

FALLEN ANGELS

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Fear, like the rumour of plague, can empty a city's streets.

Paris, on that hot September evening of 1792, seemed empty. The citizens stayed behind closed doors as though, after a week of slaughter, they were suddenly ashamed of the horrors they had fetched on their city. There was a silence in Paris, not an absolute quiet, but a strange, almost reverent, hush in which a raised voice seemed out of place.

Fear, on that evening, smelled like a charnel house.

Four horsemen rode through the streets. There was a menace in the sound of their hooves, a menace that made the hidden, listening citizens hold their breath until the sound passed. Death had become a commonplace that week, not decent death at sickness's end, but the death of the slaughterhouse. The hollow sound of the hooves was urgent, as if the horsemen had business with the horrors that had choked Paris's gutters with blood.

It was a hot evening. If it had not been for the stink in the city it would have been a beautiful evening. The roofs were outlined with startling clarity against a water-colour sky. Clouds banded the west where the sun, like a huge, blood-red globe, was suspended over the horizon.

The whole summer of 1792 had been hot. The soldiers who had gone north to fight the invading Austrians and Prussians had marched through Paris with a grime of sweat and dust caked on their faces. Rumour said that those soldiers were now losing the war on France's northern frontier, and that too had made this city fearful.

The summer had been so hot that the leaves, withered and dry, had fallen early. On the day that the King was taken prisoner, he had walked from the Tuileries Palace to the National Assembly and his son, the *dauphin*, had kicked the piles of fallen leaves into the air as if it was a game. That had been the second week of August, only the second week, yet the leaves had fallen. Never, it was said, had there been a summer so hot, a heat that had not diminished as autumn came, that turned the corpses into the stench which fouled the exhausted city.

The four horsemen rode into a square where martins dipped over the darkening cobbles. They slowed their horses to a walk.

Facing the four men was a great building with an imposing archway. The gates were open. In the entrance of the building was a small crowd, oddly cheerful and noisy on this evening of silence and fear. The people in the small crowd were tired, yet the bottles from which they drank, and the memories of their great day, gave them a feverish energy and ebullience. Nearly all of them wore soft red hats that sat rakishly on their long hair.

The oldest of the four horsemen motioned with his hand for his companions to hold back while he rode on alone. The crowd, eager for more excitement, came to meet him.

The horseman looked over the group. 'Who's in charge?'

One man stepped forward, a man with a great belly that sagged over the rope belt of his trousers. He looked up at the horseman and then, instead of answering, took a slow drink from his bottle. When he had finished all the wine, he belched. The crowd laughed. The fat man, pleased with his performance, spat, and looked truculently at the rider. 'And who, citizen, are you?'

The horseman took a folded square of paper from a pouch on his belt and handed it wordlessly to the fat man who made a great pantomime with it. First he handed his empty bottle to a companion, then he brushed his moustache, then he planted his feet wide, and finally, with a flourish, he shook the square of paper open.

He read it slowly, his lips moving. He frowned, looked suspiciously at the horseman, then turned the paper over as though its blank reverse might hold an answer to his puzzlement. He turned it back.

He stared at the signature at the foot of the paper. He stared at the seal. 'You're from the English Embassy?'

The horseman sighed. He spoke in patient French. 'The British Embassy.'

'All of you?'

The horseman gestured at his companions. Closest to him was a young man with bright red hair. 'That is Mr Lazender, behind him is Mr Drew, and my name is Pierce. Our names are all listed there.' He did not bother to introduce the fourth horseman who hung back as if he did not wish to be associated with the three Englishmen. The fourth man was the only one in the group who was armed. At his left hip there hung a long, black-scabbarded sword.

The fat man frowned. The signature seemed genuine, and the seal seemed genuine, and the orders did not

seem particularly troublesome. He scratched his cheek, pulled up his trousers, then handed the paper back to the man called Pierce. 'Who are you looking for?'

'A woman.'

'Name?'

'Lucille de Fauquemberghes. You've heard of her?'

The fat man shook his head. 'Never heard of her.' He looked at the fourth horseman, a young man dressed entirely in black who, unseen to the three Englishmen, gave the smallest nod to the fat man. The fat man seemed relieved by the signal. He waved carelessly towards the archway. 'Go on, then!'

The three Englishmen dismounted and gave their reins to the man in black who tethered their horses to a grating beside the archway. His own horse, a superb black mare, he let stand free. He walked to the open prison gates. The gutter that came out of the building was darkly choked, smelly, and busy with flies. A dog, its ribs stark against its matted skin, licked at the black substance that clogged the drain.

The fat man watched the three Englishmen go into the prison. He waited till they had disappeared, then grinned at the man in black and offered his hand. 'How are you, Gitan?'

'Thirsty.'

Gitan leaned against the stones of the archway. Even in repose he was an impressive man with a lithe, strong, animal elegance. His face, dark tanned, was thin and handsome. His eyes were light blue, and odd colour for a man with such dark skin and black hair. The contrast made his eyes seem bright and piercing. In any crowd Gitan would be remarkable, but among these sweaty, tired people he was like a thoroughbred among mules.

He seemed to look on them with an amused tolerance, as though all that he saw he judged against the unfair measure of his own competence. He was a man whose approval was constantly sought by other men.

Jean Brissot, the fat bellied man, offered a wine bottle. Gitan did not take it at once; instead he fetched a scrap of paper from his pocket, some tobacco, and in Spanish style he twisted himself a small cigar. Another of the red-capped men hurried forward with a tinder box and the black-dressed man leaned forward as though it was the most natural thing in the world for people to be solicitous of him. He blew smoke into the evening air then nodded at the horror inside the courtyard. 'Been busy, Jean?' His voice was relaxed, his eyes amused.

'A hard day, Gitan. You should have been here.'

Gitan said nothing. He wore a gold ring in his left ear. He reached for the wine bottle.

Jean Brissot watched him drink. 'If you hadn't been with them I'd have said no.'

Gitan shrugged. 'The paper's genuine.'

Brissot laughed. 'I'm astonished the citizen Minister lets them poke around! Bloody English!'

The smoke from Gitan's tobacco drifted under the archway. Flies buzzed in the courtyard behind him. He picked a shred of leaf from his lip. 'They say we don't want war with the English yet.' He spoke lazily, as if he did not really care whether there was war or not. His name, Gitan, simply meant 'Gypsy'. If he had a real name no one used it. He was horse-master to the young red-headed man, described on the paper as 'Mr Lazender'. Mr Lazender, in truth, was Viscount Werlatton, heir to the Earldom of Lazen, but this was no week to advertise aristocratic birth in Paris.

Two girls came through the archway, laughing, their wooden sabots clattering on the cobbles. They saw the Gypsy and became coy, giggling and nudging each other. 'Gitan!' one of them called.

He looked at them with his bright, amused eyes.

The black haired girl jerked her head. 'You with the foreigners?'

The Gypsy smiled. 'Which one do you fancy, Terese?'

They all laughed. Jean Brissot, sucking in his belly, looked enviously at the Gypsy. 'Is there a girl in Paris you don't know, Gitan?'

'The Austrian whore.'

That provoked more laughter. Marie Antoinette was imprisoned with her husband, the King.

Terese came close to the Gypsy. He smelt of leather and tobacco. She played with the laces of his black coat. 'Are you at Laval's tonight?'

'No.'

'Gitan!'

'I work! I sleep at the stables. If you ask my master he might let you in, but the straw gets everywhere.' He blew smoke over her head, then cuddled her almost absent-mindedly. Brissot was jealous. The Gypsy, it was said, had a way with women as he did with horses. Now Gitan smiled down at the girl. 'You're getting in the way of the bottle. Go on with you.' He pushed her out into the square where the martins flickered between the dark houses.

Jean Brissot shook his head. 'How do you do it?'

'Do what?'

'The women!' The plump man laughed. 'If I had your luck, Gitan, just for one day!'

The Gypsy shrugged. 'Women are like horses.'

'You ride them, eh?'

The tall, handsome horse-master smiled. 'You love them, you let them know who is master, and you always have a spare one.'

'Gitan! Gitan!' The voice, peremptory and desperate, shouted from within the prison. 'Gitan!'

The Gypsy tossed away his paper-wrapped cigar and shrugged. 'Watch my horse, Jean.'

Pierce, the oldest of the three Englishmen, stood by a flight of steps that led up from the courtyard. His face, always pale, seemed paper white in the fading light. 'She's there. Upstairs.' Pierce looked as if he had been sick.

The Gypsy nodded, climbed the steps and pushed past the men who loitered in the entrance. He climbed more stairs, noting how the still, hot air within the prison buildings seemed to have trapped the stench of blood and death so that it was thick in his nostrils and sour in his throat.

He saw Toby Lazender, Lord Werlatton, at the end of a long landing on the fourth floor. The young, red-headed man was leaning against the wall and he was lit by the last rays of the setting sun that filtered through a barred window and through the cell door. He did not turn as the Gypsy walked towards him, he just stared into the cell.

Gitan stopped by the door. He looked at Toby Lazender. He doubted whether, at this moment, the young Englishman was even aware that he was present. The young face was set harder than stone, the eyes empty of everything. He was utterly still. Beside him, a look of helplessness on his face, was Drew.

The Gypsy looked into the cell.

The sun dazzled him. Something stood on the window ledge.

He stepped slowly into the cell, treading gently as though in a flower bed.

‘Gitan?’ Toby’s voice was low.

The Gypsy crouched and grunted.

The young Englishman’s voice was filled with loathing. ‘Was there anything they didn’t do to her?’

The Gypsy did not reply. There was no need to reply.

Lucille de Fauquemberghes had been twenty, lovely as the night, a creature of joy and love and beauty.

Now what was left of her was in this cell. She looked like cuts of meat, nothing more.

Blood was splashed a yard high on the stones. Flesh clung to bones. It was as if she had been torn apart by wild creatures.

Gitan stepped to one side, out of the sun’s rays, and saw the object on the window sill. It was her severed head. Her hair, long and raven, fell below the sill.

‘Christ!’ The shout was like a wail, drawn out, wolf-howling, and the Gypsy turned, stepped over the horror and caught Toby Lazender about the waist. He pushed the young Englishman back against the landing wall, holding him there as Drew, an Embassy clerk, hovered helplessly. Drew, the Gypsy saw, had been sick.

‘I’ll kill them! I’ll kill all those bastards! I’ll kill them!’

Pierce, a Secretary at the Embassy, came running down the corridor. ‘Toby!’

Toby was sobbing the word ‘kill’ over and over, and Pierce looked in horror as the Gypsy held the struggling young lord against the wall. It was in anticipation of this reaction, this anger, that Lord Gower, the ambassador, had ordered the men to ride without weapons.

The Gypsy spoke to Toby Lazender in French. ‘Go downstairs.’

‘No!’ Toby howled the word. ‘No!’

‘I’ll bring her for burial. Go downstairs, my Lord.’

‘My Lord!’ Pierce took the younger man by the arm. ‘Come on. Come on! Gitan will bring her.’ He looked despairingly at the tall gypsy. It had been the ambassador who suggested that Gitan accompanied the search party; there was no man more competent, more accomplished than the Gypsy. Pierce saw the ease with which he pinioned Lord Werlatton. ‘You’ll have to help us take him down.’

The three of them took Toby Lazender down the stairs, down the steps into the yard where the bodies lay in muddled heaps, led him over the blood in the gutter, and even the grinning, blood-spattered men and women at the open gate looked nervous because of the anger and grief that was on the Englishman’s face. Pierce talked to him all the time, talked in English, told him to make no trouble, to leave, to go back to the Embassy, and the horse-master untied their horses and watched them ride away.

The Gypsy let out a long breath. If Toby Lazender had lashed out just once then the crowd would have reacted, would have drawn their blood-stained swords and hacked the Englishmen to pieces. He waited until the three horsemen had disappeared in a dark alley and until the sharp sound of their hooves had faded into the gathering night.

He turned back to the yard of the prison. Torches were being lit and pushed into their iron brackets and the flames were lurid on the heaped bodies. There were men, women and children in the pile of corpses. Some of the children had been too young to have known what happened to them.

It was the same in half the prisons of Paris. The Commune, the new rulers of Paris, had howled that the aristos and the rich were sending messages to the Prussian and Austrian enemies and so the Minister of Justice had ordered them arrested and imprisoned. Then the rumour had gone round the little streets that the aristos planned to break out of the prisons and bring swords and knives to murder the Revolutionary government, and so the people had struck first. They had massacred the prisoners. Aristocrats, priests, servants; men, women, children, all dead in the prisons. Over a thousand had died in the week, hacked and raped and mutilated until the mob was tired of the killing.

Jean Brissot came and stood beside the Gypsy. 'They found her then?'

Gitan nodded. 'They found her.'

'Which one?'

'Fourth floor. Cut up.' Gitan's deep voice was laconic, seemingly uncaring, but his words provoked the fat man to sudden enthusiasm.

'Long black hair? Pretty girl? Christ! We had joy with that one. Dear God!' He shook his head with remembered admiration. 'They're different, you know.'

'Different?' Gitan looked at the grossly fat man.

Brissot nodded. 'White skins, Gitan, like bloody milk. They only brought her in this morning. I took one look and I couldn't believe our luck! God! A man could live a hundred years and not see a girl like that.'

The Gypsy had rolled another cigar that he lit from a torch above his head. 'Who brought her in?'

'Marchenoir.'

'Ah!' The Gypsy nodded as though the answer was not unexpected.

Brissot looked nervously at the tall, calm Gypsy. 'He knows you're here. I mean I sent word when you came with the Englishmen. You can't be too careful these days.'

The Gypsy nodded. 'True. You did the right thing.' He smiled reassuringly at the fat man, then stared at the bodies; fat, thin, old, young, a mess of death. 'So you had the girl, Jean?'

'Twice!' Brissot laughed. 'You should have been here, Gitan. Skin like milk! Soft as bloody silk!'

The Gypsy blew smoke over the lolling, black-streaked bodies in the yard. 'I need to find a sack. I'm taking her away.'

'Look in the storeroom.' Brissot jerked his head towards a doorway. 'Plenty of empty flour sacks.' He watched the Gypsy pick his way among the corpses towards the store. 'Gitan?'

'My friend?'

'Why did the Englishman want to find her?'

The Gypsy turned. He blew smoke into the torch-light, and it drifted above a small child's corpse. He grinned. 'He was going to marry her next week.'

'Next week?'

The Gypsy nodded.

Brissot bellowed his laughter round the courtyard. 'He should have hurried! We got her first! I hope the bastard knows what he's missing! Married next week, eh? Skin like cream! She was a bloody treat, my friend, I tell you. Still,' his laughter died and he shrugged, 'I suppose you've had lots of them.' He sounded jealous.

'No,' Gitan said, 'I haven't.'

'You haven't had an aristo?' Brissot was unbelieving. 'Not this week?'

‘Not ever.’ The Gypsy turned away to find a sack to serve as a shroud for a dead aristocrat.

The Gypsy worked slowly, the foul cell lit by a single candle as he scooped the remains from the stone floor and, with bloodied hands, pushed it into the sack.

When the work was half done he heard heavy footsteps on the landing. With them came the thick smell of cigar smoke. The Gypsy rubbed his hands on a corner of the sack, stood, and leaned against the wall.

A large, fierce-faced man appeared at the cell door. He was a man in his late forties whose shoulders were humped with muscle like an ox. He was huge-chested, massive-armed; everything about him spoke of strength and weight. His shirt had separated from his trousers, showing the straps of a corset that held in his belly. He looked at the mess on the floor and at the Gypsy’s stained hands. ‘You’ll forgive me if I don’t shake hands with you.’ He laughed.

The man was called Bertrand Marchenoir. There had been a time when he was a priest, a fierce preacher made famous by the vitriol of his sermons, but the revolution had let him abandon the service of God for the service of the people. He was now a leader of the revolution; a man to fear or love, but never ignore.

Marchenoir bullied his followers; he preached, he shouted, he thumped tables into the night, he led, he harangued, he wept false tears to rouse the mob, his gestures were as expansive as his oratory. His voice, starting low and rising to a massive crescendo, had stirred the people from their slums out into the great streets of Paris. He had been at the Bastille, he had helped fetch the King from Versailles, and now his massive, terrifying force whipped the laggards in the National Assembly.

'Forward! Forward!' was his cry, and this week in Paris, fearing that the revolution would go backwards, Bertrand Marchenoir had led the slaughter in the prisons.

For those who wanted vengeance on their betters, Marchenoir was an idol. For those who wanted moderation, he was a scourge. No one was allowed to forget that he was peasant born; no gutter, he said, was lower than the one in which he had been spawned, and no palace, he shouted, was so high that it could not be pulled down. Forward, ever forward, and this week a thousand and more had died that Marchenoir's revolution could go forward.

This was the man who came to the cell, who looked almost disinterestedly at the mess on the floor, then back to the Gypsy. 'So you're Gitan?'

'I am Gitan.'

'You know me?'

'I know of you, citizen.'

Marchenoir smiled and waved his cigar at the scraps of the body. 'You're doing woman's work, Gitan.'

'A man is lucky to have a job these days, citizen.'

The heavy, jowled face stared at the Gypsy whose words had verged on criticism of the revolution. Then Marchenoir twitched his unshaven cheeks into a smile, into a laugh, and he kicked at the sack. 'Why are you doing it, Gitan?'

'The English lord wants to bury her.'

'So let him do his own dirty work. Are you a slave?'

'I am a horse-master.'

'And she's a corpse.' Marchenoir stepped over the sack and peered at the face on the window ledge. 'She took a long time dying.'

'So Brissot said.'

‘Brissot has a fat mouth. One day I’ll sit on it and fill it up.’ Marchenoir spoke without anger. ‘I let them have her first. They queued from her to the second floor!’ He leaned against the wall, the candle throwing the shadows upwards on his big, red face. ‘I should have charged two livres a go, eh?’

‘Not a very revolutionary thought, citizen.’

Marchenoir laughed. He was a leader of ‘the left’, so called because they sat on the left side of the Assembly. They were revolutionaries who sought to abolish the crown, destroy the old privileges, and declare France a people’s republic. The events of the last two months were bringing that dream to fruition. Now Marchenoir blew a plume of smoke over the cell. ‘I was thinking that we ought to have a people’s brothel with girls like this. Every whore an aristo, yes? It would pay for the army.’ He looked at the girl’s head. ‘Do you think she deserved to die, horse-master?’

‘We all die,’ Gitan said. He was astonished at the brooding sense of power that was in this room. He had heard Marchenoir speak many times, he had seen the powerful arms beckoning at the crowd, listened to the voice arouse their anger and their hopes, yet still he was astonished at the sheer presence of the man.

Marchenoir chuckled at the non-committal answer. ‘She had to die, Gitan, but why? That, my friend, is my secret.’ He stabbed with his cigar at the Gypsy. ‘Nothing can be done without blood, nothing! Even the church taught that! If we fear blood we fear life! Isn’t that right, sweet child?’ He had asked the question of the severed head. He chuckled, and pushed the stub of his cigar into the dead lips. He turned back to the Gypsy. ‘I wanted to talk with you.’

'I'm here.' Even with such a rising, powerful man as Marchenoir, the Gypsy seemed laconically independent, yet there was a hint of respect, of deference in his bearing. Marchenoir, after all, was in the new government.

Marchenoir sat against the far wall. He was a man of extraordinary slovenliness, his clothes filthy, torn, patched and held by loops of fraying string where the buttons had come free. Gitan, whose black clothes were spotless, saw the streaks of food and spittle on the politician's coat and reflected that such an appearance was a decided advantage for the ambitious in these days. It was certainly part of Marchenoir's appeal. The people saw him as rough, ready, lovable, and theirs. He spoke for them, and he killed for them.

Marchenoir had taken another cigar from his waistcoat pocket and he leaned forward to light it from the candle. 'What else are you besides a horse-master?'

Gitan shrugged. 'Just that.'

Marchenoir stared at him. When his face was in repose it had a brooding aspect, as if his mind stirred above a pot of horrors. Slowly, he smiled. 'I hear from Citizen Belleau that you are more.' He ignored Gitan's shrug. 'You are a spy, Gitan, a spy.'

'If Citizen Belleau says so.'

Marchenoir laughed. 'Citizen Belleau does say so. You have, he says, given us much valuable information from the English Embassy.'

Gitan said nothing. What Marchenoir said was true. For three years, while employed by Lord Werlatton, the Gypsy had passed news to whatever government ruled in Paris. Marchenoir took a scrap of tobacco leaf from his tongue. 'Do you deny it?'

'No.'

‘So what happens to you, horse-master and spy, when the Embassy closes down?’

Gitan shrugged. The British Embassy was one of the last in Paris. After the slaughter of this week it would undoubtedly close. ‘There’s always a job for a good horse-master.’

‘Like a whore or lawyer, eh?’ Marchenoir’s pouchy, bloodshot eyes watched the Gypsy. ‘Does your little English lord want you to stay with him?’

Gitan paused, then nodded. ‘Yes.’

Marchenoir smiled. ‘Tell me, horse-master, do you know who your little lordling’s father is?’

‘He’s an earl.’

‘An earl.’ Marchenoir said the word with distaste. His bitter hatred for the aristocracy was at the root of his fame. ‘But not just any earl, horse-master. Before his accident he was Britain’s spymaster. Did you know that?’

‘No.’

‘The British spymaster.’ Marchenoir said it as though he spoke of a terrible ogre to a small child. He laughed and spat another shred of leaf towards the blood. ‘Lord of the English spies! The Lazenders are so damned deep into spying that they’ve got eyes in their backsides. Your little lordling’s a spy, isn’t he?’

The Gypsy did not reply, though he knew the accusation was true. Lord Werlatton’s job in the Paris Embassy was to entertain the politicians and bureaucrats of Paris. He would lavish champagne and luxury upon them, and leave the rest to their indiscretions.

Marchenoir pointed the cigar at Gitan. ‘So will you go to England with your lord, Gypsy?’

‘I don’t know.’

Marchenoir stared at him, as if considering the truth

of the answer. Slowly, he smiled. 'I want you to go with him.' The Gypsy said nothing. Marchenoir spoke softly. 'I want you to go, Gitan, because soon we will be at war with England, and because the English will ask you to become a spy.'

The Gypsy shrugged. 'Why would they ask me?'

'God made the gypsies fools?' Marchenoir's smile took the sting from the words. 'They will have a French-speaking man whom they know has friends in Paris. Of course they'll recruit you! They will think you work for them, but really you will work for me.' He said the last words slowly and forcefully.

'For you?'

'I need a messenger, horse-master, who can travel between here and London. A messenger who can travel in utter safety.' Marchenoir's voice was low and urgent. 'So let them recruit you. In England they will protect you, and in France we will protect you. What could be more perfect? Our enemy will be your friend.'

The Gypsy did not speak or move. His odd, light blue eyes stared at the other man, his long black hair clung to shadow his thin face.

Marchenoir pointed to the candle with his cigar. His voice was still low. 'It is not I who ask, Gitan, nor France. It is that.'

The Gypsy looked at the flame. He knew the secret message that was being given to him. The candle gave light, and light was reason, and reason was the gospel of the *Illuminati*. 'For reason?'

Marchenoir smiled. His voice was low. 'For reason, which is above the law.'

The Gypsy looked from the candle to the powerful man. For the first time the Gypsy smiled easily, his fear

of Marchenoir gone. Now he knew why such an important man had sought him out. Even Gitan's voice seemed to change. He no longer was wary, he spoke now as if to an equal because he had discovered that this most dangerous, forceful man was, like himself, a member of the secret *Illuminati*. 'I sometimes feared that the brethren slept.'

'No, my friend. So? Will you be our messenger?'

Gitan still smiled. He gestured at the candle. 'Of course.'

Marchenoir grunted approval and struggled to his feet. 'There will be rewards, Gitan.' He waved his cigar at the body. 'We're going to strip these bastards of everything, everything!' He stared at what was left on the floor. 'She was going to marry your English lord, yes?'

'Yes.'

'Your English lord.' Marchenoir's voice was suddenly bitter. 'His mother was a d'Auxigny. I grew up in Auxigny. We had to kneel in the mud if one of the family went past. Even if the coach was a half mile away we had to kneel. Even if we were thigh deep in muck we had to kneel. All between the river and the mountain belonged to Auxigny, and that included us.' He laughed. 'Do you know who the present owner of Auxigny is?'

Gitan smiled at the big man. 'You, citizen!'

'Me!' Marchenoir pointed at his breast with his cigar. 'Perhaps I'll turn it into a brothel of aristo bitches.' He nudged the sack with his dirty boot. 'That's one at least I won't have to kneel to again.' He laughed as he walked to the cell door. 'Good hunting, my friend. See me before you leave Paris!' He was in the corridor now, his voice booming behind him as he walked away. 'Come and drink to our success, Gitan!' He laughed again, then sang a line of the new song that was sweeping through Paris.

‘The day of glory has arrived!’ The smell of his cigar lingered in the stink of blood, urine and flesh. He shouted once more, his voice fading. ‘Forward! Forward!’

The Gypsy did not move for a long time after the politician had gone. He stared at the candle. Then, at last, he stepped to the window, took the damp cigar stub from the dead girl’s lips, and threw it into the darkness.

He finished his work, tying the neck of the sack over the long, black hair of a girl who had been beautiful before this day, then he carried his soggy burden down to where carts were being loaded with the white, naked bodies of the enemies of the state.

His horse, untethered still, whinnied and came towards him. The Gypsy mounted, the sack heavy in his hand, and rode into a night that was filled with the smell of death, into a city exhausted by massacre. Yet he knew there would be more blood, far more; these deaths were just a beginning, enough to give the new men who had risen to power the taste of slaughter.

He thought of Marchenoir, of the candle’s secret message, and smiled in pleasure. He was the Gypsy, the black dressed horseman who would ride through the horrors on the secret, silent path of the traitor, just as he now rode through a silent, dark, frightened city with his burden of death. He rode unafraid through a city of fear; he was the Gypsy.