

To: Shelby Mahurin
From: Kayla Humphrey
Date: May 08th, 2023
Re: Editing plan for "Serpent & Dove."

The following is my editing plan and my copyedit for the first two chapters of your book "Serpent & Dove". I have attached a style sheet with the copyedit to aid with future edits.

I performed an electronic copyedit of your work using Track changes in Microsoft Word. Due to the length of some of the author queries, I separated them into a list also attached to this plan. In the right-hand margins, you will see a numbered reference to the relevant query in the list. Any direct copyedits in the work will be in red marks or text.

If you have any questions, please contact me at kayla.humphrey01@student.csulb.edu.

Evaluation

Content

Overall, the content of your work is good. The primary purpose of telling a story is successfully completed through its point-of-view chapters. The work's first-person point of view format does well to establish the setting, its characters, and the different established character groups. The grammar and style imply that the intended audience is primarily young adults and older due to mature themes and its language being straightforward.

Style

Even though the first-person point of view format is well reflected in the style, repetitive choices made in the work can cause the reader confusion on the matter of emphasis. While reading the story, the reader will be drawn to the use of italics. In the text, italics are used for multiple functions. They are used to point out foreign terms not standard in the English language. It is also in character dialogue to emphasize how they stress certain words as they speak. It is also used to emphasize the internal thoughts of the point of view character. This also adds to the confusion since the character is not speaking the words that are emphasized, making it difficult for the reader to focus on what should stand out for them.

Another notable style choice is the em dash throughout the work. In the work, the em dash is used as an interrupter and as a sign of a character being abruptly cut off from speaking or their thoughts. Structurally they are used correctly for their purpose. However, the different functions are often used close together, which can make the reading hard to follow as the em dash loses its overall effect on the reader.

Mechanics

The style choices used in the work's format affected mechanics. A repeated issue was some of the sentence fragments in character dialogue. Some sentence fragments added contextual weight to what was being said or additional flair to an action. However, it does not maintain that consistency throughout the work. Some sentence fragments are ineffective at conveying proper meaning, which may confuse the reader upon reading.

Editing Plan

Style

Content

- Even though a story is effectively told through a first-person point of view. Some sentences will need some revision to ensure that it maintains the story format.
 - **EX:** *Not your fight.* Lifting my chin, I mentally shook myself. (p. 14)

The first sentence is written as an active thought which would be present if the story was written in a third person perspective. It can confuse the reader since the corresponding chapter is already written in the character's perspective.

Italics

- Limiting the function of italics in the work to foreign terms and words in dialogue to signal how the characters are stressing certain terms will help maintain its effectiveness. Using italics in the thoughts of the point of view character is not necessary since they are not verbally spoken to point out stressed terms.

- **EX:** But while *Filippa* might've had no enemies... (p. 2) Since the character is not speaking direct dialogue, it would be better to remove the italics around the name.
- **EX:** “The eyes and *ears*, remember? *Ears*. You must whisper in this place.” (p. 5) The character is speaking and is stressing words to make a point. Italics are used well in this example.

Em dash

- The em dash is used as both an interrupter and a signal of a character being cut off in speech or in thought. While both functions are effective in the work, using both functions closely together may confuse the reader. Replacing some of the em dashes with commas in sentence interrupters may improve understanding while making the passage easier to read.
 - **EX:** “If you hadn’t, perhaps dear Filippa would still be with us—”

His head snapped up at his daughter’s name, and his eyes—no longer haunted—glinted with fierce purpose. (p. 8)

Mechanics

Sentence Fragments

- While some sentence fragments add a dramatic flair to the narration, others do not have the same effect and would be better combined to improve comprehension.
 - **EX:** A lingering aura on the corpse’s skin. As if the magic itself was still present somehow, watching and waiting.

Alive. (p. 1)
 - The first two sentences are hard to read as a standalone and would improve the reader's comprehension if the details of both were combined. The single-word sentence is simple and written as an afterthought for the character and works for the style it is written.

Style Sheet

Author/Title: Shelby Mahurin, *Serpent & Dove*

Copyeditor: Kayla Humphrey

Date: 5/08/2023

References: *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*
Chicago Manual of Style
The Copyeditor's Handbook

Characterization

- **Louise (Lou):** One of the point-of-view characters in the story. She is witch who lives in hiding in the city by often disguising herself as a man.
- **Cosette (Coco):** A close friend of Lou's who is also a witch and disguises herself as a man.
- **Pierre Tremblay:** As aristocrat who deals in black market products connected to witches.
- **Filippa:** One of Tremblay's daughters who is deceased.
- **Babette:** A servant of Madame Labelle.
- **Madame Labelle:** Owner of the Bellerose Brothel.
- **Andre:** A security guard for Madame Labelle and partner of Grue.
- **Grue:** A security guard for Madame Labelle and partner of Andre.
- **Bas:** A wealthy associate of Lou.
- **Mademoiselle Lucida Bretton:** One of Lou's aliases when she has to dress up as a woman.
- **Johannes Pan:** Lou's subordinate who takes on different tasks for her when she is Mademoiselle Bretton.

Abbreviation

- **Lou:** Shortened name for Louise.
- **Coco:** Shortened name for Cosette.
- **Chass:** Shortened term for Chasseur.
- **'tis (it is):** A contraction in the Meriam-Webster dictionary.

Capitalization

- **Chapter Title:** All letters in the chapter title are capitalized.
 - Example: THE BELLEROSE
- **Chapter Subtitle:** The first letter of the character's name is capitalized.
- **the Church:** Refers to an important governing body in the story's setting and should be capitalized when mentioned.

- **Madame/Mademoiselle/Monsieur:** When it precedes a character's name it should be capitalized.
- **Dames Blanches-** It refers to a group of witches in the story and should be capitalized.
- **Chasseurs-** It is the title for the witch hunter who work for the church and should be capitalized.

Hyphenation

- **scantily-clad:** adverbs ending in -ly when paired with a participle or adjective should be left without a hyphen no matter if it is before or after a noun.

Numbers and Numerals

- **Part I:** It is used to signify how the story's chapter will be separated.
- **Chapters:** There are no numbered chapters.
- **Thirteen:** Numbers are spelled out in dialogue and internal monologue.
- **Page numbers:** The pages showing the story parts and the new chapters are not numbered.
 - Example: The PART I page is not numbered.
 - Example: The first page of the BELLEROSE is not numbered.

Punctuation

- **Period after Dialogue**
The period goes inside the dialogue if it is a complete sentence.
 - Example: "Babette should be here soon."
- **Colon**
It introduces or amplifies what came before the colon.
- **Em dash**
According to the handbook, there is no spacing before or after the dash.
Example: Thirteen bodies had been found throughout Belterra over the past year—more than double the amount of the years prior.
- **Interrupters**
Commas and dashes may be used as interrupters to flesh out details or provide emphasis according to the handbook.
 - Example: "Your mistress would burn you—and us—if she knew the truth."
- **Ellipses**
It can be used to suggest faltering or fragmented speech.

Special Symbols

- **è, é:** diacritic marks for acute and grave accent in the Meriam-Webster dictionary.

Spelling

- Bonjour
- Couronnes
- Mademoiselle
- Monsieur
- Messieurs
- Mon amour
- Mes amours
- Putain

Visuals

- **Italics:** According to the handbook, use italics to set apart specific phrases the characters are using.
- **Italics for Non-English words:** Chicago style uses italics for words and phrases from another language that are unfamiliar to the readers. If the word is used repeatedly in the work, then it should only be italicized the first time.

Example French phrases used in italics:

- *Bonjour*
 - *Monsieur*
 - *Messieurs*
 - *Mon amor*
 - *Couronnes*
- **Chapter subtitle:** The name in the subtitle is italicized and used to signal the point of view the chapter is in.

Key Terms:

- Dames Blanches: A type of witch in the story setting, and can easily travel through their society undetected.
- Belterra: The world in the story takes place in.
- Casarine: The city the story takes place in.
- Chasseur: Witch hunters in service to the Church.
- Balisarda: Weapons of the Chasseurs.

Author Queries

1. The sentence fragment is confusing on its own. It may be easier for the reader to understand the sentence when combined with the following sentence.
2. Interrupter may distract from the comparison between Coco's scarred hands to her smooth face. Consider removal or revision.
3. Italics used in both dialogue and internal thoughts from point of view character may confuse the reader on emphasis. Considering restricting the function to emphasis in spoken dialogue and foreign terms.
4. Using different functions of the em-dash closely together may confuse the reader. Consider replacing some em-dash interrupters with commas to space out its use.
5. Referring to the portrait this way may confuse the reader since it is an object with the woman's likeness and not the woman herself. Consider revising for clarity.
6. Consider changing the format since italics are already being used for foreign terms and emphasis. Any additional functions for italics may confuse the reader.
7. The italics and the spelled-out sound effect is confusing since it is not said out loud. It also signals Lou's inner thought which is also confusing since the first-person point of view is already in her thoughts. Consider deleting or revising into dialogue.
8. 'Heinous' suggest a largely negative connotation on Lou's and Bas relationship Which may be confusing for the reader since they seem to still be playful and flirtatious with each other. Consider substitution.
9. Ellipses used to signify a character trailing off may be confusing to the reader if used in both spoken dialogue and inner thoughts of point of view character.
10. Consider moving the em-dash inside the quotation marks to better signify Lou's cutting herself off as she eats.

11. The subject appears to change after Bas agrees to help and would start a new paragraph from here to make the change of focus from the agreement to observing the parade easier to read.
12. Consider rewriting Lou's thought to match the first-person format of the chapter since it is already for her perspective.
13. The sentence and following fragments may be hard for the reader to follow. Since the elements of both are used to describe Lou's opinion of the city, consider revising them into a single sentence using a serial comma.
For example: "It was suffocating, lifeless, and dull."

The Bellerose

Lou

There's something haunting about a body touched by magic. Most people first noticed the smell: not the rot of decay, but a cloying sweetness in their noses, a sharp taste on their tongues. Rare individuals also sensed a tingle in the air. There is a A-lingering aura on the corpse's skin. As, as if the magic itself was still present somehow, watching and waiting.

Alive.

Of course, those stupid enough to talk about such things ended up on the stake.

Thirteen bodies had been found throughout Belterra over the past year—more than double the amount of years prior. Though the Church did its best to conceal the mysterious circumstances of each death, all had been buried in closed caskets.

"There he is." Coco motioned to a man in the corner. Though candlelight bathed half of his face in shadow, there was no mistaking the gold brocade on his coat or the heavy insignia around his neck. He sat rigid in his chair, clearly uncomfortable, as a ~~seantily clad~~scantily clad woman draped herself across his plump midsection. I couldn't help but grin.

Only Madame Labelle would leave an aristocrat such as Pierre Tremblay waiting in the bowels of a brothel.

"Come on." Coco motioned toward a table in the opposite corner. "Babette should be here soon."

"What sort of pompous ass wears *brocade* while mourning?" I asked.

Coco glanced at Tremblay over her shoulder and smirked. "The sort of pompous ass with money."

His daughter, Filippa, had been the seventh body found.

After her disappearance in the dead of night, the aristocracy had been

Commented [k1]: Query 1

shaken when she'd reappeared—throat slashed—at the edge of L'Eau Mélancolique. But that wasn't the worst of it. Rumors had crawled through the kingdom about her silver hair and wrinkled skin, her cloudy eyes and gnarled fingers. At twenty-four, she'd been transformed into a hag. Tremblay's peers simply couldn't understand it. She'd had no known enemies, no vendettas against her to warrant such violence.

But while ~~Filippa~~ **Filippa** might've had no enemies, her pompous ass of a father had accumulated plenty while trafficking magical objects.

His daughter's death had been a warning: one did not exploit the witches without consequence.

"*Bonjour, messieurs.*" A honey-haired courtesan approached us, batting her lashes hopefully. I cackled at the brazen way she eyed Coco. Even disguised as a man, Coco was striking. Though scars marred the rich brown skin of her hands—she covered them with gloves—her face remained smooth, and her black eyes sparkled even in the semidarkness. "Can I tempt you to join me?"

"Sorry, darling." Adopting my smarmiest voice, I patted the courtesan's hand the way I'd seen other men do. "But we're spoken for this morning. Mademoiselle Babette will be joining us shortly."

She pouted for only a second before moving on to our neighbor, who eagerly accepted her invitation.

"Do you think he has it on him?" Coco scrutinized Tremblay from the top of his bald head to the bottom of his polished shoes, lingering on his unadorned fingers. "Babette could've been lying. This could be a trap."

"Babette might be a liar, but she isn't stupid. She won't sell us out before we pay her." I watched the other courtesans with morbid fascination. With cinched waists and overflowing bosoms, they danced lithely amongst the patrons as if their corsets weren't slowly suffocating them.

To be fair, however, many of them weren't wearing corsets. Or anything at all.

"You're right." Coco dug our coin pouch from her coat and threw it on the table. "It'll be after."

"Ah, *mon amour*, you wound me." Babette materialized beside us, grinning and flicking the brim of my hat. Unlike her peers, she swathed as much of her pale skin as possible with crimson silk. Thick, white makeup covered the rest—and her scars. They snaked up her arms and chest in a similar pattern to Coco's. "And for ten more golden *couronnes*, I would

Commented [k2]: Query 3

Commented [k3]: Query 2

never *dream* of betraying you.”

“Good morning, Babette.” Chuckling, I propped a foot on the table and leaned back on my chair’s hind legs. “You know, it’s uncanny the way you always appear within seconds of our money. Can you smell it?” I turned to Coco, whose lips twitched in an effort not to grin. “It’s like she can smell it.”

“*Bonjour*, Louise.” Babette kissed my cheek before leaning toward Coco and lowering her voice. “Cosette, you look ravishing, as usual.”

Coco rolled her eyes. “You’re late.”

“My apologies.” Babette inclined her head with a saccharine smile. “But I did not recognize you. I will never understand why such beautiful women insist on masquerading as men—”

“Unaccompanied women attract too much attention. You know that.” I drummed my fingers against the tabletop with practiced ease, forcing a grin. “Any one of us could be a witch.”

“Bah!” She winked conspiratorially. “Only a fool would mistake two as charming as you for such wretched, violent creatures.”

“Of course.” I nodded, tugging my hat even lower. While Coco’s and Babette’s scars revealed their true natures, Dames Blanches could move through society virtually undetected. The russet-skinned woman on top of Tremblay could be one. Or the honey-haired courtesan who’d just disappeared up the stairs. “But the flames come first with the Church. Questions second. It’s a dangerous time to be female.”

“Not here.” Babette spread her arms wide, lips curling upward. “Here, we are safe. Here, we are cherished. My mistress’s offer still stands—”

“Your mistress would burn you—and us—if she knew the truth.” I returned my attention to Tremblay, whose obvious wealth had attracted two more courtesans. He politely rebuffed their attempts to undo his trousers. “We’re here for him.”

Coco upended our coin pouch on the table. “Ten golden *couronnes*, as promised.”

Babette sniffed and lifted her nose in the air. “Hmm . . . I seem to remember twenty.”

“What?” My chair plummeted back to the ground with a bang. The patrons nearest us blinked in our direction, but I ignored them. “We agreed on *ten*.”

“That was before you hurt my feelings.”

“Damn it, Babette.” Coco snatched our coin away before Babette could

Commented [k4]: Query 4

touch it. “Do you know how long it takes us to save that kind of money?”

I struggled to keep my voice even. “We don’t even know if Tremblay *has* the ring.”

Babette merely shrugged and extended her palm. “It is not my fault you insist on cutting purses in the street like common criminals. You would earn thrice that sum in a single night here at the Bellerose, but you are too proud.”

Coco took a deep breath, hands curling into fists on the table. “Look, we’re sorry we offended your delicate sensibilities, but we agreed on ten. We can’t afford—”

“I can hear the coin in your pocket, Cosette.”

I stared at Babette incredulously. “You *are* a goddamned hound.”

Her eyes flashed. “Come now, I invite you here at my own personal risk to eavesdrop on my mistress’s business with Monsieur Tremblay, yet you insult me like I’m a—”

At that precise moment, ~~however~~, a tall, middle-aged woman glided down the staircase. A deep emerald gown accentuated her flaming hair and hourglass figure. Tremblay lurched to his feet at her appearance, and the courtesans around us—including Babette—swept into deep curtsies.

It was rather odd, watching naked women curtsy.

Grasping Tremblay’s arms with a wide smile, Madame Labelle kissed both his cheeks and murmured something I couldn’t hear. Panic spiked through me as she looped her arm through his and led him ~~back across the room~~ toward the stairs.

Babette watched us out of the corner of her eye. “Decide quickly, *mes amours*. My mistress is a busy woman. Her business with Monsieur Tremblay will not take long.”

I glared at her, resisting the urge to wrap my hands around her pretty neck and squeeze. “Can you at least tell us what your mistress is buying? She must’ve told you *something*. Is it the ring? Does Tremblay have it?”

She grinned like a cat with cream. “Perhaps . . . for another ten *couronnes*.”

Coco and I shared a black look. If Babette wasn’t careful, she’d soon learn just how ~~wretched wretched~~ and ~~violent violent~~ we could be.

The Bellerose boasted twelve luxury parlors for its courtesans to entertain guests, but Babette led us to none of these. Instead, she opened an unmarked thirteenth door at the end of the corridor and ushered us inside.

Commented [k5]: Query 4

Commented [k6]: Query 3

“Welcome, *mes amours*, to the eyes and ears of the Bellerose.”

Blinking, I waited for my eyes to adjust to the darkness of this new, narrower corridor. Twelve windows—rectangular, large, and spaced at regular intervals along one wall—let in a subtle glow of light. Upon closer inspection, however, I realized they weren’t windows at all, but portraits.

I traced a finger down the nose of the one nearest me: a beautiful woman with luscious curves and an alluring smile. “Who are they?”

“Famed courtesans of years past.” Babette paused to admire the woman with a wistful expression. “My portrait will replace hers someday.”

Frowning, I leaned closer to inspect the ~~woman-portrait~~ in question. Her image was mirrored, somehow, her colors muted, as if this were the back of the painting. And . . . holy hell.

Two golden latches covered her eyes.

“Are those *peepholes*?” Coco asked incredulously, moving closer. “What kind of macabre freak show is this, Babette?”

“Shhh!” Babette lifted a hasty finger to her lips. “The eyes and *ears*, remember? *Ears*. You must whisper in this place.”

I didn’t want to imagine the purpose of such an architectural feature. I ~~did~~ did, however, want to imagine a very long bath when I returned home to the theater. There would be scrubbing. Vigorous scrubbing. I could only pray my eyeballs survived it.

Before I could voice my disgust, two shadows moved in my periphery. I whirled, hand flying to the knife in my ~~boot, beforeboot~~ before the shadows took shape. I stilled as two horribly familiar, horribly unpleasant men leered at me.

Andre and Grue.

I glowered at Babette, knife still clenched in my fist. “What are *they* doing here?”

At the sound of my voice, Andre leaned forward, blinking slowly in the darkness. “Is that . . . ?”

Grue searched my face, skipping over my mustache and lingering on my dark brows and turquoise eyes, freckled nose and suntanned skin. An evil smile split his face. His front tooth was chipped. ~~And~~ and yellow. “Hello, Lou Lou.”

Ignoring him, I glared pointedly at Babette. “This wasn’t part of the deal.”

“Oh, relax, Louise. They’re working.” She flung herself into one of the wooden chairs they’d just vacated. “My mistress hired them as security.”

Commented [k7]: Query 5

Commented [k8]: Query 3

“Security?” Coco scoffed, reaching into her coat for her own knife. Andre bared his teeth. “Since when is voyeurism considered security?”

“If ever we feel uncomfortable with a client, all we do is knock twice, and these lovely gentlemen intervene.” Babette pointed lazily toward the portraits with her foot, revealing a pale, scarred ankle. “They are doors, *mon amour*. Immediate access.”

Madame Labelle was an idiot. It was the only explanation. ~~for such . . . well, idiocy.~~

Commented [k9]: Query 9

Two of the stupidest thieves I’d ever known, Andre and Grue infringed constantly on our territory in East End. Wherever we went, they followed—usually two steps behind—and wherever ~~they~~ they went, the constabulary inevitably did too. Big and ugly and loud, the two lacked the subtlety and skill necessary to thrive in East End. ~~And~~ —and the brains.

I dreaded to think what they would do with ~~immediate access~~ immediate access to anything. Especially sex and violence. And those were perhaps the *least* of the vices happening within these brothel walls, if this business transaction served as any example.

Commented [k10]: Query 3

“Do not worry.” As if reading my thoughts, Babette cast the two a small smile. “My mistress will kill them if they leak information. Isn’t that right, *messieurs*?”

Their grins vanished, and I finally noted the discoloration around their eyes. Bruises. I still didn’t lower my knife. “And what keeps them from leaking information *to* your mistress?”

“Well . . .” Babette rose to her feet, sweeping past us to a portrait down the corridor. She lifted a hand to the small golden button next to it. “I suppose that depends on what you’re willing to give them.”

“How about I give *all* of you a knife in the—”

“Ah, ah, ah!” Babette pressed the button as I advanced, knife raised, and the golden latches over the ~~courtesan portrait~~ ’s eyes flipped open. Madame Labelle’s and Tremblay’s muffled voices filled the corridor.

Commented [k11]: Query 5

“Think carefully, *mon amour*,” Babette whispered. “Your precious ring could be in the very next room. Come, see for yourself.” She stepped aside, finger still pressing the button, allowing me to stand in front of the portrait.

Muttering a curse, I stood on my tiptoes to see through the courtesan’s eyes.

Tremblay wore a path through the plush floral carpet of the parlor. He looked paler here in this pastel room—where the morning sun bathed

everything in soft, golden light—and sweat beaded along his forehead. Licking his lips nervously, he glanced back at Madame Labelle, who watched him from a chaise longue by the door. Even sitting, she exuded regal grace, neck straight and hands clasped.

“Do calm yourself, Monsieur Tremblay. I assure you I will obtain the necessary funds within the week. A fortnight at most.”

He shook his head curtly. “Too long.”

“One might argue it is not nearly long enough for your asking price. Only the king could afford such an astronomical sum, and he has no use for magic rings.”

Heart lurching to my throat, I pulled away to look at Coco. She scowled and dug in her coat for more *couronnes*. Andre and Grue pocketed them with gleeful smirks.

Promising myself I would skin them alive after I stole the ring, I returned my attention to the parlor.

“And—and if I were to tell you I have another buyer in place?” Tremblay asked.

“I would call you a liar, Monsieur Tremblay. You could hardly continue boasting possession of your wares after what happened to your daughter.”

Tremblay whirled to face her. “Do not speak of my daughter.”

Smoothing her skirts, Madame Labelle ignored him completely. “Indeed, I’m rather surprised you’re still in the magical black market at all. You do have another daughter, don’t you?” When he didn’t answer, her smile grew small and cruel. Triumphant. “The witches are vicious. If they learn you possess the ring, their wrath on your remaining family will be . . . unpleasant.”

Face purpling, he took a step toward her. “I do not appreciate your implication.”

“Then appreciate my threat, *monsieur*. Do not cross me, or it will be the last thing you ever do.”

Smothering a snort, I glanced again at Coco, who now shook with silent laughter. Babette glared at us. Magical rings aside, this conversation might’ve been worth forty *couronnes*. Even the theater paled in comparison to these melodramatics.

“Now, tell me,” Madame Labelle purred, “do you have another buyer?”

“*Putain*.” He glared at her for several long seconds before grudgingly shaking his head. “No, I do not have another buyer. I’ve spent *months*

renouncing all ties with my former contacts—purging all inventory—yet this ring . . .” He swallowed hard, and the heat in his expression flickered out. “I fear to speak of it to anyone, lest the demons discover I have it.”

“You were unwise to tout any of their items.”

Tremblay didn’t answer. His eyes remained distant, haunted, as if he were seeing something we couldn’t. My throat constricted inexplicably. Oblivious to his torment, Madame Labelle continued ruthlessly. “If you hadn’t, perhaps dear Filippa would still be with us—”

His head snapped up at his daughter’s name, and his eyes—no longer haunted—glinted with fierce purpose. “I will see the demons burn for what they did to her.”

“How foolish of you.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I make it my business to know the business of my enemies, *monsieur*.” She rose gracefully to her feet, and he stumbled back a half step. “As they are now also your enemies, I must offer a piece of advice: ’tis dangerous to meddle in the affairs of witches. Forget your vengeance. Forget everything you’ve learned about this world of shadows and magic. You are wildly outmatched and woefully inadequate in the face of these women. Death is the kindest of their torments—a gift bestowed only to those who have earned it. One would think you’d have learned that with dear Filippa.”

His mouth twisted, and he straightened to his full height, spluttering angrily. Madame Labelle still loomed over him by several inches. “Y-You cross the line.”

Madame Labelle didn’t shrink away from him. Instead, she ran a hand down the bodice of her gown, utterly unfazed, and withdrew a fan from the folds of her skirt. A knife peeked out from its spine.

“I see the pleasantries are over. Right, then. Let us get down to business.” Spreading the device in a single flourish, she fanned it between them. Tremblay eyed the knife point warily and conceded a step. “If you wish me to relieve you of the ring, I will do so here and now—for five thousand gold *couronnes* less than your asking price.”

An odd choking noise escaped his throat. “You’re mad—”

“If not,” she continued, voice hardening, “you will leave this place with a noose around your daughter’s neck. Her name is Célie, yes? La Dame des Sorcières will delight in draining her youth, in drinking the glow from her skin, the gleam from her hair. She will be unrecognizable by the time the

Commented [k12]: Query 4

witches finish with her. Empty. Broken. Just like Filippa.”

“You—you—” Tremblay’s eyes bulged, and a vein appeared on his shiny forehead. “*Fille de pute!* You cannot do this to me. You *cannot*—”

“Come now, *monsieur*, I do not have all day. The prince has returned from Amandine, and I do not want to miss the festivities.”

His chin jutted obstinately. “I—I do not have it with me.”

Damn it. Disappointment crashed through me, bitter and sharp. Coco muttered a curse.

“I do not believe you.” Striding to the window across the room, Madame Labelle peered down. “Ah, Monsieur Tremblay, how could a gentleman such as yourself leave your daughter to wait outside a brothel? Such easy prey.”

Sweating profusely now, Tremblay hastened to turn out his pockets. “I swear I don’t have it! Look, look!” I pressed my face closer as he shoved the contents of his pockets toward her: an embroidered hand cloth, a silver pocket watch, and a fistful of copper *couronnes*. But no ring. “Please, leave my daughter alone! She is not involved in this!”

He made such a pitiful sight that I might’ve felt sorry for him—if he hadn’t just dashed all my plans. As it were, however, the sight of his trembling limbs and ashen face filled me with vindictive pleasure.

Madame Labelle seemed to share my sentiment. She sighed theatrically, dropping her hand from the window, and—curiously—turned to look directly at the portrait I stood behind. Tumbling backward, I landed squarely on my ass and bit back a curse.

“What is it?” Coco whispered, crouching beside me. Babette released the button with a frown.

“Shhhh!” I waved my hands wildly, motioning toward the parlor. *I think*—I mouthed the words, not daring to speak—*she saw me.*

Coco’s eyes flew open in alarm.

We all froze as her voice drifted closer, muted but audible through the thin wall. “Pray tell me, *monsieur* . . . where is it, then?”

Holy hell. Coco and I locked eyes incredulously. Though I didn’t dare return to the portrait, I pressed closer to the wall, breath hot and uncomfortable against my own face. *Answer her*, I pleaded silently. *Tell us.*

Miraculously, Tremblay obliged, his vehement reply more dulcet than the sweetest of music. “It’s locked away in my townhouse, you *salope ignorante*—”

“That will do, Monsieur Tremblay.” As their parlor door clicked open, I

Commented [k13]: Query 6

Commented [k14]: Query 6

could almost see her smile. It matched my own. “I hope for your daughter’s sake you aren’t lying. I will arrive at your townhouse at dawn with your coin. Do not keep me waiting.”

The Chasseur

Lou

“I’m listening.”

Sitting in the crowded patisserie, Bas lifted a spoonful of *chocolat chaud* to his lips, careful not to spill a drop on his lace cravat. I resisted the urge to flick a bit of mine at him. For what we had planned, we needed him in a good mood.

No one could swindle an aristocrat like Bas could.

“It’s like this,” I said, pointing my spoon at him, “you can pocket everything else in Tremblay’s vault as payment, but the ring is ours.”

He leaned forward, dark eyes settling on my lips. When I irritably brushed the *chocolat* from my mustache, he grinned. “Ah, yes. A magic ring. I have to admit I’m surprised you’re interested in such an object. I thought you’d renounced all magic?”

“The ring is different.”

His eyes found my lips once more. “Of course it is.”

“Bas.” I snapped my fingers in front of his face pointedly. “Focus, please. This is important.”

Once, upon arriving in Cesarine, I’d thought Bas quite handsome. Handsome enough to court. Certainly handsome enough to kiss. From across the cramped table, I eyed the dark line of his jaw. There was still a small scar there—just below his ear, hiding in the shadow of his facial hair—where I’d bitten him during one of our more passionate nights.

I sighed ruefully at the memory. He had the most beautiful amber skin. And such a tight little ass.

He chuckled as if reading my mind. “All right, Louey, I shall attempt to marshal my thoughts—as long as you do the same.” Stirring his *chocolat*, he sat back with a smirk. “So . . . you wish to rob an aristocrat, and you have, of

course, come to the master for guidance.”

I scoffed but bit my tongue. As the third cousin twice removed of a baron, Bas held the peculiar position of being part of the aristocracy, while also *not* being part of it. His relative’s wealth allowed him to dress in the finest fashions and attend the fanciest parties, yet the aristocrats couldn’t bother to remember his name. A useful slight, as he often attended said parties to relieve them of their valuables.

“A wise decision,” he continued, “as twits such as Tremblay utilize layers upon layers of security: gates and locks and guards and dogs, just to name a few. Probably more after what happened to his daughter. The witches stole her during the dead of night, didn’t they? He’ll have increased his protections.”

Filippa was becoming a real pain in my ass.

Scowling, I glanced toward the patisserie’s window. All manner of pastries perched there on glorious display: iced cakes and sugar loaves and *chocolat* tartlets, as well as macarons and fruit danishes of every color. Raspberry eclairs and an apple *tarte tatin* completed the display.

Out of all this decadence, however, the enormous sticky buns—with their cinnamon and sweet cream—made my mouth truly water.

As if on cue, Coco threw herself into the empty seat beside us. She thrust a plate of sticky buns toward me. “Here.”

I could’ve kissed her. “You’re a goddess. You know that, right?”

“Obviously. Just don’t expect me to hold your hair back when you’re puking later—oh, and you owe me a silver *couronne*.”

“Like hell. That’s my money too—”

“Yes, but you can weasel a sticky bun out of Pan anytime. The *couronne* is a service fee.”

I glanced over my shoulder at the short, plump man behind the counter: Johannes Pan, pastry extraordinaire and halfwit. More important, however, he was the close personal friend and confidant of Mademoiselle Lucida Bretton.

I was Mademoiselle Lucida Bretton. With a blond wig.

Sometimes I didn’t want to wear the suit—and I’d quickly discovered Pan had a soft spot for the gentler sex. Most days I only had to bat my lashes. Others I had to get slightly more ... creative. I shot Bas a covert look. Little did he know, he’d committed all sorts of heinous shameless acts to poor Mademoiselle Bretton over the past two years.

Pan couldn’t handle a woman’s tears.

Commented [k15]: Query 4

Commented [k16]: Query 9

Commented [k17]: Query 8

"I'm dressed as a man today." I tucked into the first bun, shoving half of it into my mouth without decorum. "'esides, 'e prffers"—"I swallowed hard, eyes watering—"—blondes."

Commented [k18]: See query 10

Heat radiated from Bas's dark gaze as he watched me. "Then the gentleman has poor taste."

"*Ick*." Coco gagged, rolling her eyes. "Give it a rest, will you? Pining doesn't suit you."

"That *suit* doesn't suit you—"

Leaving them to bicker, I returned my attention to the buns. Though Coco had procured enough to feed five people, I accepted the challenge. Three buns in, however, the two had turned even my appetite. I pushed my plate away roughly.

"We don't have the luxury of time, Bas," I interrupted, just as Coco looked likely to leap across the table at him. "The ring will be gone by morning, so it has to be tonight. Will you help us or not?"

He frowned at my tone. "Personally, I don't see what all the fuss is about. You don't need an invisibility ring for safety. You know I can protect you."

"*Pfft*." Empty promises. Perhaps that was why I'd stopped loving him.

Commented [k19]: Query 7

Bas was many things—charming, cunning, ruthless—but he wasn't a protector. No, he was far too worried about more important things, like saving his own skin at the first sign of trouble. I didn't hold it against him. He was a man, after all, and his kissing had more than made up for it.

Coco glared at him. "As we've told you—*several* times—it grants the user more than invisibility."

"Ah, *mon amie*, I must confess I wasn't listening."

When he grinned, blowing her a kiss across the table, her hands curled into fists. "*Bordel!* I swear, one of these days I'm going to—"

I intervened before she could slash open a vein. "It renders the user immune to enchantment. Sort of like the Chasseurs' Balisardas." My gaze flicked to Bas. "Surely you understand how useful that might prove to me."

His grin vanished. Slowly, he reached up to touch my cravat, fingers tracing where it hid my scar. Chills erupted down my spine. "But she hasn't found you. You're still safe."

"For now."

He stared at me for a long moment, hand still raised to my throat. Finally, he sighed. "And you're willing to do whatever it takes to procure this ring?"

"Yes."

“Even . . . magic?”

I swallowed hard, threading my fingers through his, and nodded. He dropped our clasped hands to the table. “Very well, then. I shall help you.” He glanced out the window, and I followed his gaze. More and more people had gathered for the prince’s parade. Though most laughed and chatted with palpable excitement, unease festered just beneath the surface—in the tightness of their mouths and the sharp, quick movements of their eyes. “Tonight,” he continued, “the king has scheduled a ball to welcome his son home from Amandine. The entire aristocracy has been invited—including Monsieur Tremblay.”

“Convenient,” Coco murmured.

We all tensed simultaneously at a commotion up the street, eyes locking on the men who emerged through the crowd. Clad in coats of royal blue, they marched in rows of three—each *thump, thump, thump* of their boots perfectly synchronized—with silver daggers held over their hearts. Constables flanked them on either side, shouting and marshaling pedestrians to sidewalks.

Chasseurs.

Sworn to the Church as huntsmen, Chasseurs protected the kingdom of Belterra from the occult—namely, the Dames Blanches, or the deadly witches who haunted Belterra’s small-minded prejudices. Muted anger pounded through my veins as I watched the Chasseurs march closer. As if *we* were the interlopers. As if this land hadn’t once belonged to ~~us~~ *us*.

Not your fight. Lifting my chin, I mentally shook myself. The ancient feud between the Church and witches didn’t affect me anymore—not since I’d left the world of witchcraft behind.

“You shouldn’t be out here, Lou.” Coco’s eyes followed the Chasseurs as they lined the street, preventing anyone from approaching the royal family. The parade would soon start. “We should reconvene in the theater. A crowd this size is dangerous. It’s bound to attract trouble.”

“I’m disguised.” Struggling to speak around the sticky bun in my mouth, I swallowed thickly. “No one will recognize me.”

“Andre and Grue did.”

“Only because of my voice—”

“I won’t be reconvening anywhere until after the parade.” Dropping my hand, Bas stood and patted his waistcoat with a salacious grin. “A crowd this size is a glorious cesspool of money, and I plan on drowning in it. If you’ll excuse me.”

Commented [k20]: Query 11

Commented [k21]: Query 3

Commented [k22]: Query 12

He tipped his hat and wove through the patisserie tables away from us. Coco leapt to her feet. “That bastard will renege as soon as he’s out of sight. Probably turn us in to the constabulary—or worse, the Chasseurs. I don’t know why you trust him.”

It remained a point of contention in our friendship that I’d revealed my true identity to Bas. My true name. Never mind that it’d happened after a night of too much whiskey and kissing. Shredding the last bun in an effort to avoid Coco’s gaze, I tried not to regret my decision.

Regret changed nothing. I had no choice but to trust him now. We were linked irrevocably.

She sighed in resignation. “I’ll follow him. You get out of here. Meet us at the theater in an hour?”

“It’s a date.”

I left the patisserie only minutes after Coco and Bas. Though dozens of girls huddled outside in near hysterics at the prospect of seeing the prince, it was a man who blocked the doorway.

Truly enormous, he towered over me by head and shoulders, his broad back and powerful arms straining against the brown wool of his coat. He too faced the street, but it didn’t look as if he was watching the parade. He held his shoulders stiffly, feet planted as if preparing for a fight.

I cleared my throat and poked the man in the back. He didn’t move. I poked him again. He shifted slightly, but still not enough for me to squeeze through.

Right. Rolling my eyes, I threw my shoulder into his side and attempted to wedge myself between his girth and the doorjamb. It seemed he felt *that* contact, because he finally turned—and clubbed me square in the nose with his elbow.

“Shit!” Clutching my nose, I stumbled back and landed on my backside for the second time that morning. Treacherous tears sprang to my eyes. “What the hell is *wrong* with you?”

He extended a swift hand. “My apologies, *monsieur*. I didn’t see you.”

“Clearly.” I ignored his hand and hauled myself to my feet. Brushing off my pants, I made to shove past him, but he once again blocked my path. His shabby coat flapped open at the movement, revealing a bandolier strapped across his chest. Knives of every shape and size glinted down at me, but it was the knife sheathed against his heart that made my own drop like a stone.

Gleaming and silver, it was adorned with a large sapphire that glittered ominously on its hilt.

Chasseur.

I ducked my head. Shit.

Inhaling deeply, I forced myself to remain calm. He presented no danger to me in my current disguise. I'd done nothing wrong. I smelled of cinnamon, not magic. Besides—didn't all men share some sort of unspoken camaraderie? A mutual understanding of their own collective importance?

"Are you injured, *monsieur*?"

Right. Today, I was a *man*. I could do this.

I forced myself to look up.

Beyond his obscene height, the first things I noticed were the brass buttons on his coat—they matched the copper and gold of his hair, which shone in the sun like a beacon. Combined with his straight nose and full mouth, it made him unexpectedly handsome for a Chasseur. *Irritatingly* handsome. I couldn't help but stare. Thick lashes framed eyes the precise color of the sea.

Eyes that currently regarded me with unabashed shock.

Shit. My hand shot to my mustache, which dangled off my face from the fall.

Well, it'd been a valiant effort. And while men might be proud, women knew when to get the hell out of a bad situation.

"I'm fine." I ducked my head quickly and tried to move past him, eager now to put as much distance as possible between us. Though I'd still done nothing wrong, there was no sense in poking fate. Sometimes she poked back. "Just watch where you're going next time."

He didn't move. "You're a woman."

"Well spotted." Again, I tried to shove past him—this time with a bit more force than necessary—but he caught my elbow.

"Why are you dressed like a man?"

"Have you ever worn a corset?" I spun around to face him, reattaching my mustache with as much dignity as I could muster. "I doubt you'd ask such a question if you had. Trousers are infinitely more freeing."

He stared at me as if I'd sprouted an arm from my forehead. I glared back at him, and he shook his head slightly as if to clear it. "I—my apologies, *mademoiselle*."

People were watching us now. I tugged fruitlessly at my arm, the

Commented [k23]: Query 3

beginnings of panic fluttering in my stomach. “Let me *go*—”

His grip only tightened. “Have I offended you somehow?”

Losing my patience completely, I jerked away from him with all my might. “You broke my ass bone!”

Perhaps it was my vulgarity that shocked him, but he released me like I’d bitten him, eyeing me with a distaste bordering on revulsion. “I’ve never heard a lady speak so in my entire life.”

Ah. Chasseurs were holy men. He probably thought me the devil.

He wouldn’t have been wrong.

I offered him a catlike smile as I inched away, batting my lashes in my best impression of Babette. When he made no move to stop me, the tension in my chest eased. “You’re hanging out with the wrong ladies, Chass.”

“Are you a courtesan, then?”

I would’ve bristled had I not known several perfectly respectable courtesans—Babette not necessarily among them. Damn extortionist. Instead, I sighed dramatically. “Alas, no, and hearts all over Cesarine are breaking for it.”

His jaw tightened. “What’s your name?”

A wave of raucous cheers spared me from answering. The royal family had finally rounded the corner to our street. The Chasseur turned for only a second, but it was all I needed. Slipping behind a group of particularly enthusiastic young girls—they shrieked the prince’s name at a pitch only dogs should’ve heard—I disappeared before he turned back around.

Elbows jostled me from all sides, however, and I soon realized I was simply too small—too short, too slight—to fight my way through the crowd. At least without poking someone with my knife. Returning a few elbows with my own, I searched for higher ground to wait out the procession. Somewhere out of sight.

~~There.~~ **There.**

With a jump, I caught the windowsill of an old sandstone building, shimmied my way up the drainpipe, and pulled myself onto the roof. Settling my elbows on the balustrade, I surveyed the street below. Golden flags with the royal family’s crest fluttered from each doorway, and vendors hawked food at every corner. Despite the mouthwatering smells of their *frites*, ~~and~~ sausages, and cheese croissants, the city still reeked of fish. Fish and smoke. I wrinkled my nose. One of the pleasures of living on a dreary gray peninsula.

Cesarine embodied gray. Dingy gray houses sat stacked atop one another

Commented [k24]: Query 12

like sardines in a tin, and crumbling streets wound past dirty gray markets and even dirtier gray harbors. An ever-present cloud of chimney smoke encompassed everything.

It was suffocating, the gray. Lifeless. Dull.

Still, there were worse things in life than dull. And there were worse kinds of smoke than ~~chimney~~chimneys.

The cheers reached a climax as the Lyon family passed beneath my building.

King Auguste waved from his gilt carriage, golden curls blowing in the late-autumn wind. His son, Beauregard, sat beside him. The two couldn't have looked more different. Where the former was light of eyes and complexion, the latter's hooded eyes, tawny skin, and black hair favored his mother. But their smiles—both were nearly identical in charm.

~~Too-Too~~ charming, in my opinion. Arrogance exuded from their very pores.

Auguste's wife scowled behind them. I didn't blame her. I would've scowled too if my husband had more lovers than fingers and toes—not that I ever planned to have a husband. I'd be damned before chaining myself to anyone in marriage.

I'd just turned away, already bored, when something shifted in the street below. It was a subtle thing, almost as if the wind had changed direction mid-course. A nearly imperceptible hum reverberated from the cobblestones, and every sound of the crowd—every smell, ~~and~~ taste, and touch—faded into the ether. The world stilled. I scrambled backward, away from the roof's edge, as the hair on my neck stood up. I knew what came next. I recognized the faint brush of energy against my skin, the familiar thrumming in my ears.

Magic.

Then came the screams.

Commented [k25]: Query 13

Commented [k26]: Query 3