

Destined To Be

Life takes unexpected turns. You spend your entire life believing something, and then, in a heartbeat, everything changes. You know who you are one moment, and then realize the next that your reflection is a complete stranger. You find yourself lost in a swirling vortex of confusion, with no answers to anchor you in the now. And then all you can do is try to answer those questions, one by one, in hopes of somehow, someday, slowly putting your life back together.

My life was simple, but I was content. I was an orphan who lived with my uncle, and I had everything I could ever need.

And then my world fell apart.

I am sorry for your loss.

Words no human being ever wants to hear.

I am sorry for your loss.

One phrase you wish wasn't a part of life.

The day my uncle died, I lost a man who had been my father, my mentor, my friend, and my role model.

All those platitudes about light and dark, and doors that open and close, they mean nothing. Not when your world shatters into teeny tiny pieces you somehow have to put back together. Not when all you have left to do is go on.

That day, all I had left to my name was my inheritance and a letter from my uncle. One letter that would have to fill the gaping void my uncle had left inside me. I sat for the longest time at my desk fingering the letter, before I finally found the strength to split the wax seal.

Dearest nephew,

If you are reading this letter, then I am no longer with you. There is so much I had wished to tell you before I left, and now I cannot. Today, I bid you to stay strong in the face of whatever fate throws your way.

After the reading of my will, I am sure you are aware I had kept a vital part of your life from you. So first, I must ask for your forgiveness. I hope once you learn why I did what I did, forgiveness will come more easily.

It is time for me to tell you a story, my dear nephew. I pray you will not hate me once I am done.

Before the revolution, your father was a member of the bourgeoisie. He was a duke in the ruling class of France, and one of the most hated by the rebels. When France fell to the revolutionaries, he asked from me one thing: that I would keep his children safe. He knew as well as

I did that for the revolutionaries, simply ending the royal rule would not be enough. They would not rest until every member of the ruling class was gone. As a poor merchant, I was beneath their notice, so I had the best opportunity to save you and your twin sister. You were easy enough to hide. I had had a son roughly your age who died in the war, and so we simply switched your stories. You were my living son, and he was your father's dead son. But your sister was far more difficult. She was the only female of her generation in our family, and she resembled the ruling class far more closely than you. And so I hid her with a poor family who lived in the outskirts of Paris.

My plan only had one flaw--I had no way to fake her death. She was proclaimed missing, rather than dead, and almost everyone forgot she existed. Almost. To this day, there is one man, who's sole goal is to find your sister and kill her. I was never able to bring her back home for fear that he would find her here, and I could not tell you for fear that you would seek her out. But I have always watched her from afar, and have made she sure is well taken care of. Today, however, everything will change. I can no longer watch over her from afar--so now it is your job to protect her. I have made arrangements for her to find you, and all I ask of you is that you keep her safe. Fulfill my last promise to your father, my nephew. Bring your sister back home.

Her name is Emmaline.

Adieu, my son. Remember, this is not goodbye forever; it is simply a farewell until we see each other again in the next life.

As I folded my uncle's letter and placed it in the drawer, I was struck by the realization that somewhere else in Paris, a young girl's life was about to change just as surely as mine had.

Emmaline,

My name is Francis Duval, and today I will tell you a story that will seem fantastic to you. But I beg of you, do not crumple this letter up after reading the first line. Please give this letter and my story a chance...

I was a simple girl, who led a quiet life. I lived with a wonderful adoptive family, and was training to become a governess. I didn't have much, because I didn't need much. And then I got a letter that changed everything.

...you have no reason to believe me, but I hope you will at least explore the possibility of my story being true...

My uncle, who had given me to a poor family to keep me safe when I was a baby, had written me a letter before he died. And I had a long-lost twin brother who had no idea I existed.

...his name is Antoine, and now that I am gone, he is the only one who will be able to protect you. Please find your way to my household and know you will always be welcome there...

And so I found myself standing in front of a large mansion, struggling to find the courage to knock at the door. The door opened as I stood there, arguing with myself, and the face of the butler peered out curiously. Oh, well, no going back now.

I stepped forward and stood up straight. "My name is Emmaline and I am here at the request of your late master to visit Mr. Antoine Duval."

The butler's face underwent several rapid transformations--curiosity to surprise, surprise to astonishment, astonishment to suspicion.

He quickly composed himself and moved back. "Please, mademoiselle, come inside as I see if Master Duval is receiving visitors. He closed the door behind me and hurried away, leaving me in the grand entrance hall. He returned a moment later. "Master Duval will see you in his study, mademoiselle."

A young man paced back and forth in front of his desk, in obvious turmoil. Suddenly he stopped and turned to face the slowly opening door. A young woman walked hesitantly through the door and let it swing shut behind her. Neither spoke. She looked up and met his searching gaze. And they both froze. The world blurred and then crystallized for the two as a jolt of visceral knowledge struck them. The only physical features they shared were the shape of their eyes and the color of their skin, but as they stood staring at each other, something neither had known was missing inside them came swirling back.

Antoine reeled as if he had been punched and Emmaline locked her suddenly weak knees. "It's true," they breathed in unison. Their gazes still locked, they both realized the enormity of their discovery.

I'm not alone anymore, they both realized.

But how do I handle her? How do I protect her? Antoine asked himself.

But he is a stranger. Where do we go from here? Emmaline wondered.

They both knew the path that lay before them would not be easy, and their conflicts were by no means resolved, but both brother and sister took consolation in the fact that no matter what happened, they would never again be alone.