. “We shall do as you suggest and await the findings of the court. We must get to the truth of this matter,” he adds, turning suddenly to the Lieutenant-General. “You understand, Monsieur de la Reynie? The truth! Anything else would cause us great displeasure…” And with that threat hanging in the air, he finally strides from the room.

Colbert, however, lingers for a moment. When the two of them are alone he speaks quietly to de la Reynie. “The King is a man of science and learning, Nicolas, never forget that. Never forget also that His Majesty’s reputation and that of the Royal Academy are closely intertwined. Both must be protected. That is the one ‘truth’ you must remember above all others… because our lives depend upon it,” he hisses before hurrying from the room.

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When Varenne arrives home, all he wants to do is rest, but is fussed over by his anxious parents until he makes his apologies and retreats to the sanctity of his bedroom where he removes his soiled clothes and does his best to once again wash away the stink of the gaol cell. Only when he feels refreshed and is dressed in freshly laundered garments and is able to face his mother and father again, does he go back downstairs. His mother brings him bread and meat stew, though despite his ordeal, he has little appetite. His father, however, has already retreated to his office.

“How is father’s health, mother?” he asks.

A maid hovering in the background is dismissed with a wave of the hand before his mother answers.

“Your father is not well, Guillaume.”

“Because we are about to lose everything?”

Suddenly, his mother is gasping for breath, her face a violent purple. “We have had bailiffs on the property. I don’t know where we will go…”

Seeing his mother in panic, Varenne goes icy with dread. He knows there is nothing he can do to prevent the calamity about to engulf them, and to offer false hope would be futile.

“Mother…” he begins but is then uncertain how to continue. They stare at each other, both lost in the silence. The moment is broken by a scullery maid who knocks and enters from the kitchen. “A letter for master Guillaume. It was delivered to the back door,” she says curtsying before her mistress.

“It is a letter for you from Anne Turgot,” his mother says, only to have the letter snatched from her hand.

Forgetting all else, Varenne returns to his bedroom, where he opens the letter with trembling hands, expecting bad news, which is what he receives.

*My Dearest love*

*I am in despair. This morning, my brother informed me that, in ten days, I am to be married to Auguste Magnoac and thereafter to live in Italy. It has all been arranged, and my father refuses to intervene, but I will not marry that odious man. Never. I will die first.*

*My beloved, my love for you is constant and unwavering, but I am broken.*

*I fear we may not meet again in this world.*

*Anne*

Varenne stares at the letter for a long time going grey with fear, his mind a jumble of thoughts, his breath coming in gasps. What can he do to prevent this injustice? The answer is nothing. He is powerless. Disaster and ruin are sweeping in from every direction and now there is this letter, but it is the words *I will die first* that most alarm him.

**Tuesday 18 April**

DAY 2

Despite his exhaustion, Varenne rises before dawn. At breakfast, his mother tries to tempt him with his favourite titbits, but he hardly eats, nor does his father who sits silently at the end of the table. The atmosphere in the room is grim and depressing.

He leaves as the sun is rising and walks to the Turgot house, where he hammers on the door and demands to see old man Turgot. Eventually, the door is opened by a servant who refuses him entry, informing him that Monsieur Turgot is ‘not available’. Angrily, he turns away, then looks up when a curtain twitches. He glimpses Anne’s mother glaring down at him. An instant later, the face is gone and the house set tight against him.

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“The court calls Doctor Henri-Martin de la Martiniere!”

After bowing to the Judge-President and other the court officials, Martiniere steps forward, takes his place at the witness stand then gazes proudly out over the packed public gallery. Watching him from the first row is Nicolas de la Reynie, but this time he is accompanied by the First Minister, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Surrounding these two notables are eminent physicians from the Paris Medical School and the Royal Academy, plus members of the Royal Court. The four accused, meanwhile, sit silently in the dock.

The din of conversation in the court slowly dies away after Judge-President Defita calls for order. When the room has fallen silent, Claud Perrault pats his colleague on the shoulder and steps out from behind his table.

Perrault, who is a well-known author and anatomist, is an extremely tall, thin man of middle age. He is wearing a giant wig, which he is forced to steady with his hand as he moves towards the witness stand.

“Please state your name for the record,” he says loudly, addressing himself to the witness.

“My name is Henri-Martin de la Martiniere.”

His voice, clear and precise, fills the room, and being a famous physician, he manifests such presence, that even those at the back of the court lean forward to listen intently.

“And your profession…”

“I am chymical physician at the Royal Court of His Majesty King Louis XIV, and member of the Royal Academy of Sciences.”

“Doctor Martiniere, please describe your experience as a physician for the elucidation of the court...”

Martiniere, inclines his head, and turns to face the public gallery. “At the age of nine, I ran away from home and joined a military camp near Geneva, which is where I first became acquainted with the practice of medicine and where I first encountered the skills of the barber-surgeon.

“When I was 12, I was captured by Spanish forces, but was able to negotiate my release and was put on a ship travelling east. However, in the Mediterranean, the ship was intercepted by Corsairs and I was again taken, but later became their surgeon…”

“At a very young age…” Perrault remarks.

“Yes, sir, but even at that age I was an experienced surgeon, certainly more so than any other person on board. At the age of 16, I was released from service with the Corsairs, after the ship I was on was seized by the Maltese. At that point, I continued to practice my trade on a freelance basis. Later, I returned to France and studied for my medical degree after which I became a physician in the court of His Majesty, Louis XIV.”

“Would it be correct to say that you are a highly qualified and experienced physician.”

“I believe that is an accurate statement, sir.”

“Will you explain to the court the scientific basis for your opposition to blood transfer as practiced by Doctor Denis and his co-accused.”

“Gladly, sir. The practice of blood transfer is an anathema to the practice of good medicine and is highly dangerous. If this practice is allowed to flourish then it will lead to a trade in blood, which is a crime against humanity. It is also detrimental to the health of the patient, as is clearly evident from the death of Antoine Mauroy…”

At this point, Lamoignon rises to his feet. “Objection! The court has not proven a link between blood transfer and the death of Monsieur Mauroy.”

The Judge-President considers the point. “Objection upheld,” he announces. “Doctor Martiniere, you will withdraw that remark.”

“I bow to your expert knowledge and stand corrected, sir,” the doctor says and dips his head in acquiescence, though he looks unrepentant.

“Doctor Martiniere,” Perrault continues, “you have stated your objection to the practice of blood transfer. Are there others that would support your view?”

“Indeed, there are, sir. I have support from the Paris Faculty of Medicine, including many eminent physicians. It is obvious to doctors of intellect and experience that the practice of blood transfer is ungodly and ill-advised. I personally condemn it on both scientific and spiritual grounds.”

“Could you be more specific, sir.”

“On scientific grounds, I fear that the mixing of blood from animals to man, from cows to man, could cause the recipient to develop bovine characteristics. There is every chance, for example, that should the practice of blood transfer from cows to humans be allowed to continue, then the recipient will grow horns!”

Suddenly, there was a burst of chatter from the public gallery, which the Judge-President is forced to silence.

“That is the scientific objection to blood transfer. What is your spiritual concern?”

“It is common knowledge, sir, that the human soul resides in the body. This is a fact. Should blood transfer be allowed to continue from animals to humans there is a danger that the soul could be transferred from one to the other.”

“That is a most serious accusation, sir. On what basis do you make this claim?”

“You have only to read your Bible, sir! Acts 15:20 ‘Thou must abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, *and from blood*!’ In my quest to have the practice of blood transfer banned, I am supported by the Holy Catholic Church and I have personally received a vision in which I was visited by the goddess of Truth and the Holy Ghost, who appeared to me in the form of Apollo the son of Jupiter, to condemn the practice of blood transfer.

“It is quite obvious that blood transfer is merely a new way to torment the sick. The blood of animals and humans contain different particles and we mix these disparate elements at our own risk. To allow foreign blood to enter one’s veins is an atrocity, a most inhuman remedy that will attract the ire of God.”

Shaking his head, Perrault stands for a moment with a shocked look on his face. “It is your contention then, Doctor Martiniere, that blood transfer goes against both the teachings of the medical profession and tenets of the holy church.”

“Yes.”

“However, you also allege that the accused caused the death of Antoine Mauroy. On what grounds do you make this allegation?”

“Doctor Denis and the other accused were all present when the poor victim was given cow’s blood at his house on 1 April. He died a day later. There is clearly a link between the two events, therefore the blood transfer caused Mauroy to die and Denis and his co-accused were aware of the dangers inherent in the practice. In other words, their malicious recklessness caused an innocent man to die. That is murder, sir. What is more, Doctor Denis was warned as to the dangers of this evil practice, yet he insisted on continuing. It is also necessary to point out that Denis is a graduate of Montpellier University, which has a reputation for drunkenness, whoring and unruliness!”

“But if he knew that the practice of blood transfer was both evil and fatal, why did he continue?”

“To gain a reputation. He is a showman, sir. He is not a physician!”

“And his co-accused?”

“They are complicit. They were aware of the dangers of blood transfer and I have personally warned both Doctor Chernier and Monsieur Varenne, but they refused to distance themselves from the practice. And I have made my objections clear to Doctor Denis and Doctor Emmerez. The accused cannot claim ignorance of their evil practices. They are guilty!”

“Thank you, sir. You may step down…”

Advocate Lamoignon gets to his feet. “Just a moment, Doctor, if you may. I have a few questions…”

With a look of distaste, Martiniere turns towards him.

“Let me go back over certain points of your evidence, if I may. You claim that the opposition to blood transfer is widespread. Are all physicians opposed to this practice?”

A long pause. “No. Some so-called doctors support the practice.”

“So, there are some physicians, some men of experience and medical knowledge who are not opposed to the practice of blood transfer, but who actually support it?”

“There are misguided men in every profession, sir.”

“In other words, there are physicians who would argue that you are wrong in your condemnation of blood transfer?”

“As I have explained, sir, the medical profession is not immune to those who are ill-informed.”

“Is it true, Doctor, that you are not allowed to teach at the Medical School of Paris?”

Martiniere glares as Lamoignon. After a moment, he replies.

“Yes, that is true. Many of the doctors at Paris Medical School fear my greater knowledge will diminish their standing.”

“You are not allowed to teach because you earned your medical degree at the University of Rouen.”

“Yes, but it is simply a practice to restrict competition from greater minds; a foolish and scientific jealousy born out of ignorance.”

“So, you contend that your medical knowledge and qualifications are equal to, if not better than, those of the Paris medical fraternity. In other words, their refusal to allow you to teach at their esteemed school is based solely on prejudice and ignorance.”

“That is so.”

“Yet you condemn Doctor Denis because he obtained his medical degree at Montpellier…”

“Sir, you cannot compare those two institutions. Rouen is a university renowned for its advanced learning whereas Montpellier is renowned for its debauchery and anarchy.”

“As you say, sir…Doctor Martiniere, are you familiar with the name Arthur Coga?”

Again, the witness stares sharply at his interrogator before he answers. “Yes, sir, I am.”

“Monsieur Coga received a blood transfer in England in November last year. Is that correct?”

“I don’t recall the details, sir.”

“Let me jog your memory, Doctor. Arthur Coga is a student at Pembroke College, Cambridge. In November last year he agreed to subject himself to a blood transfer. He was transfused with sheep’s blood. Are you aware of this case?”

Martiniere shrugs.

“Answer the question, sir,” the Judge-President instructs.

“Yes, I am aware of this case.”

“Coga did not complain of any symptoms or discomfort after the blood transfer. Is that correct?”

“He suffered a fever.”

“Yes, but by the next morning he was fully recovered. Is that correct?”

“So, I hear.”

“He was also transfused a second time without issue. Is that also correct?”

“Yes, but he refused a third transfer because he believed he was being transformed into a sheep.”

“But he was not transformed into a sheep, was he? He remains a man, hale and hearty.”

“This is English science you refer to, sir. In France this practice is considered heretical and treasonous.”

“That is not the point, Doctor. Coga received two blood transfers, as did Monsieur Mauroy without any ill-effects. Is that correct?”

“You are twisting the facts, sir,” Martiniere answers, irritated.

“Is my statement correct, sir? Arthur Coga and Antoine Mauroy received two blood transfers and both remained fit and healthy?”

“Mauroy, received three transfers, sir. The third transfer occurred the day before he died. It was the third transfer that caused his death.”

“We will come to that in a moment, Doctor Martiniere. Please answer the question: did Coga and Mauroy receive two blood transfers without ill-effect?”

“Mauroy is dead, sir! I think you would agree that that is a very serious ill-effect.”

“Only if his blood transfer and death are connected.”

“Of course, they are connected!”

“But as you have admitted, blood transfer in England is accepted medical practice…”

“No, sir, it is not accepted medical practice there are many opposed to it…”

“…And many who support the practice in England, as in France.”

No answer.

“Now to the question of the third blood transfer, the one you allege occurred on the day before Mauroy died. Did you personally witness this third blood transfer?”

“No, but…”

“Doctor Denis and the accused deny that a third blood transfer ever occurred. You did not witness a third transfer, did you?”

“I did not, sir, but….”

“So, you cannot claim with certainty that a third blood transfer occurred…”

“…I have it on good authority…”

“…If the third transfer did not occur, then the link you allege that exists between the third transfer and the death of the victim is invalid. In other words, if there was no third blood transfer then the accusation of murder caused by blood transfer must be denied.”

“You are not a physician, sir,” Martiniere says angrily, “and cannot begin to understand medical matters of this magnitude.”

“Thank you, Doctor Martiniere, I have no further questions, you may step down.”

As Doctor Martiniere turns away in disgust, Perrault again rises to his feet, holding up his hand. “Doctor Martiniere,” he calls out, halting the other in mid-stride, “You have stated that to your knowledge a third transfer occurred. On what grounds do you make that statement?”

“I have spoken with an actual witness, sir.”

“A witness who was present during the third transfer?”

“Yes.”

“Who is that witness?”

“The victim’s wife, Madame Perrine Mauroy, sir. She witnessed the entire procedure.”

“Thank you, doctor. I have no further questions.”

At the beginning of the afternoon session, Perrault calls his next witness, Doctor Patin.

“Doctor Patin,” he begins, “you were present on the occasion of the opening of Monsieur Mauroy’s casket at the Church of the Innocents, is that correct?”

“Yes, that is correct.”

“Why were you in attendance?”

“My presence was requested by Monsieur de la Reynie, the Lieutenant-General. I was there to witness the event.”

“Were you instructed as to your duties, that day?”

“I was instructed to examine the body of Antoine Mauroy in an attempt to establish cause of death.”

“Were you able to do so?”

“No, sir, I was not.”

“So, you could not establish that the deceased died as a result of blood transfer?”

“I established that Monsieur Mauroy died following a blood transfer, which is a practice that conflicts with the teachings of the Galenic system. In my professional opinion, it either caused or contributed to the death of Antoine Mauroy.”

“Thank you, Doctor, I have no more questions.”

Lamoignon moves away from his desk, apparently deep in thought. “Doctor Patin,” he begins, “the four accused all claim that no blood transfer occurred on the day before Monsieur Mauroy’s death, but you are now suggesting that you witnessed the blood transfer that *allegedly* caused his death!”

His face is stern when he replies. “You misunderstand me, sir. I was present at the first and second blood transfers at Lord Montmor’s estate, but I was not present on the occasion of his third blood transfer.”

Lamoignon walks around the court looking bemused. “But Doctor Patin, you have just stated that Antoine Mauroy died following this *alleged* third blood transfer…”

“Yes, that is my opinion, sir,” he says doggedly.

“Oh, it is your *opinion*…On what evidence do you base this *opinion*?”

“I am a physician of great exp…”

Lamoignon hardens his voice. “We know that, Doctor! My question is, on what *medical* or *scientific* grounds do you base your accusation?” Silence. “The fact is, there are no medical or scientific grounds to support your assertion that the deceased died as a result of a blood transfer, are there, doctor?"

The doctor shakes his head.

“Speak for the record, Doctor. Your claim that the deceased died as a result of a blood transfer is not based on scientific fact, but is merely an *opinion*.”

“For God’s sake!”

“I repeat: your claim that the deceased died as a result of a blood transfer is merely an opinion…”

Sullenly: “Yes.”

“Thank you. Now, doctor, on the occasion when Mauroy’s casket was opened, Doctor Chernier stepped forward and declared that he could smell arsenic. Did you also smell arsenic?”

“Yes.”

“Arsenic is a deadly poison when administered to a person…”

“Yes.”

“Then it is *possible* that Mauroy died from arsenic poisoning and not from blood transfer. Do you agree?”

Before the doctor could answer, there is a scrape of a chair as Advocate Lamy leaps to his feet and appeals to the Judge-President. “Your Honour,” he shouts, “my honourable colleague is introducing a cause of death on which there is no evidential basis. He must withdraw that remark.”

Before Defita can rule, Lamoignon bows to his learned colleague, then turns back to the witness. “Doctor Patin,” he says, “Let me rephrase my question. “Did you conclude that there was the smell of arsenic present in the coffin of the deceased.”

“Yes.”

“And my last question, doctor. Given your vast medical experience, do you agree that arsenic can be a deadly poison?”

“Yes, it is, but…”

“Thank you, doctor. That is all.”

Lamy again rises to his feet. “Doctor Patin, if arsenic was present in the coffin of the deceased – which cannot be scientifically proven – as I understand…”

“You are correct, sir. The presence of arsenic in a body cannot be scientifically proven.”

“Nevertheless, let us assume that arsenic was present, after all, Doctor Chernier claimed to have smelt it, then it raises the question: how did it get there? Is arsenic only used to poison people?”

“Definitely, not, sir. It has many uses and is present in a number of household products.”

“Such as…”

“Such as green dye in wallpaper, rat poison, weed-killer, sheep dips and fly-papers and is even present in some medical tonics and cosmetic preparations.”

“So, in other words, the presence of arsenic in Mauroy’s coffin could have a number of …shall I say *natural*…causes and had no part to play in the victim’s death.”

“That is correct, sir.”

“Thank you, Doctor Patin. I have no further questions.”

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When Varenne arrives home, his mother meets him at the front door. “Your father is waiting to see you,” she says.

In his office, his father is seated behind his desk. But it is not his father’s grave demeanour that concerns Varenne when he enters, but the sight of the man sitting opposite him: Joseph Turgot. In an instant, his resentment flares and his fists become so tightly clenched the white shows on his knuckles. “What does he want?” he shouts.

“Monsieur Turgot is here to speak with you, Guillaume,” his father says quietly.

When he turns, Varenne is shocked to see that the old man has been crying. “Anne is dying, Guillaume,” he says.

For a moment, the words don’t register. Varenne stares at him in stunned silence. “What….I…?” he manages to say, but is then lost for words.

“She took to her bed two days ago. Our physician says her heart if failing…” The words catch in his throat.

Varenne feels his legs go weak. He stumbles but manages to collect himself, gives a hiss of horror. “Why?” is all he can say.

“I think from despair…”

Varenne closes his eyes. “This is your doing,” he says cruelly. “She told me she would rather die than marry Auguste Magnoac. She hates him.”

“Yes.” Eyes closed, the old man nods. His lips barely move. “We thought it merely a young woman’s bluster, but she is…fading.”

“So why are you here?”

“I want you to save her.”

“How?”

“I want you to… …to convince her to live.”

Varenne shakes his head. His expression is set. “No!”

The two men regard him with horror. “Guillaume…,” his father cries out.

“If you wish me to speak to her so that she will recover only to marry Magnoac, I will not do it. I will not betray Anne.”

“There is to be no more betrayal,” old man Turgot whispers. “The wedding is cancelled. I know that she loves you. Do you love her?”

Varenne is angry; angry with this old man, angry with himself, angry at the world. “Yes, of course I love her: with all my heart!” he snaps. “Why would you doubt that?”

“I just needed to hear you say it,” the old man confesses, his throat contracting as he swallows.

“Is there a priest already at her bedside?” Varenne asks.

“Yes, he is praying for her. He is preparing to read the last rites…In her delirium she has called your name. You are our last hope.”

Again, Varenne feels his world lurch. Yet even though he knows he must act swiftly; he knows too that he must demand one more concession. “When Anne revives, we are to be married,” he says. “Today…Tonight, if she so wishes.”

Varenne’s father stares at him open-mouthed in shock. “Guillaume…” he begins to say, but is silenced by old man Turgot, who waves a hand at him. “Agreed. If my daughter restores, then I will be the first to welcome you into the family and celebrate your marriage,” he says.

On the journey to the Turgot house, Varenne is trembling with apprehension. For one thing, despite all they have shared, they have never discussed marriage. Worse still, he is fearful that whatever he says or does, it is now too late and that his beloved cannot be revived.

Anne’s bedchamber is in darkness when Varenne enters. In front of the drawn curtains, Anne’s mother is weeping quietly. Thomas’s wife, Beatrice, sits nearby head in hands and a priest stands before the blazing fireplace, Bible in hand. All heads turn when the door opens, but no one speaks, though the priest raises a finger in warning, which Varenne ignores and goes directly to the bedside. In the firelight, his shadow falls across the bed where Anne lies unmoving her long hair spread out like a halo on the pillow. For an instant, he thinks himself too late, then he sees that she is still breathing, though shallowly, her face as white as snow.

He kneels, takes the pale hand that is lying on the coverlet and brings it to his lips. “I am here, my darling,” he whispers, but gets no reaction. He raises her hand to his lips a second time. “If you recover, we will be married, which is my deepest wish. Will you marry me, my love?”

For a fleeting instant, there is movement beneath her eyelids, but her eyes remain closed, her breathing unchanged. There is a gasp from the women behind him. Varenne kisses her again, this time most gently on the forehead. “I am yours, heart and soul,” he says.

Old man Turgot has come to stand behind him. “Forgive me, Anne,” he says, “Please come back to us. Let us celebrate your marriage to Guillaume…”

Varenne hears what sounds like a growl of protest from her mother and there is a swish of clothing as Thomas’s wife stands up, but neither move to intervene. The priest, meanwhile, has started muttering a prayer. Anne continues to lie, as if in death.

For four hours, Varenne remains at her bedside, whispering his love to her, her hand against his lips. Finally, just as even he is beginning to lose hope, her eyes suddenly flutter open and she looks at him.

“Am I in heaven?” she says weakly, her voice scratchy and dry.

Varenne shakes his head. “No, you are not in heaven, my beloved. You are in your bedchamber. We are to be married, Anne, if you so wish it,” he says.

“I wish it,” she whispers, then falls back into deep slumber.

An hour later she is awake again, though her eyes remain closed. “My family…?” she whispers.

“We are here, Anne,” her father says. He is standing with his wife at the end of the bed, arms wrapped around each other. “We want only that you are happy,” her mother says.

“I… wish… to… marry… Guillaume,” she answers.

“We will arrange a great celebration,” her mother says.

“You see, my love: we are to be married,” Varenne says.

“Then I am in heaven! Or is this a dream?”

“Not a dream,” Varenne replies.

“I am so very tired…”

“Will you marry me, my beloved?”

For a moment, her eyes open and she stares at him. “Yes.”

“Now?”

She is confused. “Now?” she repeats.

“Yes, will you marry me now. Today. Here this instant?”

For the first time she gives a weak smile. “Of course, I will marry you. I would have married you the first day I saw you.”

Varenne turns to the priest. “You will marry us now,” he says.

The priest shakes his head. “The banns have not been declared,” he says, then, “There is no ring to bless…” He looks to Joseph Turgot for support.

“You are to do as Guillaume instructs, Father,” Turgot replies.

“But…This is most unusual.”

Her mother steps forward. She has a hand to her mouth. Beneath the fingers her lips tremble. She removes her ring, which she hands to the priest. “Bless this,” she says, “it is to be my daughter’s wedding band.”

Anne is staring, he eyes fixed on Varenne. “If this is a dream, I don’t want to awaken,” she whispers.

**Wednesday 19 April**

DAY 3

The courtroom is silent and deserted. There is rumour that Perrine Mauroy has been arrested and is being questioned, though this has not been confirmed. The four accused, meanwhile, have taken their places in the dock and await the arrival of the Judge-President and the court officials, who are absent and more than an hour overdue. Strangely, the public gallery is also half empty. The seats previously reserved for the Lieutenant-General, First Minister Colbert and Henri Martiniere remain unoccupied.

During the delay, Varenne has described the events of the previous evening and explained that he is now a married man. This was followed by much good-natured jesting and back-slapping from the others. It is Doctor Chernier who inquires more seriously about the health of the bride.

“She is resting and recovering her strength, Theo,” Varenne answers.

“Is she eating?”

“Yes. I fed her chicken broth myself, but there was no marriage feast last night. That will come later.”

“And the Turgots?”

“They were witnesses to the marriage and are happy to see their daughter return to the land of the living…”

“Are they also happy to see you as their son-in-law?" Doctor Denis asks bluntly.

Varenne smiles. “It is not what they planned, but seeing their daughter recover has made them look upon me more kindly…Yes, I think they are happy to have me as a son-in-law.”

“What of her brother?” Theo asks.

Varenne shrugs, then sighs. “I saw him only briefly last night when he came to the bedchamber. He enquired about his sister’s health, glared at me then left. He is not pleased, I think, but…”

“…he must accept the situation.”

“Yes, I suppose he must.”

The conversation is interrupted when the court officials begin to file into the room. These are followed by Lamy, Perrault and Lamoignon, followed shortly afterwards by Judge-President Defita. After everyone has taken their place the Judge-President announces that the trial will continue. He gives no explanation for the delay.

The first to give evidence are Doctors Emmerez and Chernier. While the scribe writes furiously, both are questioned by an argumentative Advocate Lamy, who focusses on the third blood transfer. This, he asserts, took place at Mauroy’s house in the presence of Perrine Mauroy on the day before Antoine Mauroy died and is, therefore, the cause of death. When these charges are refuted by both witnesses, the interrogations grow increasingly more confrontational. Doctor Chernier is also challenged about his claim that arsenic was present on Mauroy’s corpse and is forced to concede that the presence of arsenic on a body is not proof-positive of poisoning.

Then it is Varenne’s turn to be questioned, but by Perrault, who again continues to insist that a third blood transfer took place. Surprisingly, it is Judge-President Defita who finally intercedes on Varenne behalf.

“Monsieur Perrault,” he glowers, “the question of a third blood transfer has been asked and answered by the accused numerous times. It is time now to move on.”

An aggrieved Perrault considers this for a moment, then shakes his head. “Then I have no more questions for this witness at this time,” he says finally.

Lamoignon rises from his seat. He fusses with the cuffs of his gown then places his hands on the desk, fingers splayed. He smiles at the half-empty public gallery. “Monsieur Varenne,” he begins, “I wish to question you about a conversation you had with Antoine Mauroy on the day before he died.”

“As you wish, sir.”

“Would you describe your relationship with Mauroy as that of a friend?”

Varenne shakes his head. “No, sir, we were not friends. I considered him a sad person.”

“Why?”

“His mind was troubled, and it was clear to me that he was in some distress.”

“Mental or physical distress?”

“Both, sir.”

“Did he ever speak to you about his wife?”

“Only once, sir.”

“Did he speak to you about her wanting to harm him? Let me be more specific: did Antoine Mauroy say that he thought his wife was trying to poison him?”

Before Varenne could answer, both Lamy and Perrault shoot out of their seats, arms raised in protest. “I object,” they shout, “this is hearsay!”

The clerk has halted, his quill poised, while the Judge-President considers the objection. “This is not hearsay: it is the recounting of a conversation involving the witness giving evidence. You may answer the question, Monsieur Varenne.”

“Yes, he did, sir.”

“Where and when was that?”

“It was the day before he died. We were at his house. Doctors Denis and Emmerez had planned to transfer blood to Monsieur Mauroy for the third time and Doctor Chernier and I were there to act as witnesses, but as my colleagues have testified, the blood transfer never happened.”

“Thank you. When exactly did Monsieur Mauroy speak to you about his wife?”

“When she left the room for a moment. He called me over to whisper in my ear.”

“What did he say?”

“He said, ‘My wife has poisoned me.’”

“How did you answer?”

“I didn’t answer. I was too shocked, sir.”

“Thank you, Monsieur Varenne. I have no more questions.”

Advocate Lamy immediately comes to life again and steps out to confront the witness. “Monsieur Varenne, you say you were shocked when the deceased said that his wife was trying to poison him?”

“Yes, sir, I was.”

“In your opinion, was the balance of his mind disturbed at that time?”

“He was very sick, sir.”

“Sick in the head?”

“I cannot say, sir, but, yes…he was…he was…melancholy….confused at times…”

“So, your assertion that Mauroy was poisoned, is based solely on the ravings of a madman.”

Varenne shakes his head. “He was not mad, sir!”

“But he was ‘melancholy’ and ‘confused’. Those are your words, Monsieur Varenne!”

“At that moment, he was lucid and clear of mind.”

The Prosecutor waves a dismissive hand in the air. “Yes, so you claim. However, apart from the *alleged* conversation which you have now recounted, you cannot offer any further evidence to this court to show that Mauroy was poisoned, can you?”

“No, sir, I cannot.”

“Thank you.” Perrault begins to turn away, then another thought occurs to him. “I have one further question, Monsieur Varenne: Did you speak to any of your colleagues about this alleged conversation?”

“Yes, sir. I spoke with Theo…Doctor Chernier.”

“What did he say?”

“He said that that he would discuss the matter with Doctors Denis and Emmerez….”

“And?” Lamy asks impatiently.

Varenne glances uncomfortably to his fellow accused before answering. “Doctor Denis said that even though Mauroy’s mental state had improved he was still subject to occasional bouts of delirium.”

Perrault grins then strides up to the dock the better to gloat at the witness. “Still subject to bouts of delirium…In other words, even Doctor Denis did not believe you!”

“I do not think Monsieur Mauroy was lying, sir,” Varenne retorts. Even to him this sounds weak.

“What you think, Monsieur Varenne, has no place in this court. Here, only evidence is pertinent.”

“He was not lying, sir!”

“No, not lying, Monsieur Varenne - deranged!” Casting his arms wide, Perrault then turns to the court. “Your Honour, the evidence is clear; there was no poisoning, which means that we are left with only one conclusion: Mauroy, a confused and deranged innocent, died following a third blood transfer…”

A furious Lamoignon is already on his feet. “Your Honour, I demand that my learned colleague desist from making this spurious allegation!”

“Withdrawn,” Perrault says, flapping his hands in the air as he resumes his seat.

“This trial is adjourned. We will resume tomorrow,” the Judge-President announces, much to everyone’s surprise.

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Later that afternoon, Theo Chernier and his daughter arrive at Varenne offices, just as Guillaume was about to return to the Turgots, where he plans to spend the night tending his wife.

“I have come to speak to your father,” Theo says then goes into his father’s office and closes the door leaving Athénaïs in Varenne’s care.

Guillaume escorts her into the board room where important visitors are entertained. Coffee is provided and he pulls out a chair inviting her to sit, but instead she goes to the window that looks out into the main office where the many clerks are hard at work. She is wearing, he notices, a becoming dress of blue silk. He is also aware of her blossoming figure.

Athénaïs turns to him. “What is it that you do exactly?” she asks.

“We are ship’s chandlers,” he says. “We provide supplies for the ships that sail to and from Paris.”

“Yes, sir. I know that. But what do *you* do?”

“I am responsible for the ledgers…”

“Ledgers?”

“The books in which our business activities are recorded. I also visit the ships that we provide stores to and oversee their loading and unloading.”

“It looks very enterprising,” she says.

Varenne joins her at the window and is aware of her heady perfume. She is, he realises, no longer a little girl, but is swiftly becoming a beautiful young woman. Suddenly, his reverie is interrupted when he hears the sound of raised voices in his father’s office. Athénaïs looks to Varenne for an explanation. “I don’t know,” he says.

A moment later, the door to his father’s office crashes open and Doctor Chernier emerges looking troubled. He is immediately followed by Varenne’s grim-faced father who storms out of his office, and marches towards the main door of the office. When Varenne gives his friend a questioning look the other shakes his head.

A junior clerk leaves his desk and rushes to open the front door for his master. When the door opens, two bailiffs are standing outside the building. Without a word, they march in uninvited.

“Monsieur Varenne,” the taller of the two says, “we are here on official business.”

“Then speak!” Varenne father bellows, the anger still bright inside him.

“Perhaps you would prefer the privacy of your office,” the second bailiff suggests.

“It makes no difference: say what you have to say!”

“We are bailiffs acting on the instructions of Thomas Turgot,” the first says insolently. “You have a debt which is about to fall due.” He holds out a document he has removed from his greatcoat, only to have it snatched away and handed to the young clerk.

“Your business here is done,” Varenne’s father says pushing past the two men and striding off down cobbled street.

“We will return next week to seize assets,” the second bailiff calls after him, but receives no reply.

The Chief Clerk, who has watched the incident unfold, gathers up the papers on his desk. “This is not right, sir,” he says and looks to Varenne for guidance, but the young man appears frozen with indecision. “I think we will close for the day, sir,” the Chief Clerk then announces, extinguishing the candle on his desk. Taking his lead, all the other clerks swiftly clear their desks and depart in silence.

Varenne, who has watched them go, turns anxiously to his friend. “What did you say to my father, Theo?” he asks.

“I merely said that I had heard that he had suffered a bout of breathlessness and asked if I could examine him.”

“Who told you that he was breathless?”

“Your mother sent me a note. She is worried about your father’s health…”

\*

The Lieutenant-General is hard at work when his Chief Investigator enters his office. “Why have you arranged for the trial to be adjourned, Pierre?” he says.

“Perrine Mauroy has been arrested, my lord. I thought it best to consult with you before proceeding.”

De la Reynie puts down the quill he has been holding. “Where was she hiding?”

“In a room across the river.”

“And where is she now?”

“Locked up, my lord. I thought you would want to interrogate her…perhaps before she is questioned in court…”

“Yes, you are right. Let us not keep Madame Mauroy waiting any longer,” he says drily, rising from his chair.

When the door opens, Perrine Mauroy is sitting on the stone shelf that runs along one side of the cell. Her hair is wild, her clothes tattered and torn, her face streaked with dirt. When she sees de la Reynie standing in the corridor, her face registers shock then she falls immediately to her knees and starts crawling towards him. “My lord,” she implores, “I am an innocent woman. I have been wrongly imprisoned. I beg you to release me.”

The gaoler, who has stepped into the room, immediately rushes forward. “Get back, woman!” he shouts, delivering at the same time a vicious kick to her side. She screams and crumples sideways, clutching an elbow. Suddenly, the room is filled with gasping sobs.

The gaoler would have kicked out again, had not Pierre Gagnon intervened and ordered him from the room.

“You have questions to answer, Madame,” de la Reynie says to the cowering woman.

“I am innocent, my lord,” she whimpers.

“Innocent of what?”

She is shaking, glances up at him in fear. “Of what I am accused.”

He looks to his Chief Investigator, who shakes his head. “But you have not been accused of anything.”

She stares at him blank-faced, though her mind is clearly ticking over. It occurs to de la Reynie that there is a deviousness about her that no amount of subterfuge can conceal.

“I will be blamed for my husband’s death,” she says.

Gagnon grimaces but says nothing. The Lieutenant-General, on the other hand, folds his arms and regards her with interest. “Why do you say that, Madame? Why would you be blamed?” She swallows but makes no reply. “Did your husband receive a third blood transfer at your house on the day before he died?”

She rubs her arm as her eyes dart around the room. “Answer the question,” Gagnon says sharply.

She shakes her head and frowns like she is reluctant to speak, but speak she does. “Yes, my lord. They gave him blood and then he died.”

“Who is ‘they’?” de la Reynie asks.

“The doctor, the blood doctor and the others…”

“Others? What others?”

“The other doctors, two of them, and the young man….”

“And you witnessed this? Your husband being given blood by these men?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Did anyone coerce you into saying these things? Did anyone tell you what to say when questioned? Did anyone give you money?”

She shakes her head again. “No, my lord, I swear…” Their eyes meet, “As God is my witness…”

“You deny that any pressure was put on you to accuse these men?”

“Yes, I deny it.”

De la Reynie nods. His lips are pressed together, his expression unreadable.

“Can I go now, my lord?” she asks.

“No, you cannot go.” He turns to Gagnon. “Send for the lawyers. I wish them to be present when she is questioned.”

Madame Mauroy has heard his instruction. Her look is one of confusion. “What should I say to them?” she pleads. “Tell me what to say and I will say it.”

“The truth, madame, nothing but the truth. Only the truth will set you free. This conference is concluded.”

“I am an innocent woman,” she shouts as the two men turn to leave.

In the doorway, de la Reynie pauses. This time his eyes are cold and hostile. “I am not sure I believe you, Madame” he says as the torturer steps out of the shadows.

\*

In Anne Turgot’s bedchamber, Guillaume Varenne is at his wife’s bedside, the two of them holding hands. For twenty-four hours her mother and father have fussed ceaselessly over their daughter as she slowly recovered, but it has been the presence of her husband that has been the most important factor in her healing. Now she is sitting up in bed and there is some colour in her cheeks.

“I have prepared our room at my parents’ house, Madame Varenne,” he says and sees her smile.

“I can’t believe we are married,” she says amazed.

“My beloved wife,” he corrects her and kisses her hand.

When her brother Thomas enters, both stiffen. “I am happy to see you mended, sister,” he says. Then, to Varenne, “May I speak with you privately?”

Outside the room, Thomas gets straight to the point. “You are now my brother-in-law, but that does not change the fact that your family owes money to my family. This is a debt that must be repaid.”

When Varenne opens his mouth to speak, Thomas waves him to silence.

“This is the hard world of commerce, Varenne, nothing more. You have taken out a loan, which I suspect cannot be repaid. This means that when debt falls due your family business will founder. Is this correct? I thought so,” he continues when he sees the other’s expression. “As my brother-in-law I cannot have you put out on the street…” His eyes narrow, “… much as I would like to. If you are not in prison, you will be given a job within my company…a clerk in my office, possibly, under my supervision, of course.”

“And my family?” Varenne makes a point of keeping his voice level.

“When the business is sold to pay the debt, there will be money left over, which will provide them with a small pension. Their circumstances will change, but this is merely one of the consequences of attempting to rise above one’s station.”

Varenne’s gaze does not leave his eyes. “Thank you for the information,” he says cooly and returns to the bedroom.

\*

In a torture chamber lit by guttering torches, Perrine Mauroy is shackled to the wall under the watchful eye of Chief Investigator Gagnon. Advocates, Lamy, Perrault, Lamoignon and Assistant-Judge d’Ormasson are also present in the room, all of them grim-faced and ill at ease. Around them are various mechanicals of unknown purpose, plus a number of pulleys from which hang cords and hooks.

A wooden horse higher than her waist, has been set up in front of Madame Mauroy and she is watching in horror as the Head Torturer, his long leather jerkin grease-stained and mottled with blood, makes his preparations. He has already brought in two buckets of water which he has placed nearby. When his assistant brings in a third, she begins to wail.

Lamy springs to life when Judge-President Defita and Nicolas de la Reynie enter the chamber. “My lord, this is not right!” he protests.

“Madame Mauroy is to be put to the question…An ordinary question,” de la Reynie answers calmly.

An ordinary question involves eight pints of water. An extraordinary question, twice that amount.

“My lord, this is most inappropriate,” Perrault adds. “Surely a court of law would be better…”

“No. In this case, first we must hear what she has to say. I am acting on His Majesty’s instructions.”

This realisation that the king is involved silences Perrault, though he does little to hide his unhappiness.

“My Chief Investigator will question Madame Mauroy in your presence,” de la Reynie explains to the assembled group. “You should know that I have already spoken with the witness, but I am not convinced she has been honest with me. Today we will discover the truth.”

Lamoignon nods to the buckets of water, “But using this method, sir?”

“In this case some…coercion… may be necessary. Now, let us proceed…”

The seven men gather around the restrained woman, who has fallen silent, but stands pale and shivering with fear.

“Do you know why you are here, Madame?” Gagnon asks.

She shakes her head. “You must speak up, woman,” he warns. “Silence is not an option today.”

She jerks at the ropes binding her wrists. “I don’t know why I am here. I am an innocent bereaved woman. I have done nothing!”

“You are here to answer questions about your husband’s death,” Gagnon says.

Again, she tugs violently at the ropes. “It was the doctors what killed him,” she shouts.

“Which doctors?”

“The one named Denis and his assistant, and the other two…”

“Doctor Emmerez?”

“Yes.”

“How did the doctor kill your husband?”

“He poisoned his blood.”

“How?”

“He put animal blood into him.”

“At your house? The day before he died?”

“Yes.”

“There, we have the truth of it,” Lamy says, throwing out his arms, like the matter is concluded.

“Be quiet, sir!” de la Reynie hisses.

“I protest!”

De la Reynie responds with a look of such vitriol the lawyer takes a step back, shocked into silence. “Protest noted,” de la Reynie says, then to Gagnon, “Pierre…”

Gagnon steps up to the witness his face so close they could almost be kissing. “The herder has confirmed that the animal was not used,” he whispers.

She is shaking her head. “Then he is lying!” she says.

Gagnon nods to the torturer, who lifts a bucket of water and places it near the hurdle then steps back again. She stares at the water with wild, scared eyes.

“Now you will tell me the truth, or you will suffer. Do you understand?” He speaks very quietly.

She is shaking like a leaf, but manages to nod. “I didn’t do nothing,” she says.

“Who paid for the animal?”

“I paid.”

“But who gave you the money?”

“No one. It was money I saved…”

“I don’t believe you. Did you poison your husband?”

The sudden shift from money to poison silences her. For a moment, she stares at him, mouth agape. “No, sir…never. I loved him…!

“That is not what your neighbours say.”

“They lie.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“I tell the truth, sir…The truth.”

“Let me ask you again, Madame Mauroy, and this time you must come clean. Who gave you money?”

“No one.” Her voice is barely above a whisper.

Gagnon looks to de la Reynie, who nods. “You will now be put to the question, madame,” he says, causing the three lawyers to stiffen uncomfortably. “I will not be party to this,” Lamy declares and starts to leave, until de la Reynie raises a hand to him. “Step back! You will listen and observe. You will listen and observe and be quiet. Do you understand?” There is no mistaking the warning beneath the words and Lamy once again retreats. The smug self-confidence he presents in court, is now gone.

The torturer and his assistant, unshackle Mauroy and drag her to the wooden horse where, shrieking, she is forced onto her back. Then her arms and legs drawn out and tethered to ring bolts in the floor.

“Prepare yourself, madame,” Gagnon says, but she makes no reply, though her lips are moving soundlessly in prayer.

The assistant steps forward and forces a long leather tube into the struggling woman’s mouth. She is already starting to choke when the torturer takes a dipper, fills it from the bucket of water and pours it into a funnel he has fitted to the tube. The woman’s eyes go wide as she retches and heaves, but he continues to pour until the bucket is almost empty. All the time, she shudders and shakes while beneath her, the wooden horse clatters and creaks from her struggles. Eventually, Gagnon orders the torturer to step back and the tube is withdrawn. There follows a bout of coughing and spluttering as water gushes from her mouth.

“Who paid for the animal?” Gagnon asks again.

She is panting, gasping, vomiting water. “Stop, my lord….stop…”

“Who paid for the animal?” Gagnon repeats.

“Savings…” she gasps. “Savings…”

He steps back, and nods to the torturer. Again, the tube is forced into her throat. A second bucket of water is used. This time she bucks uncontrollably on the trestle. When the tube is removed from her throat she lies as if dead for a long time before shuddering weakly back to life. This time it is Lamoignon who protests to de la Reynie, who replies with a shake of his head. Lamy and Perrault merely look on in horror.

“Who paid for the animal?” Gagnon repeats.

Her face is blanched in agony. “Savings…” she repeats weakly.

It is when Gagnon motions for the torturer to continue that she wheezes, “I don’t know…”

Gagnon puts out his arm to stop the torturer who is moving forward with the tube at the ready. “What do you mean, you don’t know?”

“Stranger. He arrived by horse… didn’t dismount. He… gave… me… money…”

At this admission, the five men crowd more closely around her.

“Describe him,” Gagnon says.

She opens her eyes, turns her head to look at him, defeated; a broken woman. “Tall… a tall, thin man…”

“Young or old?”

“Thirty years…maybe…”

“Describe his horse.”

She is confused. “His horse…sir, I don’t…”

“What colour was his horse?”

She frowns. “Grey. It was grey.”

“What is the man’s name?”

She shakes her head. “Don’t know... He arrived when it was going dark…spoke to me in the garden…said blood transfer was Satan’s work …said he wanted to help me…”

Gagnon grins, like this is the confession he has been expecting all along. “Did he give you money?”

“Yes…gold coin… Said he would return…”

“Did he?”

She nods. “Please, release me, sir,” she begs.

“When did he return?”

“Three days later…appeared out of nowhere… Antoine had gone drinking like he usually did…”

“Did he give you coin again?” She nods. “What else?”

Her eyes are closed. She has fallen back into silence.

“What else?” he repeats, this time with a hint of malice in his voice.

“White powder.”

“White powder?”

“Said I was to put in my husband’s food… said that it would stop him drinking… stop him hitting me… Use only a little,” he said.

“Did you use it?” Gagnon asked.

“No, sir.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“It’s the truth.”

When Gagnon motions for the torturer to step forward again, she begins to keen with anguish. “Please, sir, not again,” she begs, “it will kill me.”

“Then tell the truth!” he shouts. “Did you use the white powder on your husband?”

“Yes,” she sobs.

\*

The Lieutenant-General and his Chief Investigator are in conference in the corridor outside the torture chamber. Everyone else has departed and Madame Mauroy has been taken back to her cell.

“I want you to find out who gave her the poison, Pierre,” de la Reynie says quietly. “Someone who rides a grey horse. Find out who it is.”

“Yes, my lord.”

“…but discreetly, you understand. Discreetly!”

**Thursday 20 April**

DAY 4

Before dawn, de la Reynie rides out to Versailles. At the Royal stables he sends a message to Colbert requesting an urgent meeting. A swift reply instructs him to await the First Minister at the Apollo Fountain.

Colbert walks out of the building ten minutes later. Wigless and in jerkin and leather breeches, he could almost be mistaken for a working man, except for the two men-at-arms who have accompanied him into the gardens and now hover in the background.

Nearby, there is a pyramid of collapsed scaffolding with workers clambering over the wreckage like ants on an anthill.

“The scaffolding fell down in the night,” Colbert says, when he sees de la Reynie looking.

“How many were killed?” de la Reynie asks. It is common knowledge that fatal accidents happen all the time at Versailles, where thousands of workers toil day and night in deplorable conditions.

Colbert grimaces and glances back to the palace. “Five men were crushed to death,” he says grimly, then: “However, I suspect you have not ridden all this way to discuss this very expensive building site, have you, Jean?”

“No, my lord. It is the Mauroy case. There have been developments…”

Colbert, looks around. There are workmen and women, guards and gardeners everywhere. “Come, let us find somewhere a little less public,” he says and leads the way to a stone bench hidden behind a line of saplings waiting to be planted. It is only after they are seated that he says, “Tell me…”

“Perrine Mauroy has confessed to poisoning her husband…”

“Good. A confession freely given?”

“Some…coercion… was used.”

“But you believe she has told the truth… even under duress?”

“Yes, I do. She was given money and poison by a visitor…a person of standing…”

Colbert sighs. “Who?”

“Henri de la Martiniere. He also paid for Mauroy’s hastily arranged funeral.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

“Who knows?”

“My Chief Investigator, Pierre Gagnon, myself and now you.”

“Then keep it that way. No one else is to know. Martiniere is one of the King’s Men …”

De la Reynie slips a sideways glance at Colbert because he knows what that means: the murder investigation has now become a powder keg. “Will you inform his majesty, my lord?” he asks carefully.

“Yes…probably…at the right moment.”

“And Madame Mauroy?”

“You say she has confessed to murder?”

“Yes, my lord.”

“Then she must pay the price.”

“And Doctor Denis and his co-accused?”

“Denis has yet to be questioned in court, has he not?

“Yes, my lord.”

“Then he must be vigorously interrogated like everyone else!” Colbert says firmly. “His Majesty desires that the trial should take its course and that the law be seen to be fair and impartial.” De la Reynie nods. “Good. I am glad we understand each other. Of course, given this new evidence, it is obvious that Doctor Denis and his co-accused will be found innocent...”

“I’m sure that can be arranged, my lord, “de la Reynie says clumsily.

Colbert throws him a sharp look, like he is about to offer a rebuke, then seems to think better of the idea. “Yes, Jean,” he says coolly, “justice must prevail: the guilty are punished and the innocent go free.”

“And Doctor Martiniere?”

For a moment, a dark shadow passes over the First Minister’s features. “I will deal with him personally,” he says quietly.

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The fourth day of the trial is once again delayed, this time until early afternoon. The first sign that the hearing is about to commence is when Pierre Gagnon enters the courtroom accompanied by Nicolas de la Reynie, his boots and leggings still mud-stained from riding. Shortly thereafter, Judge-President Defita takes his seat.

Addressing himself to an empty courtroom, the Judge-President announces that given the limited time available, only one witness will be called – Doctor Jean-Baptiste Denis. This unexpected announcement causes a flurry of activity outside the courtroom and is followed by a sudden inrush of spectators. By the time Denis has taken his place at the witness stand, the public gallery is packed to overflowing.

There is no doubt that Denis is an arrogant man, which is no more obvious than when he struts proudly to the witness stand. After he has taken his place, he regards his inquisitor with cool indifference. When Advocate Lamy opens his mouth to begin, the doctor raises a hand to silence him then turns to address the Judge-President. A hush falls over the court.

“Your Honour,” he says loudly, “I have been accused of murder, but my accuser is not in court to answer for her lies. I demand that all charges against myself and my companions be dropped immediately!”

Defita stiffens in his seat. “You *demand*, sir? You do not *demand* in my court. Request denied. You will answer the questions put to you, sir.”

But Denis will not be subdued. “Then I formally register a protest.”

“Noted. Now continue.”

Making a show of his displeasure, Denis turns and throws out his arms in a gesture of appeal to the public gallery. He is rewarded for his effort with a smattering of applause. The Judge-President is less appreciative, however, and repeatedly calls for order. As the uproar subsides, Lamy is forced to raise his voice to make himself heard. “Doctor Denis,” he shouts, “describe the nature of your work regarding blood transfer…”

Denis again spreads his arms, but this time to call for silence. Only after the laughter has dwindled and there is peace and order in the court, does he deem to speak.

“Sir, in recent years, blood transfer experiments have been carried out in England by a number of eminent physicians, including Richard Lower, Edmund King and Thomas Coxe. In these experiments, blood was transferred between dogs. In the English experiments one dog invariably died and the other survived. However, I determined to repeat these experiments, but with more care and consideration, which I did. In my case, both dogs survived; the one appeared weak and beaten, the other awake and gay. During subsequent experiments of a similar nature, it became evident to me that there was much virtue in the process of blood transfer and I determined to conduct a human experiment, which I also did successfully. In June last year, I transfused blood into two patients, both of whom remain hale and hearty. Following these successes, I selected Antoine Mauroy for treatment…”

“Why Mauroy?” Lamy interrupted.

“Because his mind was disturbed and I knew that my treatment would return him to sanity and reset the balance of his humours. Twice last December, he successfully received blood transfers. At the time of his death, his mind had been restored and he was in good health…”

“Good heath, sir?” Lamy roars, “the man died!”

“Not as a result of my treatment, sir!”

Lamy shakes his head, clearly unconvinced by this response. He strides over to where the doctor is standing. He grins at Denis. “Doctor Denis, on the day before he died, did you perform a third blood transfer on Antoine Mauroy?”

This question causes the witness to sigh and shake his head. “Sir, that question has been asked and answered many, many times…No, sir, I did not.”

“But you visited him at his home with the purpose of conducting a third blood transfer! Is that not true?”

“Yes, but a third transfer did not take place?”

“Why not?”

Again, Denis turns exasperated to the public gallery for support, “Sir,” he says, “on the occasion in question, the patient was clearly unwell. He was listless and out of sorts. Doctor Emmerez prepared him for the procedure, but when we cut into his foot the blood that revealed itself was black and heavy. It was at that point that he suffered a seizure and we refused to continue. We informed Madame Mauroy and began putting away our instruments at which point she became angry and insisted that we carry out the operation. We did not do so and departed.”

“He suffered a seizure!” Lamy bellowed. “You have just said he was in good health, sir!”

“…It was a temporary condition.”

“A temporary condition…” Lamy was incredulous.

“Yes,” the doctor answers impatiently.

“Madame Mauroy has claimed that she witnessed you transfer blood into her husband.”

“Then she is lying, sir. Let her come to court and present her evidence before this court!”

“But you admit that you rode out of the city in order to carry out the blood transfer…”

“Yes, I admit I went to the Mauroy residence, but I did not carry out the procedure. Were you not listening, sir?”

“Doctor Denis,” the Judge-President roars, “you will restrict your comments to answering the questions and nothing more. Do you understand, sir?”

Denis shrugs. “If you insist, sir.”

“Yes, I insist! And if you continue to play to the gallery, I shall clear the court. Do you understand that, too?”

Denis nods.

“Do not shake your head at me, sir! Say, ‘yes’, or ‘no’.”

“Yes.”

“Yes, Monsieur le Judge-President.”

“Yes, Monsieur le Judge-President.”

“Thank you. Prosecutor Lamy, please continue.”

Turning once more to the witness, Lamy says, “It is my contention that the fact that Monsieur Mauroy was *clearly not well*, to use your own words, was a direct consequence of the previous two blood transfers he received at your hands.”

Denis sighs and rubs his face, then seeing the look that the Judge-President is giving him, then in a gesture of calm assurance, gently clasps his hands. “Those transfers occurred more than two months before his death, sir,” he says quietly. “Two months. During this interim he was in the best of health.”

“Until the third transfer caused the patient to have a seizure and die…”

“Prosecutor Lamy,” Defita intrudes, “I am becoming extremely frustrated by this line of questioning. It has already been proved to the court’s satisfaction that no third transfer took place. I have allowed you leeway and have tolerated you repeatedly belabouring this point, but my patience is now exhausted. It is clear to this court that there is no evidence to show a third blood transfer occurred. Move on, sir!”

Lamy bows, his mouth a thin line. After a moment of thought, he turns again to the witness. “Doctor Denis, it is true, is it not, that the practice of blood transfer is condemned by both eminent physicians at the University of Paris and the Catholic church?”

“It is true that I have encountered opposition from a variety of ill-informed quarters…”

“But, sir, you are a man of low birth, dubious qualification and questionable morality. How can anyone put faith in your medical knowledge …?”

Amidst the uproar that follows this insult, there is a scrape of a chair as Lamoignon shoots to his feet in protest. “Your Honour,” Lamoignon says, “my learned colleague appears to have confused asking questions with voicing slurs …”

Even as the Judge-President is reacting, Lamy is already moving back to his seat. “I have no more questions for this witness,” he says.

Lamoignon steps forward. “Doctor Denis,” he begins. “You carried out *two* successful blood transfers on the deceased four months before he died. Is that correct?”

“Yes, sir, I did.”

“And, as already been established, a third blood transfer never happened. Is that also correct?”

“That is also correct, sir.”

“Then neither you, nor the other accused, can be held responsible for the death of Antoine Mauroy.”

“That is what I have been claiming from the moment this ridiculous charge was laid against me, sir.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

\*

Immediately after the court session has ended, Varenne goes to see his wife, who is out of bed and sitting by a window in her bedroom when he arrives. Although she remains pale, some colour is slowly returning to her face. Pulling up a seat, he takes her hand and kisses her gently on the lips.

“I am glad to see you up and about, my love,” he says.

Her smile is pure sunshine. “I have to look my best for my husband,” she replies. They grin at each other, though a second later, her expression darkens.

“Yes?” he says.

“I am worried about you. The trial…?”

He takes her by the shoulders. “My love, I have done nothing wrong and the trial is going well. Monsieur Lamoignon is confident that we will be acquitted…”

“When? When will you be acquitted?”

“Tomorrow…the day after…who knows…but soon.”

It is obvious from her expression that she remains unconvinced, though she says nothing.

“When you are fully recovered, we will move to my parents’ house where rooms have been prepared and are awaiting us.”

She looks at him then dips her head, blushing shyly at the thought of the marriage bed. “As soon as possible,” she says strongly. “I am your wife. I am packed and ready to move.”

“Are you certain?”

“Yes. Please call Danielle so she can prepare my things.”

“Yes, my love, then I shall return home to make sure everything is ready.”

Outside in the corridor, he hears raised voices. Downstairs in the kitchen, Thomas is arguing with his father. When Varenne walks in the two men fall silent. Thomas glares at him then storms out of the room.

It is old man Turgot who is the first to speak. “I have ordered that the legal case against your father be halted,” he says. “My son strongly objects, as I’m sure you are aware, which is why, for the moment, it is only halted and not cancelled. When we have definite news of the *Jonkeer* we will review the matter, but I can do nothing about your other creditors who are determined to pursue the matter…”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I prefer an amalgamation of our two companies if the ship is lost, though your father may object. My son wishes for complete control…but do not think too harshly of him, Guillaume. He is a businessman first and a brother-in-law second. I, on the other hand, am a father-in-law first, and a businessman second…But tell me, what do you wish to say?”

“Anne wishes to move to my house, sir. I came looking for Danielle.”

The old man smiles sadly. “She is now a wife, Guillaume, and much as it saddens me to see her leave this house, that is what is right and proper.” Then he becomes serious. “I am trusting you to love and protect my beloved daughter…”

“I will, sir. Have no fear in that regard.”

“I know that the trial is going well, but still a verdict has not been reached.”

“I am optimistic, sir…”

“Yes, but optimism is no guarantee of success…”

\*

Doctors Martiniere and Lamy are taking coffee together when a member of the Swiss Guard approaches their table and requests that Doctor Martiniere join First Minister Colbert in his carriage, which is waiting outside in the street.

Martiniere exchanges a look with his companion, then glances around and sees that everyone is watching him.

“Of course, officer,” he says loudly, stepping away from the table, “we must not keep our esteemed First Minister waiting…”

Outside, the weather has turned to rain and dark clouds have descended over the city.

“Please take a seat, Doctor,” Colbert says, when the other climbs into the carriage.

“This is most pleasant surprise, sir,” Martiniere says smoothly, brushing raindrops from his shoulder, “but could I not have been… forewarned… of this meeting?”

“No.”

Hearing the sharp response, Martiniere bristles. He is not one to be intimidated. Folding his arms, he sits back in his seat and regards the other with narrowed eyes. “Why have I been so rudely summoned, sir?” he asks.

“You are strongly opposed to the practice of blood transfer, are you not, Doctor Martiniere?”

The doctor lifts his hands to concede the point. “It is common knowledge that I disapprove of the practice.” His gaze does not leave the other’s eyes. “My opposition is well known and is based upon well-established scientific principle.”

“What principle is that?”

The doctor sighs wearily, like the question is but one more vexation in a world filled with annoyances. “Blood forms a harmonious link between the soul and the body. The soul resides in the body, therefore, to transfer blood risks transferring the soul from one being to another…”

“I see.”

“No, sir, I don’t think you do see! The victims must be protected from this Satanic malpractice. The particles transferred from both bovines and ovis aries will have the result of causing the mind of the recipient to become slow and heavy…”

“Is that why you paid Perrine Mauroy to poison her husband…to protect him?”

For a moment the doctor is struck dumb. “I have no idea what you are talking about,” he says angrily when he eventually finds his tongue.

“I think you do, sir. Anyway, I have the evidence. Under normal circumstances you would be taken to the Place de Greve and hanged like the common criminal you are, but these are not normal circumstances. Do you deny meeting with Perrine…and do not lie to me, Doctor, or things will go very, very badly for you.”

Despite this warning, the doctor smiles; a display of confidence that borders on insolence. “Since you appear so well-informed, First Minister, I confess that I did take the opportunity to meet her. I gave her a gold coin to compensate for the ordeal she has suffered, and I offered solace since her husband had been so cruelly treated.”

“How many times did you visit her?”

He turns his head away and presses a hand to his mouth, the better it seems to recall such unimportant details. “Let me think…Ah, yes, on two occasions,” he says cooly.

“You are an expert on poisons. Your ‘Treatise on Antidotes’ has been widely read. On the second visit, you used this expertise to provide poison to Madame Mauroy.”

“You go too far, sir! On the second occasion, I gave the lady a dietary supplement that she could add to her husband’s food to improve his health…”

“Doctor Martiniere, you are currently standing in the shadow of the gallows, do not make matters worse through the pretence of innocence. His Majesty is aware of your crimes…”

Shocked by this revelation, Martiniere gives a little hiss of distaste.

“If you wish to avoid the hangman, I suggest that from now on you keep your medical opinions to yourself and desist from your cowardly plotting. Do I make myself understood?”

“I understand that I am being silenced.”

“I understand you are a fool who likes to play with fire. Are you intent on continuing with this most dangerous game that you are playing? If that is your intent, then I warn you now that such action will not end well for you...”

There is a moment of silence then the doctor shrugs as his bluster evaporates. He drops his gaze “No...”

“No? No, what?”

“No more…I shall remain silent on this matter.”

“Good, then this meeting is over. Get out of my sight!”

**Friday 21 April**

DAY 5

Assistant Judge d’Ormasson rises from his seat and takes a deep breath. “The court calls Perrine Mauroy!” He then steps out from behind his desk, clearly intending to conduct the questioning himself. This unexpected development is a surprise for the four accused. When they look to Monsieur Lamoignon for an explanation, he merely shakes his head.

In the front row of the public gallery, Nicolas de la Reynie sits quietly in his seat. Around him, however, there is much noisy debate, which does not cease until the witness finally emerges, blinking into the light. Only at this point does a deep hush descend over the court.

All eyes are on Perrine Mauroy as she walks unsteadily to the witness stand accompanied by a court official, who is supporting her at the elbow. There follows the swearing-in formalities, after which the official, having discharged his duties, moves away. She, however, remains standing, swaying gently in the dock.

Assistant-Judge d’Ormasson approaches the witness. “Please give your name for the court record,” he says.

She has her head bowed and is clutching her stomach. She glances up. “I am Perrine Mauroy,” she whispers then shrinks back into herself. Her face, when glimpsed, is dirt-streaked and etched with suffering; a reminder to those watching that torture is legal practice in France.

“Speak up, Madame,” d’Ormasson instructs.

“My name is Perrine Mauroy,” she says a little more loudly.

“Madame Mauroy, I have some questions for you. You are required to answer them honesty. Do you understand?”

She nods.

“Say Yes or No, Madame.”

“Yes.”

“Good. Question one: did you wrongly accuse Doctor Jean-Baptiste Denis of murdering your husband?”

“Yes.”

“Question two: Madame Mauroy, did you poison your husband with arsenic and cause him to die?”

She sighs and seems to smile to herself, though the expression is little more than a grimace. It is only when her interrogator takes a breath to repeat the question, that she answers.

“Yes.”

There are gasps from the public gallery and d’Ormasson looks to Judge-President Defita. “I have no more questions, Your Honour,” he says.

“Oh, I think you do, sir,” the Judge-President responds sharply, motioning for him to continue.

A little flustered, d’Ormasson returns to his table and consults some papers. After composing himself, he returns to the fray.

“Now, Madame Mauroy,” he begins, “I wish to go over the details of your crime. Cast your mind back to Saturday March 1, the day before your husband died. On that day, you were visited by Doctors Denis, Emmerez and Chernier and Monsieur Varenne. These are the four men sitting in court alongside you. Is that correct?”

She does not look up. “Yes.”

“When these men arrived, you were prepared for the doctor to carry out a blood transfer. Is that also correct?”

“Yes.”

You had acquired a calf, an expensive animal, which was tethered outside the house and would be used in the transfer of blood to your husband. Is that correct?”

Before she answers this question, she raises her head for the first time the better, it seems, to study her inquisitor. There is a more determined look on her face when she says, “Yes, I did.”

“Now, Madame, I want you to describe for the court the scene that day…”

She once again drops her gaze, and appears to be collecting her thoughts. “Antoine was in bed,” she begins. Then looking up, “He was tied; a rope around his chest because he had become noisy…”

“How had you manged to tie him up?”

“He was sick…weak. A neighbour helped me. The villagers hated Antoine…He was always causing trouble…”

“What trouble?”

“Antoine had an over-fondness for ale.” She gives a shuddering sigh. “He would come from the tavern drunk. Then he’d start shouting…. He would hit me. We were always fighting…The neighbours hated him…I hated him…”

After this admission, for ten heartbeats, d’Ormasson is frozen in place, staring at her with great intensity. “Did a stranger give you money?” he says finally. Then, when she fails to answer, “Did a man on a grey horse give you money?”

“Yes.”

“Who was this mysterious person?”

She shakes her head. “I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?” He sounds disbelieving. “You don’t know the name of the person who gave you gold…”

“No.”

“Did this mysterious person also give you the poison you used to murder your husband?”

A vein is now throbbing in her temple. “He gave me white powder,” she says.

“White powder…which you added to your husband’s food...”

“No, sir, I did not.”

“No?” Clearly, this is not the answer he had unexpected.

“I added it to his beer.”

There is a smattering of laughter in court.

“This white powder…It was poison, was it not? Arsenic by name.”

She shrugs. “If you say so. I was never given a name.”

“But you added it to his drink and he became sick and died…”

“Yes, good riddance to him!”

Monsieur d’Ormesson sighs at this outburst. “Let us move on to another subject: did Doctor Denis transfuse blood into your husband that day?” he asks.

She shakes her head.

“Speak up, Madame,” he says.

“No.”

“But that was the purpose of his visit…”

“Antoine started wailing when they cut into his foot…he started thrashing about. The doctor said he was having a seizure, that his blood too black…that he wasn’t going to continue.”

“What did you do?”

At this question, she straightens herself, meets the eyes of her inquisitor, speaks more boldly: “I shouted…told him he had to do it, that everything had been prepared, He said it was a wasted journey. I was angry…”

“You were angry…?”

“Yes. I picked up the candle, held it up to my face. ‘Look at the bruises,’ I said. ‘He hits me all the time…that why you have to do it…otherwise, he’ll kill me in his madness…’”

“What did the doctor say?”

“He didn’t say anything, just shook his head, I rolled up my sleeve to show him more bruises on my arm. ‘My husband did these,’ I said. ‘He’ll kill me!’ But he just shook his head again and started putting away his instruments. ‘My husband is mad!’ I shouted, ‘He thinks he can marry a noblewoman…!’” She cackles at the memory of this mixture of terror and truth, before sinking back into silence. Around her, the entire court is looking on in horror.

“And the next day, you poisoned your husband?”

She is shaking her head. “No, not the next day, that afternoon. What else could I do? My husband was a mad man…”

In an instant, the court is in uproar, cries of ‘guilty!’ called out from the public gallery.

“You could have nursed him,” d’Ormosson says when order has once more been restored. “You could have behaved like a loving wife?”

At this remark she again comes suddenly to life. “I was a loving wife!” she screams. “But where was my loving husband?”

“Perrine Mauroy, you have admitted before God and this court that you are both a deceiver and a murderess. You are an evil woman, Madame, and you will be punished for your crimes!

She raises her chin, sneers at him, “Oh, no, sir, not evil. I am simply a woman with a temper!”

\*

When Varenne and his wife, Anne, arrive at his parents’ house accompanied by a small entourage carrying boxes, his mother and father are outside waiting for them and a crowd is gathered in the street. His mother steps forward to hug Anne, “Our best rooms have been prepared for you, daughter-in-law,” she says warmly.

“Thank you,” Anne says, curtseying politely, but she is smiling.

Guillaume is being hugged by his father. “You have a most beautiful wife, my son,” he says.

“Thank you, father. Yes, I have. I am glad to see you so happy.”

“Today is an auspicious day, Guillaume…You have all been acquitted of that terrible crime…”

“Yes, Perrine Mauroy has been condemned to hang...”

The two men take a moment to gaze out onto the river where a ship is edging out into the stream.

“I have other good news, Guillaume,” Varenne father says, clapping his son on the shoulder, “I have received news that the *Jonkeer* docked safely at Rouen, yesterday. It will arrive here tomorrow…”

AUTHOR’S NOTE

*The Patient* is a work of fiction, which means that the main characters and some of the events described in the story are figments of my imagination. Some of the events, but not all…

The years 1667 and 1668 were characterised by a growing controversy within the medical fraternity with regards to the practice of animal-to-animal and animal-to-human blood transfusions. These experiments, which divided medical opinion in both England and France, were reported in the English scientific journal *Philosophical Transactions* and the French *Journal des Sçavans*.

In June 1667, Doctor Jean-Baptiste Denis and Barber-Surgeon Paul Emmerez carried out the first ever animal-to-human blood transfusion by transfusing 12 ounces of lamb’s blood into the vein of a 15-year-old boy suffering from persistent fevers. The boy survived the transfusion, but his underlying condition – possibly tuberculosis - was not improved. Shortly afterwards, Denis followed this experiment by transfusing blood into a healthy middle-aged butcher. Both the boy and the butcher survived.

On December 19, 1667, Denis transfused blood into a third patient, Antoine Mauroy. This experiment was carried out before an audience of noblemen at the home of the celebrated scholar, Henri-Louis Habert de Montmor. It was Denis’s contention that the transfusion would cure Mauroy of mental illness. Two days later, Mauroy underwent a second blood transfusion, also at Montmor’s city estate.

Two months later, in February 1668, Mauroy allegedly underwent a third transfusion at Antoine Mauroy’s home on the outskirts of Paris. According to Mauroy’s wife, Perrine, this transfusion caused her husband to die. Perrine Mauroy subsequently accused Denis of murder.

The trial of Jean-Baptiste Denis began on April 17, 1668. The prosecution was led by two vociferous opponents of blood transfusion, Guillaume Lamy and Claud Perrault. Denis consistently maintained that both the slanders and charges made against him were politically motivated and had been instigated by members of the Paris medical fraternity who were opposed to the practice of blood transfusion. At the end of the trial, Denis was found Not Guilty.

Following the dismissal of charges against Denis, Perrine Mauroy was accused of killing her husband. Judge Defita later declared that she had been paid by ‘unknown’ physicians to poison her husband and she was found guilty of murder. It is not known what sentence she received for this crime, though it is probably safe to assume that she ended her days in one of the horrific cells of the Grand Châtelet. However, at this point she effectively vanishes from the historical record.

It was never established who paid Perrine Mauroy to kill her husband, though a later investigation by Louis de Basril, a Parisian lawyer, implicated the physicians Henri-Martin de Martiniere - an expert on poisons - and Guillaume Lamy in ‘secret intrigues’. Neither Martiniere nor Lamy were tried for their alleged involvement in the murder plot.

In a final twist to the story, at the conclusion of Denis’s trial, the Judge-President decreed that, henceforth, no transfusions could be carried out without the explicit permission of the Parisian Faculty of Medicine. Denis appealed this decision, and the case eventually went to the Grande Chambre of Parliament, which, in December 1669, upheld the judge’s decision. As a result of this verdict, a number of other nations followed suit and the practice of blood transfusion became prohibited throughout Europe for the next 150 years.

After the trial, Martiniere stopped writing on medical matters. Denis continued his medical practice and later invented styptic, a substance capable of stopping bleeding when applied to a wound. Styptic ‘pencils’ are still in common use today to treat small cuts caused by shaving.