

Cagliostro's Disgrace

"Tell me again what brings you to Paris, mademoiselle?"

"You have a short memory. That can't be good in your line of work. I'm a journalist and I came to cover the Ready-To-Wear Festival at the Grand Palais."

The customs officer, a young idiot with velvety eyes that were confident in their seduction, had started this mating dance with the lovely Italian with long red hair who had come to register her photography material. To be fair, the pretty girl's gorgeous figure was particularly stunning in her black suit. And she was as patient as an angel with the young hotshot's cooing. Behind her, her friend and colleague, Leonardo Verga, tall, brown-haired, well built and in his thirties, was not so tolerant and was shifting from one foot to the other.

"Could you speed it up a little?" he raised his voice. "I'm waiting here."

"It's true, we have to cut our lovely conversation short," the Italian said with a little sass. "But we'll certainly see each other again when I go back to Milan. Unless, of course, someone perishes from your cute dimples before that."

"I love your accent," the customs officer muttered as he literally melted behind his desk. "Have a nice trip."

The young lady thanked him with a dazzling smile and left holding her friend's arm.

"You're too much, Sibilla," Leonardo said. "When a young creep is hitting on you, you always have to overdo it."

"I love light appetizers, especially when the rest is looking so spicy," replied Elena Drago, a.k.a. Sibilla, a journalist with *Flash* and an occult investigator. "According to Sir Wilson the case we're interested in involves Interpol as much as... as the past of a person I owe a lot to, or so he said. I don't like it when he's vague."

"Interpol is no small matter! Let's hope we're not getting mixed up in politics. And for your meeting? Is a driver waiting for us or are we on our own? Just getting out of the airport is going to be a mess."

"Look."

Sibilla pointed to a tall, thin man, impeccably dressed in a black suit. He was holding a sign on which the names of the two Italians were printed. His blonde hair was brushed back and his expressionless face could have belonged to an English butler, but a butler whose respect you had to earn to give him orders.

"If that guy isn't a Brit working for Interpol I'll eat my Leica," Leonardo mumbled, then he raised his hand to show that they were the expected party.

The stranger smirked when he saw them coming up. He held out a firm hand in a leather glove that Sibilla and Leonardo shook in turn.

"Miss Sibilla and Mr. Verga, welcome to Paris. I'm Graham Carter. I'm the one who contacted your boss. I'm part of a special section of Interpol, but I'll tell you more on the way. Please follow me."

The Englishman turned around and without looking to see if they were following him he marched through the teeming crowd. Even the passengers in a great hurry stepped aside to let him pass.

"What presence!" Sibilla whistled in admiration at the natural authority emanating from their contact.

Leonardo grumbled.

The trio left the crowds behind to wind their way through the vast parking maze. A black sedan was waiting for them. Leonardo was a little disappointed by the car that looked nothing like James Bond's Aston Martin. Graham Carter let them get settled in the comfortable leather seats, then sat behind the wheel.

Before starting the car he turned to Sibilla, "As Sir Wilson must have explained to you, we're going to be staying in an apartment in the Marais. The place should be familiar to you. During part of 1785 Count Cagliostro lived there."

Sibilla's heart beat faster. To be within the walls that had sheltered the man to whom she owed her occult powers was an exhilarating prospect. Without a doubt and despite the short time he spent in the rooms the magnetic presence of Cagliostro ought to have seeped into the place.

"Would the case have anything to do with him?" Leonardo asked.

"Let's just say that Cagliostro was the unlucky hero of what we can call the prologue to our story. Incidentally..."

The Englishman opened the glove compartment and took out a document carefully wrapped in brown paper. He handed it to Sibilla who felt her hair stand on end as if she had just got an electric shock. She tore off the paper and held a very old, bound notebook. Her fingers drummed on it. She looked at Carter as he finally turned the ignition.

The Englishman smiled in the rear view mirror, "That's the journal the Count kept during his imprisonment in the Bastille. The story he wrote is really fascinating. It should make for good reading during the drive."

Sibilla opened the book gingerly. The yellowed pages were fragile. Having consulted the grimoires countless times the magician was familiar enough with Cagliostro's handwriting to authenticate the work she held in her hands.

While the sedan sped through the traffic and honking horns, the pretty Italian learned about the dreadful disaster of the famous case of the Queen's necklace.

August 13, 1785

"A nocturnal visit might play against you, Your Eminence. And it's all the more dangerous if the king's spies are watching you."

"That's exactly what I said," the cardinal's young secretary affirmed, "but he refused to listen to me. And when I begged him not to go to the rendezvous supposedly set up by the Queen, he did as he wanted. Now you see the unfortunate results!"

"That's enough, Louis!" Cardinal de Rohan shouted. "There's no need to twist the knife in the wound. I came in spite of the dangers because I couldn't wait any longer to show you, Count. Oh, have pity and save me! I think I'm being followed. I feel like one of those big deer being attacked on all sides by relentless hunting dogs."

"Worry is making His Eminence poetic," Louis muttered.

Count Cagliostro gently pushed Cardinal de Rohan into a comfortable armchair and went to fetch some wine for his guests. The churchman was Cagliostro's patron, who had been witness to his magical talents when he had healed the prince of Soubise by a simple laying on of hands. The Cardinal was amazed and eagerly sang the magician's praises all over Paris. At first embarrassed by the sudden interest that he attracted in high society Cagliostro finally realized that he could turn an honest profit from his powers. But only the least spectacular of his gifts and the least susceptible of incurring the wrath of the clergy. Unfortunately some of his patients were so generous that the Count could not stop tongues wagging and calling him a cheat.

But tonight, what de Rohan brought was harder to define than a simple attack of gout or kidney stones. As the Cardinal's personal secretary Louis was responsible for explaining the particulars of the affair: his boss had been involved in a large-scale fraud and he was the main victim. Someone pretending to be Marie-Antoinette had kept up a regular correspondence with him. Then they had urged him, in order to prove his "friendship" with the Queen, to acquire a necklace worth the extravagant sum of two million pounds! Of course, the crooks had pocketed the money without giving anything to the artisan who was supposed to make the jewelry. When no money came the craftsman went to complain directly in Versailles. Already shaken up by the scandal Rohan was now filled with terror on learning that the King had requested his sworn enemy, Baron de Breteuil, to look into the affair. The situation was really

desperate for the Cardinal whose naivety could land him in prison and made worse by the fact that the Queen hated him with all her heart. She would certainly not lose the chance to heap scorn and disgrace on Rohan.

“I didn’t think you were so candid, Your Eminence,” the Count said once Louis had finished his story. “You really thought that the Queen wanted a quick and easy reconciliation after that grievous dispute that pitted you against her late mother? And you never doubted that the letters apparently signed by her hand were fakes? Breteuil must be in seventh heaven.”

“My friend, your chiding only makes me feel worse. I came to you because you are the person I trust the most. I was counting on your intelligence and your uncommon gifts.”

Rohan waved to Louis to hand a document to the magician.

“I wrote down the names of the swindlers,” he explained. “We know that some of your talents involve bending even the most contrary minds to your will.”

“I see. I can’t guarantee a complete absolution with the Queen, but it’s true that loosening a few tongues will be the only way to soften your fall.”

A great weight seemed to lift off Rohan’s shoulders. He took Cagliostro’s hands in his own and squeezed them. With tears in his eyes he said, “Thank you! Thank you! I owe you so much!”

“Wait to see the results before you start thanking me,” Cagliostro replied. “Tomorrow night I’ll pay a visit to a few scoundrels.”

“Louis will go with you. Everybody respects him for his intelligence and his virtue. His presence will play even more in my favor.”

If Cagliostro was offended by the unspoken suggestion that the word of a magician was of little value, he did not show it.

“Do you really want to go with me, Louis?”

“These rogues and their little schemes make me sick,” the young man answered. “I’m ready to sacrifice a good night’s rest for it.”

“I hate getting such a noble soul mixed up in such a dark affair, but so be it,” the Count sighed.

“Great!” Rohan sounded confident. “My friends, I’m counting on your discretion, your ingenuity and your very special talents.”

The first person to receive a visit that night was a skillful forger by the name of Marc Rétaux de Villette. He was the one who had written the letters perfectly imitating the Queen’s handwriting. His reputation was more of a ladies man than a reasonable man and he would give his all to enjoy their generosity.

Cagliostro had the carriage stop a few streets away from the scoundrel’s lodging. The two men walked calmly, like all good people, up to the house. Rétaux de Villette lived on Île Saint Louis. The three-storey building had seen better days. Cagliostro and Louis walked around the side looking for the servant’s entrance. It was not locked. As the two men snuck in, the magician had a morbid feeling that turned his stomach: death had struck.

Louis saw him turn pale all of a sudden and grabbed his arm, afraid he might pass out, “Count?”

“It’s nothing. I was just taken by surprise. Quick, let’s find the cur... even if we can’t get much out of him.”

Worried about the physical change in the thaumaturge, Louis did not dare say a word. They tiptoed upstairs. Although modest the house was well taken care of. The servants were certainly on the top floor but it was better to be careful. They stopped before a door that was left ajar. Cagliostro opened it slowly and was blasted by the stench of death. A painful, desperate death. Merciless.

Candles burning in the tarnished silver candelabra cast a faint light in the room, a scene of total chaos: sheets of paper and inkwells lay on the wooden floor, books were piled up on the shelves, disheveled wigs were hanging off the backs of chairs, open bottles of perfume and cosmetic powders added their heavy scents to the shambles.

And slumped in a high-backed chair, a motionless king in the middle of his chaotic realm, Marc Rétaux de Villette stared at the ceiling in disbelief. His corpse showed no trace of violence. However, the

agony of his death still filled the room. Cagliostro smelled it like the sharp odor left from a deadly fire days later.

Trying to hide his disgust, Louis examined the dead eyes and hands. "I don't think he was poisoned. And yet it looks like he had horrible convulsions."

"Here's a death quite convenient for our thieves but at a bad time for the Cardinal," Cagliostro muttered.

He nervously twisted his strange ring in the form of a snake pierced by an arrow, which he never took off and whose brilliance always fascinated Louis.

"My friend," the magician said, "You've already seen some of my... tricks, as the skeptical call them. You've seen the relief I brought to those in suffering."

The young man nodded without saying a word, waiting patiently for his companion to get to the point.

"I know that you're a sensible, rational person, not so gullible," the Count continued as he circled around the chair in which the dead man lay. "That's why I'm sorry to have to rattle your beliefs, so to speak. I could make an excuse to get you out of the room but I need a witness of your standing. You're going to see some magic that would earn me the gallows if word got out. But there's nothing else I can do if I want to learn more about our criminals or whoever's in control. So, in the name of our mutual trust, please don't be afraid and don't scream bloody hell."

Louis felt his throat tighten. It was hard for him to swallow. "I will prove worthy of your trust," he croaked.

Cagliostro gave him a warm smile, glad to hear his answer. Then his face went hard as he turned toward the forger's remains. Slowly, he raised his hand. The ring on his finger shined in a glow of jade, lighting up the room that the candles had kept in morbid shadows.

"By the power of the Twelve, I order you to appear and reveal to us what is hidden, Marc Rétaux de Villette. Show yourself, wretched lost soul, and find peace once your duty is accomplished."

All of a sudden everything went dark except for Cagliostro's ring. Then a figure stepped out of the shadows. Louis struggled not to pass out in fear: before them stood the spectral form of Rétaux de Villette. His dark-ringed eyes were jumping out of their sunken sockets, his mouth was gaping open with mute, unbearable sorrow. His milk-white body twitched in a dance of suffering like a glowworm held over candle flame. One bony hand clutched his chest.

"Tortured spirit, poor, tormented soul," Cagliostro murmured, "eternal rest will be granted you when you have revealed to us who it was who used you to harm Cardinal de Rohan and how you died."

With this said, the ghost moaned long and low, which shook Louis to the depths of his soul. Then, slowly, the pale lips exhaled such weak grumblings that the two men had to hold their breaths to hear.

"Jeanne... la Motte... she dem... to imitate... the Queen... Jeanne plan... all... London, the jewels... My heart! My heart!"

These last words came out in a heart-rending cry. The ghost twisted in pain, opened and closed its mouth searching for air that it would never breathe again.

"What's happening to your heart, Marc?" Cagliostro asked compassionately. "Are you sick?"

"No, no!" the ghost said. "Jeanne... the pin..."

The ghost reached out its trembling arm toward the small desk by the door. Cagliostro went over and opened the drawers one by one. When he finally found the strange object, his blood froze. But his voice was calm when he addressed the phantom for the last time.

"Marc Rétaux de Villette, by the power of the Twelve, may your poor soul be free of the sufferings of this world. You can rest in peace."

A bright, green light sprang out of the ring and enveloped the sad, spectral figure. Louis watched on, frozen in both fear and amazement, as the forger's spirit dissolved. There was just enough time to see Rétaux de Villette close his eyes, peacefully, before the ephemeral figure vanished in a glowing whirlwind. When everything was back to normal, the young man finally let his legs go. He dropped to his knees on the floorboards, utterly stunned by the sight he had just witnessed.

"Come on, Louis, this is not the time to pass out," Cagliostro told him.

But he was not looking at his young companion. His eyes were captivated by the object found in the desk drawer, which he was holding out in disgust. It was a small, wax doll bound with a lock of hair. Sticking out of the middle of it was a long, silver pin.

"I wouldn't be surprised if this hair belonged to our host," the magician said. Then, to Louis who was still dazed, "Get hold of yourself, my boy, we have a very interesting clue to follow here."

"Huh?" Louis looked up and slowly pulled himself together but he was obviously fighting against the fear of going crazy. "Yes, yes, I remember. He mentioned a name and the city of London."

"I'll bet my precious ring that the stolen jewels are in London. But do you know this Jeanne la Motte?"

"Jeanne *de* la Motte," Louis corrected. "I'm afraid yes. She's the Cardinal's mistress."

Cagliostro swore. "That explains why he was so easily manipulated. Rohan kept you from adding her name to the list of suspects while she was the ringleader. A criminal who knows black magic to boot!"

"But... and you? What you did..."

"I have never used my gifts to hurt anyone. In the name of our friendship, Louis, don't think of me as one of those cheap necromancers squeezing riches out of helpless grieving families... nor like a sorcerer who would sign a pact with the devil. I get my powers from an ancient civilization that is now extinct, from an age when the devil was a light-bearer and not a tempter. But we have to get out of here fast. Maybe the depraved woman has not had time to get rid of all her accomplices.

All night long the magician and Louis walked the streets of Paris, silent shadows lost in the twists and turns of a dark tale, searching for other people on Rohan's list. Twice they could only join the onlookers crowded around a house, mumbling about the freshly discovered corpse. Cagliostro and Louis had no doubt about the identity of the deceased. On the other hand, they were the first on the scene of the lifeless corpse of a prostitute named Nicole Leguay. Looking at her delicate face frozen in death, the two men understood why Cardinal de Rohan proved to be so remarkably naïve.

Except for a few small details the young woman bore a troubling resemblance to Marie Antoinette.

It was easy to imagine the secret rendezvous set up between the fake queen and the cardinal. Rendezvous that took place in suitably deceptive shadows.

Despite Louis' obvious reluctance, Cagliostro called upon his dark magic once again. Whereas the ghost of Rétaux de Villette had been sad and sorrowful to a pitiful extent, the aura of Nicole Leguay's ghost was a mixture of tears and anger.

"Jeanne, that damned witch!" she shouted while ectoplasmic tears ran down her marble face. "May God forgive all my sins but I hope He soaks that harlot in the flames of hell!"

Then she pointed to an object under her bed. Cagliostro was expecting this but he could not stop the shiver from running down his spine when he pulled out the wax doll like the one found at the forger's.

Nicole Leguay's ghost was not finished, "Look for the Count de la Motte in London. The jewelers Clifford and Parrels."

Cagliostro would never forget the ghost's unflinching eyes drilling into his own when his ring flashed and freed her from the terrestrial purgatory.

The clues they had now were enough to form an action plan. The day was dawning when the two men went to Louis' home to prepare for his trip. Nine o'clock had not yet tolled when the Cardinal's secretary jumped into a carriage headed for Calais with some light luggage. He had to find the stolen jewels as soon as possible. Rohan's disgrace was no longer a question of days but of hours if one could judge by the way Jeanne de la Motte was disposing of the most compromising witnesses.

Once Count Cagliostro was alone he shut himself up at home. He slept very little. He sent a message to the Cardinal that summed up the investigation but without informing him of Louis' departure, which had to remain confidential. For the rest, the magician shared his worries and advised the greatest caution because evil sorcery was at work.

The two wax dolls were put on a stand, looking like they were observing the magician emptying his bookshelves and thumbing madly through old tomes that exuded a sweet, musty odor. These dolls,

obviously the instruments of lethal black magic, reminded him of a wicked person whose evil influence on history was seen in the massacres of Protestants.

Thus Cagliostro spent the day, a day of suffocating heat, reading and cussing under his breath whenever his fears were confirmed. The sun was sinking behind the roofs of Paris when he closed his last book and turned his eyes toward the two little, wax horrors.

“Now you’re going to take me to your real creator.”

Late at night when honest folks are snoring soundly in bed a shadowy figure was sneaking through the streets, as dark as the other shadows and as quiet as a cat. It would have taken a very careful observer to spot the two tiny creatures leading the prowler. Without any hesitation the two things jogged down the road, jumping over holes and puddles. With his hand held out in front of him, as if he were trying to catch the weird pixies, the man trotted lightly behind them. Look closer and you might see a shiny ring with a jade glow on his finger and a thin ray of light coming out of it and surrounding the two dolls.

With his magic Cagliostro had animated the wax dolls and turned them into guides toward the real mastermind behind the crimes. The farther he went through the dark night, the more sure he was of his conclusions: it was not just Rohan who was the target but also the royal couple’s reputation. Getting their names mixed up in such a sinister fraud, already being so unpopular, could very well make them lose all credit with the people. Jeanne de la Motte’s interest was not in the money she would swindle or else she would be in London with her husband. She was one of the last descendants of the royal family of Valois but had always been poor. Only vengeance could make her form an alliance with a demon that everyone thought was dead.

When he got in view of the tall column next to La Halle aux Blés and topped with a big sundial, Cagliostro knew that he had arrived at his destination. Because of the nearness of Les Halles market to the old Holy Innocents’ cemetery, he became doubly cautious. Even in the darkest hour of the night chance encounters could happen. Thieves, murderers, beggars, road workers, early peddlers, all kinds of people were already pounding the pavement close by.

With a wave of his hand Cagliostro broke the ray of light that energized the wax puppets, which plopped quietly to the ground. Then he slipped behind the tall column that rose up to the stars. A relic of the reign of Catherine de Medici, it had been used to watch the heavens by the magus Cosimo Ruggieri, the queen’s official astrologer and a fervent practitioner of the darkest magic. It was said that on stormy nights you could see a gaunt figure on top of the column, flashing in and out of sight with the lightning.

Cagliostro perked up when he heard distant rumbling. Here came the answer to the heat of the day.

“A perfect night to invoke certain ghosts,” the thaumaturge hissed.

The quality of the air changed abruptly. Everything became smothered under a lead weight. The nocturnal birds flew off from the roofs and screeched out wild songs.

Cagliostro was about to cross the few yards between him and his goal when he saw a figure wrapped in a dark cape dashing towards the little door at the base of the column. With one hand on the door and other holding a lantern the stranger looked around to make sure nobody was following. The light from the lantern revealed the pretty face of a common woman but with a noble features marked by extreme cunning. It could only be the Countess de la Motte.

Once she had closed the door behind her Cagliostro stepped out of hiding and snuck up to the building. The first drops of rain hit the pavement when he reached the column. The Countess had locked the door so she would not be disturbed in her dark intrigues. The magician took a skeleton key out of his jacket pocket and picked the lock. The hard rain that was pouring down on Paris drowned out the creaking door as Cagliostro slipped into the column. The winding stairs were lost in almost total darkness. But a faint light came from above, changing the black into a dark gray.

The violent storm was the only noise to be heard. The Count did not know if Jeanne de la Motte was alone or if other people were already waiting for her up above. But the magician was fully aware of another presence besides the woman. An insidious presence full of powerful magic. It was seeping out of the walls, soaking into the stones.

It had been waiting for two centuries.

The magician had goose bumps. To give himself courage he fiddled with his ring, which had always protected him from evil spirits. Then he started climbing up the stairs of the Medici column. The rain might have covered the voices of anyone present but it also covered the Count's footsteps. The climb was long and tortuous because the magician was listening for signs of what was happening up above and also keeping an ear on downstairs so he would not be surprised by a newcomer.

As he neared the top he heard the woman talking passionately. A shiver ran down his spine when he heard the answer in a deep, cavernous voice devoid of all kindness and especially of life. He ducked down when he got to the top of the steps. He did not want to show himself right away and he could easily be seen in the flames of the thirteen candles, each placed at the points of the strange symbol drawn with red chalk on the gray marble floor. Jeanne de la Motte was in the middle of the cabalistic sign, on her knees, looking up, frozen in an attitude of ecstatic devotion. A dark figure, darker than the night, rose up before her. Two points of absolute blackness in the middle of a shadowy face seemed to be staring at the woman.

"The unwanted witnesses are gone," she said. "Everything will trace back to Cardinal de Rohan and I will corroborate the accusations against him. It will be so scandalous that the King and Queen will have their reputations tarnished forever."

"I know that, my child, I have seen it," the dark figure whispered.

Hissing laughter like the slow beating of an eagle owl's wings crept over the stones.

"The fall of the Bourbons is written in the stars. It's an impure dynasty that deserves to be wiped out. We will establish a kingdom enlightened by magic and prosperity. Like the great Catherine wanted."

"And for that you're ready to use the most disgraceful means, Mage Cosimo Ruggieri," Cagliostro spoke slowly as he stepped out of his hiding place.

He was pointing his ring and a jade light flashed out, lighting up the whole space, followed by a loud thunderclap that shook the column to its foundation. But this did not drown out the laughter of the ghost who looked exactly like on the day of his death: an old man with a thick beard, dressed in black, wearing a dark cap and his eyes were shining savagely under his heavy eyelids. Cagliostro had encountered many spirits, some so weak that they were no more tangible than a wisp of smoke, and others so full of anger and energy that even the living could see them. All of them, however, were disturbed or terrified by the magic emanating from the ring.

Cosimo Ruggieri was the first to scoff at the demonstration of its power. "You're finally here, magician!" the ghost clapped its bony hands joyously. "Did you like our little treasure hunt?"

"Treasure hunt?" Cagliostro could not believe it.

"You're smart but too proud of it," Ruggieri said. "Those wax dolls were meant for you. My disciples talked a lot about the healing sorcerer who was hovering around Rohan and the court. I knew it was one of the Twelve Immortals. Yes, I know all of you, my dear Count, and you alone have the power to thwart the projects that even Death couldn't stop. So, I decided to kill two birds with one stone."

Hurried footsteps could be heard on the winding staircase just behind Cagliostro. To his surprise he had not heard the door creaking open down below. The magician was caught in a trap! Determined not to go down without a fight, he pointed his ring again and raised his voice, "By the power of the Twelve, I order you to return to the Beyond, Cosimo Ruggieri."

In the magic ray of light the ghost dropped his insolent attitude and twisted in pain. Seeing this, Jeanne de la Motte, who had not budged the entire time, ran screaming at Cagliostro. He pushed her away easily but suddenly felt his arms and shoulders seized by strong hands. Ruggieri's backup had arrived.

The Count desperately kept his ring aimed at the slowly vanishing phantom and shouted at the top of his lungs, "Disappear! By the power of the Twelve!"

At the same time, he was hit in the face. Then a fist landed in his belly, knocking the wind out of him. They threw him on the ground and attacked. In spite of the pain Cagliostro kept his eyes on the ghost. In one last frantic move he shot the jade light at Ruggieri whose shadowy figure was evaporating like poisonous gas in a gust of wind.

"No! Save the Master!" Jeanne de la Motte cried out in despair.

A heavy boot came crashing down on the ring, cutting off the exorcism. The magician howled when he felt two of his fingers broken. Even through the shooting pains he saw the ghost vanish and every ectoplasmic fiber soak into the wet stones.

They yanked him to his feet. The hateful look in the eyes of his attackers left no doubt that they wanted to tear him to pieces. One of them stopped the others when they were about to finish him off.

“That’s enough! Master Ruggieri wanted him alive so he could be blamed for the crime of treason.”

Cagliostro blinked, not believing his eyes as they stared at the man standing before him. He had seen him with Rohan at the court.

“Baron de Breteuil...”

It really was the Minister of the King’s Household, responsible for finding the culprits of the fraud, standing here grinning at him with morbid delight.

“In person, my dear Count, if your title is not stolen. But it doesn’t matter, you’re nothing now. The Cardinal is finished. As for that stupid Bourbon and his Austrian wench...”

The Baron laughed scornfully. “They will end the Age in purifying violence.”

Then he turned to his henchmen, “Take this vermin to the Bastille! He is officially under arrest. You too, Madame, I’m very sorry to say.”

“I have my role to play, Baron,” Jeanne de la Motte sighed. “But our Master?”

“He knew the risks. Don’t worry, though, he will never abandon his disciples. From now on it’s up to us to set the wheels of History in motion.”

Cagliostro fought against his abductors but there were too many of them and they were too strong. They forced him down the stairs and dragged him outside in the pouring rain. A carriage hitched to four black horses was waiting for them. The magician’s cry for help was so unsettling that it froze the blood of his torturers. Then he was thrown head first into his decline.