

A woman with long, curly brown hair is seen from behind, looking out over a vast vineyard. She is wearing a green and gold patterned Victorian-style dress with a full skirt. Her right hand is resting on a green curtain that is partially pulled back, revealing the landscape. The vineyard is filled with rows of grapevines, and the sky is blue with soft white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and evokes a sense of heritage and legacy.

DEBRA BORCHERT

Her
Own
LEGACY

HER OWN LEGACY

Château de Verzat Series

Book One



DEBRA BORCHERT



Copyright © 2022, Debra Borchert

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The images that depict persons used on the cover of this book are images of models and are not intended to portray characters featured in this book.

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this book, or portions thereof, in any form or by any means whatsoever, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review. For permission, visit: www.DebraBorchert.com.

Cover design by Lynn Andreozzi

Book designed and typeset by Ampersand Bookery

Map: A map of Paris in 1789 from William R Shepherd's *Historical Atlas*, Henry Holt and Company 1921. *Wikimedia Commons*, public domain in the United States of America.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Map_of_Paris_in_1789_by_William_R_Shepherd_%28died_1834%29.jpg]

Published by Le Vin Press

Year of Publication 2022

ISBN: 978-0-9894545-4-4 (Ebook)

ISBN: 978-0-9894545-5-1 (Trade paperback)

First Edition

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Title Page
Copyright
Author's Note
Part 1: Joliette
Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Part 2: Henri
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Part 3: Revolution
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
Chapter 17
Chapter 18
Chapter 19
Chapter 20
Chapter 21
Chapter 22
Chapter 23
Chapter 24
Chapter 25

Chapter 26
Chapter 27
Chapter 28
Chapter 29
Chapter 30
Chapter 31
Chapter 32
Chapter 33
Chapter 34
Chapter 35
Chapter 36
Chapter 37
Chapter 38
Chapter 39
Chapter 40
Chapter 41
Chapter 42
Chapter 43
Chapter 44
Chapter 45
Chapter 46
Chapter 47
Chapter 48
Chapter 49
Chapter 50
Chapter 51
Chapter 52
Chapter 53
Chapter 54
Chapter 55
Chapter 56
Chapter 57
Chapter 58
Chapter 59
Chapter 60
Chapter 61
Chapter 62

[Chapter 63](#)

[Chapter 64](#)

[Chapter 65](#)

[Chapter 66](#)

[Chapter 67](#)

[Chapter 68](#)

[Chapter 69](#)

[Chapter 70](#)

[Chapter 71](#)

[Chapter 72](#)

[Chapter 73](#)

[Chapter 74](#)

[Chapter 75](#)

[Chapter 76](#)

[Chapter 77](#)

[Chapter 78](#)

[Chapter 79](#)

[Chapter 80](#)

[Chapter 81](#)

[Chapter 82](#)

[Chapter 83](#)

[Chapter 84](#)

[Chapter 85](#)

[Chapter 86](#)

[Chapter 87](#)

[Chapter 88](#)

[Chapter 89](#)

[Chapter 90](#)

[Chapter 91](#)

[Chapter 92](#)

[Chapter 93](#)

[Chapter 94](#)

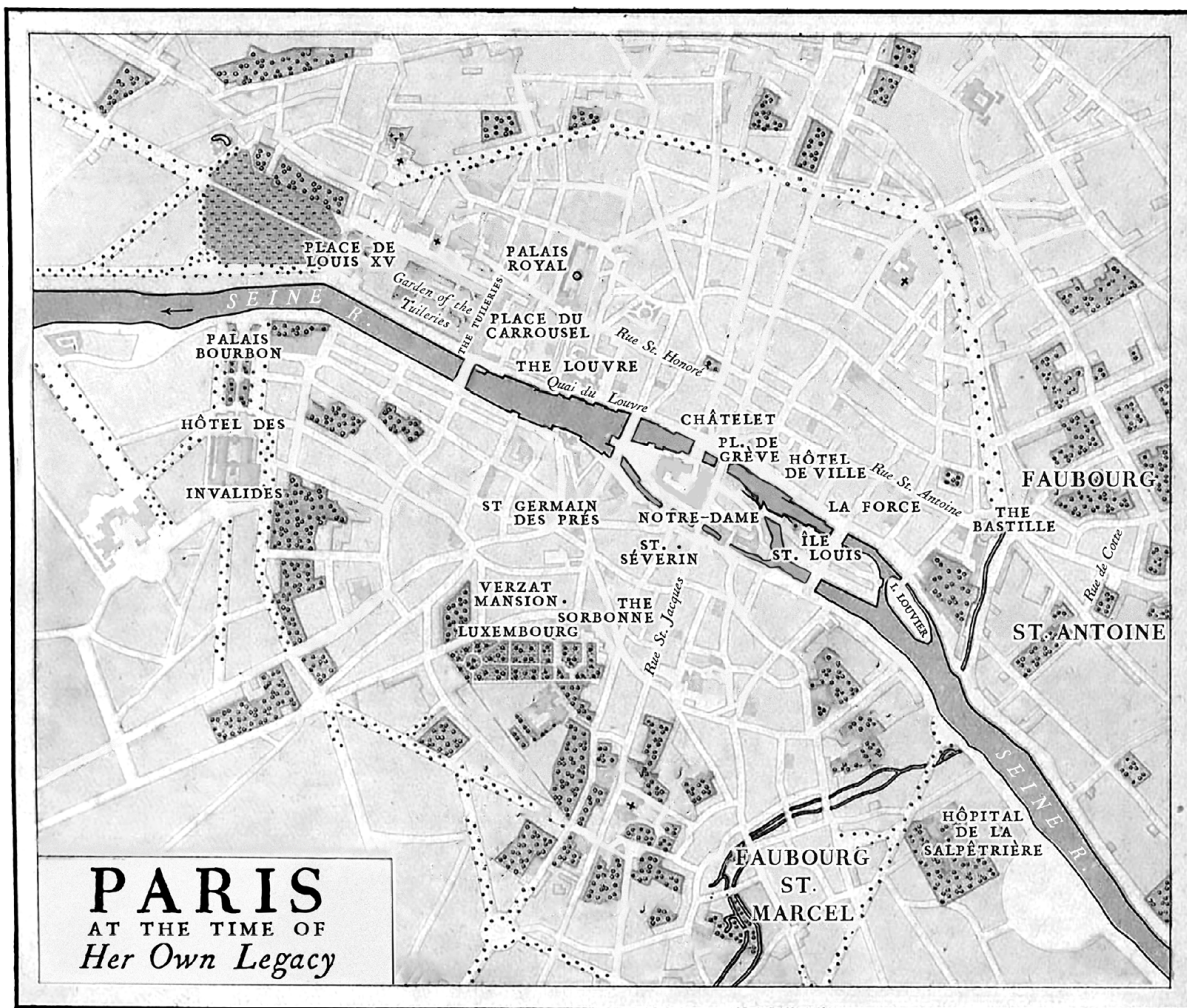
[Acknowledgements](#)

[Recipe: Soupe Poireaux-Pommes Des Terre](#)

[Discussion Questions](#)

[About the Author](#)

*In loving memory of
Barbara J. Dickett
Claire Mcmillan Horton
Deborah Covener Maher*



AUTHOR'S NOTE

All writers of historical fiction strive for authenticity, but sometimes we may find conflicting facts in our research. Other times, we are faced with using a term a modern reader might not recognize.

Confusing for readers is the evolving names of streets, buildings, people, and locations. Most readers will recognize the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, but prior to the French Revolution, it was known as: Galerie des Glaces, which is the term my characters use.

Place Louis XV became known as Place de la Révolution, the home of the guillotine at the time of Louis XVI's execution. The Directory named it Place de la Concord, but after the Restoration of the monarchy, Louis's brother wanted to name it Place Louis XVI to honor the beheaded king, but Charles X returned the square to its original name. After France's second Revolution the name was returned to Place de la Concord, and as of this writing, it remains so. Still with me? The guillotine also moved around a bit, starting at Place de Grève, moving to Place du Carrousel, and on to Place de la Révolution.

All my research confirmed two Gardes Françaises were killed at Versailles in October 1789. However, my research revealed a collection of four names. In this event, I consulted Gallica, the digital library of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and used one of the two names listed as gardes du corps who lost their lives during the assault on the palace.

While incorporating historical fact within the creations of characters and story I sometimes made concessions. In the battle at Versailles, I changed the location of the fight from the bottom of the Queen's staircase to its landing for dramatic effect.

Eagle-eyed readers may find blunders or anachronisms, for which I take responsibility. If so, please let me know through my website. As a thank you, I'll send you a short story leading up to the French Revolution and thank you in my next book in the series. Merci beaucoup.

PART 1



Joliette



Joliette

Château de Verzat
August 30, 1786

“Wine flows in your veins.” Grandmaman brought her lorgnette to her eyes, examining the underside of a grape leaf.

I walked with her through the undulating hills covered in grapevines. Bees swarmed the grapes’ syrupy juices, their humming reverberating in my chest, reassuring me I was home. Ever since I could walk, I accompanied Grandmaman on her daily inspections of the vineyard. I peered over her shoulder at the leaves, but I did not see any mites or cutworms. “My tutor told me blood flows in our veins.”

She nodded and brought her arm beneath the leaves, lifted them, and exposed the grapes, round and full and close to ripe. “It does. But you are a Verzat, and wine is in your blood.”

“That is silly.” A giggle rolled through me. “You know I am allowed only sips—I am just twelve.”

“It is not from the drinking of wine.” She straightened and dug the tip of her walking stick into the cracked earth, releasing a mineral scent. “It is from the terroir. Everything around you contributes to the wine and your blood.”

I laughed. “You are making that up.”

“I am not.” She lifted her cane, wagging it at me. “You are as rooted to this estate as the vines, and I shall prove it. Close your eyes.”

As always, I obeyed her.

“What do you smell?”

A trickle of sweat ran down my neck. I was grateful I was not wearing the tight sleeves or heavy underskirts required at the Court of Versailles. I wanted to give her the correct answer. To her dismay, my papa had no interest in the vineyard, and I often heard him arguing with Grandmaman about it. I could not further disappoint her. A cool breeze brought the scents of mud and fish from the Loire, but they merely influenced the terroir, they were not a part of it, like the earth that rooted the vines.

I turned my back to the wind. Another fruit, besides the grapes. I sniffed again. Peaches? I inhaled a scent so luscious, my mouth watered. “Sun-ripened apricots.” I opened my eyes.

Her smile lit up her face and warmed me. She lifted her stick toward the far hill, where an orchard grew. She wobbled, and I reached to steady her until she replanted her stick. “You would not have been able to identify that scent if you did not have wine in your blood.”

There was no arguing with her. “Will this year produce as good a vintage as the last?”

She adjusted my bonnet to shade my face. “You have your maman’s luminous complexion, and we must protect it, else she will forbid your accompanying me.” She pinched my chin. “What else do you smell, child?”

Another scent? My tutor gave fewer tests. I inhaled deeply. A thick aroma shimmered in the heat, as if I had entered a patisserie. “A sweet nectar, like honey.”

Her face glowed. “The fruit is smaller globed than most years but bursting with ripeness. Look.” She ran a finger along strands of juice trickling from a split grape. “Aging will intensify the ambrosial flavor that accompanies that scent.” Her blue eyes sparkled, casting magic, as she searched the vineyard, stopping when she spotted a tall man. “Joseph!” She waved her cane.

Wearing a dilapidated straw hat and blue tunic, Joseph waved and loped through the vines to us. He removed his hat and bowed. “Yes, Madame la Comtesse?”

“Send the pickers here this afternoon.”

“Just the southern slope, Madame?”

Her smile broadened. “This is why you are an excellent vigneron, Joseph. You require specifics. Yes, just the southern slope. Will you join us on our walk?”

“Of course, Madame.” Joseph followed us at a respectful distance.

“You will see why I am grooming Joseph as my apprentice until you can take over, my dear.” Grandmaman cupped her fingers along my cheek, and I leaned into her touch like a puppy nuzzling its maman.

“That will not be for a long time. I have much to learn.”

She tapped the tip of my nose. “You have a vintner’s sense of smell. That honeylike scent makes the wine robust and gives some wines a hint of caramel, like the caramel in Cook’s pastries. It only occurs during years of scant rainfall. I believe this year will be an excellent vintage, better than the last.”

I picked a grape and savored the taste, imagining how the flavor would change after fermentation. The cracked dry soil released puffs of chalky dust with our footsteps. If I breathed through my mouth, I tasted the chalk. Like the parched earth, I wanted to soak up every drop of her knowledge. “But if there is little rainfall, will the harvest yield less fruit?”

She planted her walking stick and lifted her face to the sun, her wrinkles slipping away in the golden light. “You are correct. And you have the mind of a viticulturist.” She tilted her head, examining me.

I wrapped my tongue around the word, forming it silently and feeling a strange pride growing in me for having the mind of an expert.

“Rather a large word for the growing of grapes. True?” Her lips formed a pink heart. The black lace cascading over her straw bonnet and tied beneath her chin accentuated the heart shape. Leaning on her cane, she wavered a bit.

“Viticulture?”

“Oh, how I wish your father had been as curious at your age. He has the Verzat palate, of course.” She stabbed the earth with her walking stick. “But he did not, and still does not, possess the desire for learning how to preserve the Verzat legacy.”

A tightness wrapped around my chest—pressing me to not disappoint her. Yet, out of loyalty, I hastened to defend my father. “Papa granted the vassals houses and land on the estate in return for their working the vineyard.”

“Yes. That was democratic of him, and he is a good businessman.” She twisted her stick in the dirt. “Your father considers himself a student of the Enlightenment. He spent many years studying Locke and Rousseau.”

I turned and pretended to examine a leaf. He had encouraged me to read

the same, but I did not confess it.

“In recent years he spent much time with that American...the man with the funny fur hat...what is his name?”

I laughed. “Monsieur Benjamin Franklin. He made embarrassing mistakes in French, and Papa had difficulties not laughing at the Ambassador’s faux pas.”

“That is the man. My son is more interested in the American democracy than the Verzat winery. But should Château de Verzat fail, the land will be sold. And four hundred families will either go back to being vassals or be without homes and work. And it would be the end of the Verzat legacy.”

A niggling sensation moved through my stomach. “It will not fail so long as you run the winery, Grandmaman.”

“For now. I am nearly sixty and will not be here forever to ensure its success.” Her eyes grew moist.

I squinted in the bright light. She could not leave me. I would die without her. I reached out and held her arm. “You are too young to die, Grandmaman.”

“Not for a long time. But someday, I will.” She gazed out over the Loire River, her eyes unfocused, as if watching the past. “My dear husband taught me nearly everything I know, and it is most fortunate laws allow widows to inherit and run businesses. Still, I made mistakes without him, in the beginning. But I learned from them and survived along with the winery. Otherwise, the legacy would be no more.” She pulled me close and wrapped her arm about my waist. Her heart beat rapidly, far faster than mine. “I loved the vineyards so, I never returned to my position as lady-in-waiting to the Queen. You know the legacy?”

Joseph stopped near us and removed his hat, in what seemed like reverence.

“Bien sûr, Grandmaman. Château de Verzat wine is the finest in France. Verzats have held the vineyard and legacy since 1515.”

Joseph smiled at me.

My throat grew dry, but I forced myself to speak. “If Papa had a son, would you be training my brother to be vintner?”

Her eyes flashed as her gaze locked with Joseph’s. He bowed his head and stepped back, replacing his hat.

She looked at me and pulled at her emerald earring. “Perhaps...but I doubt anyone would be your equal.” Her voice brightened. “If your father

does have a son, your brother will forever depend upon your nose, palate, and intelligence.”

Pride skittered up my backbone. Part of me wanted a brother, so he could inherit the estate and continue the Verzat legacy and name. And although I had often asked my parents for a brother, I was now glad I had none, for I wished more than anything to be like Grandmaman and preserve the legacy, myself. Yet, if Grandmaman and my parents died before I married, a distant cousin would inherit the entire estate and legacy. Everything I treasured and cherished would be lost, and I would be left to the mercy of a man I had never met.

Most girls were thrilled to train as a lady-in-waiting, drinking chocolat chaud, dressing in silks and lace and jewels, and making wealthy nobles fall in love with them. Other girls would be glad their brothers would take over the vineyard and legacy. Although my name would change with marriage, at least I could ensure the winery and estate would always be Château de Verzat, but I would have to find a husband who desired the same.

She placed her hands on my shoulders and looked deeply into me. I was glad I did not lie to her, as I so often lied to fool my parents. I also kept no secrets from her, for her gaze would surely expose them.

“You have your father’s eyes—that miss no detail—and his fine mind. Fortunately, that is all of him you have inherited. You have *my* nose and determination.” She pinched my chin. “It is time for your first official tasting, *ma chérie*.”

She turned to Joseph. “Please prepare for us.”

Joseph hurried down the hill toward the cave’s tasting room.

I hiccupped from my excitement. I had been allowed watered-down glasses of wine, but without knowing what I had been drinking. Now I would learn to identify varietals.

She gripped my arm, tightly, and I slowly led her uphill toward the cave entrance. She stopped to rest, and I waved my fan before her, the breeze stirring her gray curls. The hum of cicadas filled the air. She bent and coughed roughly. I patted her back, which was damp.

“Let us continue.” She gripped my hand and we climbed and stopped and rested and climbed again until we reached the terrace outside the cave.

I guided her to sit on a silk-covered divan beneath an arbor. On a low table before us stood a silver bowl mounded with clusters of grapes, a pair of crystal wine goblets, sparkling in the dappled light. On a side table sat a

green leather-bound book in which I had often seen her writing. Joseph stood holding a carafe, a white serviette draped over his forearm.

My hands jittered, and I smoothed the lace on my sleeve. My glasses of watered-down wine had been served at dinner, never a formal tasting.

“First we shall start with the fruit. Close your eyes, my dear.”

I squeezed them shut.

“Taste this grape and tell me the varietal.”

I nearly coughed. What a test. The vineyard grew at least five types, perhaps more. I knew them all by sight, but she wanted me to identify one by taste, alone? I swallowed, willing my palate to cleanse itself.

The grape, warm from the sun, trembled against my lips. I opened my mouth and held it with my teeth, sliding my tongue against its shape, which did not give me a clue about variety. I bit. Juice burst in my mouth, tasting sweet, but not overly so; fruity, yet slightly tart; raspberries at the end of the season; ripe plums splitting from an overabundance of juice.

I held the grape in my mouth, inhaling, determined not to disappoint her. I chewed. The Chenin Blanc would be tarter, Sauvignon Blanc greener, the Gamay and Muscat more floral. I swallowed. *S’il te plait, mon dieu*, let me be right, I prayed. “Cabernet Franc.”

“Correct!”

My eyes sprang open.

She dangled a cluster of purple-black grapes and crowed a laugh.

Joseph’s smile was broad.

My face warmed as my success washed through me.

“Are you ready for the next step?”

I nearly jumped up. “Yes!”

“Pour the wine, Joseph.”

He poured the bright pale-yellow liquid into two glasses etched with the Verzat crest of grapevines entwining a fleur-de-lys. He stepped back, watching me.

Picking one up by the stem, she instructed me to hold the glass the same way. She swirled the liquid and brought the glass to her nose, closed her eyes, and inhaled gently. She looked at me and cupped her other hand, bidding me to do the same.

The scent dizzied me, so intense was the aroma—like a *mélange* of all the fragrances of the estate.

Her blue eyes sparked like the wine. “What does your nose tell you?”

“It smells like home. Like here.”

She smiled. “What specifically?”

“Fresh green grass, after a rainstorm.”

Her smile deepened the lines that sprang up from the corners of her eyes.

“The chalky tufa stone.” My words surprised me. I had not expected the taste of rocks to appear in a wine.

She nodded and caressed the emeralds circling her neck.

She wanted me to discover more. I inhaled again and sensed something flowery or herbal, reminding me of my maman, but the fragrance was faint and elusive. I sniffed again.

“Take a tiny sip, hold it in your mouth, and inhale through your mouth.”

As the wine touched my tongue, I sipped a breath, and the taste exploded. I swallowed the delicious drop. “Lavender.”

“You picked it up!” Grandmaman clapped. She caressed my cheek. “Ma chérie, you do have wine running in your veins. You are a true Verzat. Is she not, Joseph?”

“Indeed, Madame.”

Her enthusiasm filled me with such pride my corset pinched as I inhaled.

“If your father does not have a son, this château, the entire estate, and the Verzat legacy will rest in the hands of you and your husband, Joliette. You and I must train our expert vigneron, Joseph, until you can become vintner. As your assistant, he will serve you well.”

Joseph bowed and moved back from the table.

Vintner? Me? A prickling crept up my back. What she had said was true. Papa was with the King. He would not be here to oversee the harvest. I did not remember him having anything to do with the vineyard. If I married a man who knew as little as I did, how could we possibly succeed?

She sat watching me, her head bobbing like a sunflower bloom at the top of its stalk, battling a breeze. The oppressive heat made my head pound. The thought of Grandmaman no longer being with me squeezed my chest. I fanned myself. “What will happen if we do not finish training?”

“We *must* find an accomplished vintner should I fall ill before you are vintner. Joseph is an excellent vigneron, but he has neither your nose nor palate.” She brushed her fingertips across my forehead. “Do not worry, ma petite princesse. I shall not leave you for a long, long time. I shall dance at your wedding.” She pointed to the green leather book.

Joseph hurried over, retrieved it, and placed it upon the table before me.

I picked it up. It was heavy with thick worn pages and smelled musty, as if many drops of wine had splashed upon it over the years. I placed it on her lap.

She caressed the book like it was her most precious memento. “I have kept a diary, of every one of my days in this vineyard. It will explain what to do in any event, a hailstorm, draught, flooding, frost, fungus, pests.” She held it out to me. “I give it to you, my dear. For only you can advise the future vintner.” Her hands shook, and I rushed to take it from her.

Its weight pulled at my arms, but I hugged the book. “I shall read it every day, Grandmaman.” I wanted to be exactly like her, a fearless, knowledgeable keeper of the Verzat legacy, but she had to show me how.

She patted her mouchoir to her face. “As you should. Be prepared for anything, Joliette, then you can make decisions and take actions, quickly. Your wise choices may save a vendanges.”

My decision could save an entire harvest? A tightness in my chest trapped my breath. She spoke as if the Verzat legacy would rest upon my shoulders very soon. “I will learn everything to ensure that Château de Verzat produces the finest wines in the *world*.” I placed the book on the low table before us. “And I will ensure that wine flows in Verzat blood for another two hundred and seventy years.”

“I know you will never abandon the legacy.”

I opened my fan, pretending to relieve the heat, but actually hiding my fingers as I tugged at my gown’s bodice, loosening the laces, hoping she would not notice. “Joseph knows much about the vineyard and winemaking, but do you not wish to know more so that you might direct him?” Her face was still, but her eyes sparkled.

“Bien sûr.” I never wanted anything more in my life. But how would I learn everything? Perspiration collected on the back of my neck. I had tasted but one wine of the six Château de Verzat produced—and every vintage was different. Grandmaman was faltering. Would she have time to teach me everything? I spent most of the year at Versailles, training to become a lady-in-waiting. My parents would not allow me to interrupt those lessons. Only Grandmaman could teach me the Verzat secrets. But she was old and frail. “Do you think I can learn it all?”

“Commoners are apprenticed at thirteen. And they must live up to expectations without the advantage of your fine education.”

I grabbed at the challenge. If a commoner could succeed, a Verzat

certainly could. The heat dizzied me. I knew nothing.

“If I believe you can, and I do,” her eyes cast their magic over me, “then you can believe it, also.”

An excited giggle caught in my throat. I pressed my hands below my ribcage and exhaled against my nervous excitement. I had to act as an adult—to ensure the Verzat legacy.

She gripped her cane and stood, looking out over the vineyard. I thought she was bending to pick up the book, but then her body twisted and slumped. Her stick clattered to the stone.

I caught her in my arms. Staggering, I laid her on the divan. “Joseph!”

His arms were beneath her in an instant. He tenderly lay her back upon the divan.

Grandmaman lay, eyes closed, yet smiling, like she was content and happy.

I shook her. “Grandmaman!” Her eyelids fluttered. I patted her hand and whispered, “I promise, Grandmaman, but you must help me. I have so much to learn and only you can teach me.”

She closed her eyes. Her smile grew peaceful.

Joseph picked her up in his arms. I held her hand, not leaving her side, as we hurried toward the château.

I whispered to her. “I will make you proud, Grandmaman. I promise.” With every step, I prayed, *S’il te plait, mon dieu*, let her live.