

SUB ROSA
THE LOST FORMULA
A NOVEL

PATRICK SEAN BARRY

Sub Rosa
The Lost Formula

ALSO BY PATRICK SEAN BARRY

Sub Rosa – Sanctuary's End

Sub Rosa

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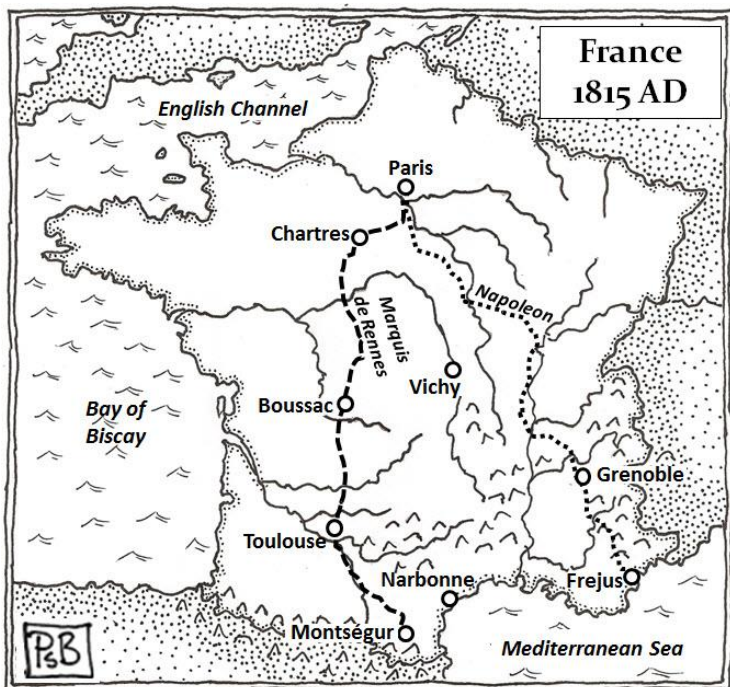
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*For Brigitte, Caitlin and Brian—
Who make it all worth it.*

*And in memory of my uncle,
Monsignor William J. Barry—
One of the Good Ones.*



*“There are two levers
for moving men –
interest and fear.”*

Napoleon Bonaparte
Emperor of France

*“Through her extreme sensibility and the mobility
of her own bodily fluids, the woman is to a certain extent
in a favorable position to cross to the higher level...
She stands, therefore, on the right-hand side of the arcana.”*

Armand Barbault
Alchemist



The Sky Over Central France 1 March, 1815 AD – Midday

Not far from Vichy, in the Auvergne region, she had just crossed high above the last river, the Allier. The afternoon light drew long shadows across the fields below. Radiant mustard plants cultivated to create brilliant lemon-hued patches on the gently rolling landscape were turning amber as the day's colors grew more somber and muted. She scanned from side to side as she flew on, following the inner compass that had been so reliable for her kind for eons.

Her wings felt the fatigue of the long passage. Her rests along the way on the occasional tree limb had always been brief, something inside always pressing her on, to complete her journey. Two days before, at the beginning of her flight, she had barely avoided a falcon's talons, but one of her

companions was not so fortunate. That peril long forgotten, the relentless ancient instinct pushed her further on.

The landscape became more familiar to the ingrained patterns in her primitive brain. Her internal compass told her the flight was almost at an end. Drawn to a hillcrest ahead, one which overlooked the countryside, an edifice resembling a small barn stood atop the hill, but including a feature which set it apart from other structures in the vicinity. Off to the side of the barn, a tall wooden tower stood three stories in height. The top two stories hosted numerous small rounded openings with short wooden platforms. She headed for one on the top level, and finally landed. Upon entering the small portal, she brushed across a thin copper bar mechanism which tripped a bell that jingled in the belfry of the tower.

Down below, in the mottled darkening shadows of the ground floor, amid a symphony of persistent avian cooing, Maryse Bertrand had been tending to feed the carrier pigeons in their wooden cages when the bell rang high above her. As usual, the thirteen-year-old hiked up her long cotton patterned dress to facilitate easier movement, and she lithely climbed the extremely wide wooden ladder-like structure up to where the light gray carrier pigeon had just come to roost. Maryse smiled with affection and care as she reached out to take the bird gently, cradling her protectively, and then climbed back down the ladder with deft athletic familiarity. When she reached the bottom, she smiled at the bird.

“Oh, my little one, have you had a long trip?” Maryse inquired lovingly, almost as though she expected an answer. As she petted the pigeon lightly, Maryse spied the petite leather case tied securely to the pigeon’s right leg. The girl dutifully carried both the pigeon and her precious cargo from the roost tower and over to the farmhouse nearby. She knew she was not to open these message packets, or even to untie them from the bird, without her father’s direction or permission.

Inside, Maryse’s father, Yves Bertrand, was busy writing a precise and microscopic message on a small and very thin piece of special paper, copying it from an original. Once complete, he then tightly rolled the communiqué and inserted it into a tiny leather case much like the one which had just arrived on the leg of the carrier pigeon. He glanced up to see his daughter, not yet noticing the pigeon cradled in her hands. He picked up the leather case, along with three more like it, and handed them to Maryse.

“These must go to the Mayor of Poitiers. It’s important, so we’ll send four, hoping at least one gets through. Prepare the birds and call me when they’re ready. I’ll check them before release,” he directed her with a sense of distracted purpose. It was only then, based on her hesitation, that he saw Maryse had a pigeon with a message. Yves gestured for her to hand it over to him.

Yves Bertrand studied the knot tying the small tube-shaped leather case onto the pigeon’s leg. “This is urgent,” he observed. Yves glanced briefly at his daughter with concerned distraction, then motioned her away slightly with his index finger.

Maryse knew this signal meant her father needed to be

alone with whatever information this sachet contained. She took the four missives her father had prepared and returned to the roost to discharge her duties as directed.

Yves Bertrand petted the carrier pigeon with professional respect, and then carefully untied the minute leather case. Before opening it, he studied all the details of the exterior to assure he did not miss any part of what was being communicated. From the inside, he extracted a small thin piece of scrolled paper which he unrolled onto the table, and then read the brief message. In disbelief, he needed to read it again, and again.

“*Mon dieu!* It cannot be!” he muttered in private astonishment.

Yves Bertrand quickly went into action. He took ten small prepared slips of thin parchment paper and painstakingly copied the message over and over. He knew this one message might be the whole reason he was here, and that his family had chosen this avocation. This was destiny and history in the works, and he was part of it. He copied the message in a tight, crisp script, and he intended to have these on their way to Paris within the hour. Hopefully, they would reach the destination before the end of the day tomorrow.

Time was truly of the essence.



**Hotel la Comtesse de Narbonne
16th Arrondissement, Paris, France
2 March, 1815 AD – The Dinner Hour**

From the balcony of this stately and well-appointed city manor, a small coterie of elegantly dressed socialites had gathered around two men: all were excited with the demonstration about to transpire. Despite the candle lighting, the entire group stood fundamentally in the shadows, which brought an added sense of mystery and exclusivity to their activities.

As one dandy onlooker, dressed in opulent green velvet vestments, flirted with one of the elite society maidens in attendance, most remained focused in anticipation of the promised entertainment.

One man held a large round object—something like a misshapen ball. He stood poised by the edge of the railing where a panoramic view of the city lights sprawled out below them. The second man took a long candle from its stand and brought its flame closer to the object and handed it to the first man. The luminance of the flame revealed the focus of everyone’s attention: a miniature replica of an ornately crafted and working scale model of a hot air balloon. Complete with intricate colorful painted decorations festooning two sides of the silk balloon itself, its bulbous shape was supported by a framework of thin wire ribbing.

“Ah, the moment of truth! I predict the entire contraption shall burst into flames before us!” the dandy quipped, hoping to impress the young beauty next to him.

“Silence! Let the Marquis de Rennes concentrate!” commanded the hostess of the event—La Comtesse de Narbonne—revealing a trace of impatience with the impertinence of the loud-mouthed scoffer in her otherwise exclusive *soirée*.

The marquis, meanwhile cautiously delivered the candle’s flame to a wick in a receptacle located in what would traditionally be the passenger basket on a full-scale balloon. Made of the thinnest gauge brass wire, the receptacle had been crafted to work as a small lamp-torch; and a substance housed in a small cup, soaked with flammable oil, immediately lit.

The small crowd held their breath for what would happen next. Roger Rosier, the assistant to the marquis—a charming and handsome man in his own right—took back the candle as the marquis allowed the bottom of the

balloon's basket to rest on the palm of his hand, his fingers lightly holding the base. Illuminated from within by the flame and now clearly buoyant in the air, the small pear-shaped balloon remained tethered by the marquis's fingers.

"The miracle of flight is now in all of Mankind's grasp, my friends."

The marquis opened his fingers, releasing the brass basket below the balloon. The miniature craft immediately rose, caught by a light buffeting of wind, and began to drift out over the city. The balloon itself, illuminated by the flame radiating up into its heart, brought the colorful hand-painted decorations to life: a man and a woman in elegant dress, holding hands in a representation of love. It had a magical effect on the party there on the balcony as the balloon moved out over the expansive cityscape below them. The entire clique applauded loudly, offering 'bravos' and congratulations. One woman flirted with the marquis.

"I would very much enjoy going up in one of those, monsieur le Marquis. I am told you are quite an experienced pilot of these fantastic inventions."

"Indeed, mademoiselle, I own two. And if you were ever to visit my château in the south, it would be my honor to host you for a journey which I dare say would be the defining moment of your life."

"I would love to ride with you, *mon beau* marquis, and I would hope I could provide some definition for your life as well!" the young maiden replied, her double-entendre blatant and fully intended to hint and entertain the group. All laughed, as some drank champagne; others simply gazed at the balloon as it drifted further off into the distance.

In time, it floated to a point out above the city where it

became difficult to see clearly. With the novelty and excitement of the moment having passed, the group gradually migrated back to the heart of the festivities inside the manor house, to the salon.

The Marquis de Rennes stepped through the doorway leading inside, and the ambient light made his features easier to discern, as was the case with all partygoers entering from the balcony. Dressed in an elegant plum-colored velvet waistcoat, frilled white shirt, violet silk leggings with white stockings, one feature in particular gave the clean-shaven and strikingly handsome man a special and distinctive look. In contrast to his long flowing dark brown hair gathered in the back, his right eyebrow had the appearance of being predominantly bleached white.

As he and his valet Roger entered, the hostess, la Comtesse de Narbonne, dressed in a sumptuous emerald-green silken gown, made sure they were offered a fresh glass of champagne, which both men readily accepted with charm and poise.

At this moment in history, the salons of Europe were where the heartbeat of culture pulsed, and the salons of Paris were not only the nerve center of France, but in fact the most influential on the continent. All of the latest news of the world and local gossip emanated from here. All artistic tastes, the trends and fashions, were defined here. And, as well, all the political opinions and cultural attitudes were forged in the cauldron of the passionate debates and brilliant conversation found here. Both before and after the Revolution, the salon of the Comtesse de Narbonne, in her grand city mansion overlooking the Seine River and the Île de la Cité, held the vaunted status of being one of the

undisputed elite centers of Paris society.

Tonight the Comtesse's festivities celebrated the debut of her new, sumptuously appointed grand drawing room, designed and furnished with what had been, until ten months before, the newest rage of Paris society: the neo-Egyptian style inspired by Napoleon's military campaign into the mysterious and exotic lands of the pyramids, which had taken place over a decade before.

Undaunted by the overbearing and *de rigueur* environment of the new political correctness, where the head of the re-installed Bourbon dynasty wore the king's crown of France, her newly debuted drawing room—complete with all the finest details of Egyptian-inspired décor—expressed an unambiguous homage to France's recently departed emperor.

Selected Egyptian antiques, as well as newly crafted furniture, statuary, and beautifully commissioned wall and ceiling murals, created an ambiance which was certainly not ancient Egypt, but something else redolent, unique and elegant. It boasted an idealized hybrid of styles which took the best of late Baroque craftsmanship, blended with the neoclassic influence, guided by the evocative stylistic lines of ancient Egypt, resulting in a subtle quasi-mystical and stylish environment which provided hidden details of refinement, accomplishment and charismatic mystique at each juncture and niche in the room.

Special attention was also given to the large balcony off the salon where the balloon demonstration took place. Here two small white marble Egyptian obelisks—especially custom-made in the finest Carrara marble—framed the view of the Île de la Cité, where history cites the birthplace of

Paris. There as well, esoteric tradition teaches that on this small island in the Seine River, over a millennium before Notre Dame was built, a temple to Isis herself stood in ancient Roman times. And this temple, ancient tradition reveals gave the city its name, taken from the age-old Pharos lighthouse of Alexandria, and the dominant worship of Isis in this city—hence Pharos-Isis became shortened to Paris.

Even Napoleon revised the seal of Paris, adding the star of Sirius, symbolizing Isis, hanging over the prow of the boat in the crest which represented the ship-shaped Île de la Cité. The insertion of the star caused great displeasure among the Christians and royalists. Yet this version of the Paris crest remained proudly displayed and prominently emblazoned on the wall of the balcony near the ‘Cleopatra obelisks,’ as the Comtesse had affectionately dubbed them.

Beyond the spacious main salon chamber—where the latest Vivaldi string quartet composition was being performed in front of a large well-heeled gathering—a grand two-storied octagonal private library housed hundreds of rare volumes on dark hardwood shelves, along with all the classics. The truly rare tomes were only accessible along the bronze and iron-railed second floor balcony which overlooked the heart of the main floor of la Comte de Narbonne’s library.

A number of paintings hung not only on the two-story high walls, but also on various easels—the theme of tonight’s library art exhibition: the great Dutch masters. Pieter de Hooch, Adrian van de Velde, Van Dyke, and of course the prerequisites for any comprehensive Dutch master collection—Rubens, Vermeer and Rembrandt—were on display. Landscapes, portraits, still life pieces, and more,

delivered a feast for cultured and appreciative eyes.

The jovial and corpulent Comte de Narbonne, an avid and wealthy collector, had much to be proud of with his impressive collections of paintings and many more *objets d'art*. He was also especially proud of his finely crafted esoteric and mysterious works by Nicolas Poussin, as well as two new politically powerful paintings from the Spaniard Goya, which sparked lively discussion and debate in his circle.

This exclusive realm of well-dressed gentlemen of high station, a selection of nobly born and men of distinguished accomplishment, smoked ornate carved ivory pipes loaded with the latest blend of imported tobacco from the young nation of America. Expert opinions, and a fair share of priggish bloviating, bandied back and forth amid sometimes self-satisfied pooh-bahs who had distinct opinions about the merit of the paintings and various bronze and marble statues, some antiques, and other *objets d'art*, which adorned this impressive library.

The splash of colors of the gentlemen's satin and high-collared silken waistcoats, red, bright blue, emerald green, violet, with intricate golden embroidery and more, created a rich rash of hues in movement. Combined with the host of over sixty paintings, the riot of vibrant color and design made it difficult for the unaccustomed eye to focus on any one piece in particular.

The 'Egyptian Room,' as it was immediately titled by one of the early elite arrivals, however, was the center of activity. Here both the gentlemen and the women mingled and flirted, and this locale hosted the most impactful activities of the evening. A demonstration of the latest technology—the

steam engine—had been shown to the gathering in a miniature representation, foreshadowing the arrival of the nascent Industrial Age. Included, as well, a presentation of new scientific phenomena—the exotic and mysterious magnetism and static electricity.

Now, as the music played, a card game of chance, with a life's fortune at stake, was being decided in one corner. At other tables, however, the whims of cultural influence and political authority of the land swayed in the balance of the evening while fresh Normandy coast oysters—packed in Alpine ice—and the finest champagne were consumed with ravenous gusto.

Other exotic cuisines originating from the southern shores of the Mediterranean enhanced the Egyptian theme, as the eclectic mix of luminous guests sparked lively and intelligent discussion in the broadest range of topics.

To the untrained eye, nothing might necessarily distinguish one set of circumstances from another; however, from two closely situated tables in the corner, opposite the card game, the fate of France was being politely debated. And contributors to that debate were significant and influential players in the destiny of the nation.

In the background of this powerful and stylish discourse, while seemingly innocuous to a casual observer, one particular transaction worthy of note occurred. A distinguished guest, upon his arrival and welcomed warmly by the hostess, presented the Comtesse with a neatly wrapped sheaf of papers tied with a wide vermilion silk ribbon. The Comtesse accepted the package with charming appreciation, casually covering it from further view with her pale blue silk fan. As she chatted breezily with the man who

delivered the parcel, she gestured to one of her servants. She handed the package to the attendant and whispered quietly in his ear as he nodded acknowledgment of his duties, while the Comtesse led the new guest into her husband's library.

The servant, meanwhile, traversed the crowded salon to another guest who had observed the entire exchange with veiled interest. Seeing that the Comtesse had led the guest into the library and was hence out of direct line of sight, the servant then passed the package over to the well-dressed nobleman, the Marquis de Rennes. Taking the package with a thankful nod, he then turned to his valet, Roger. He spoke quietly to the valet as he passed the package and then watched as his valued assistant exited the party straightaway. Yet the marquis also noted that, before he left the *soirée*, Roger could not resist flirting and pinching the cheek of a particularly attractive maid serving for the Comtesse and the *soirée*.

After the valet finally exited, and seeming to be relieved of a burden, the guest with the white eyebrow sat by a beautiful young woman who had saved a seat for him at the table next to which, at the neighboring table, a spirited, yet polite political discussion, was taking on a new tone.

On the surface, the discussion at the adjacent table explored the topic of the Congress of Vienna, currently in session, where the allied nations who defeated Napoleon debated the future of France. Since Napoleon dismantled the Habsburg dynasty's centuries-old claim on the Holy Roman Emperor title, speculation at the table explored how

the Pope would react to the new balance of power which now tilted back in favor of European royalty.

A small cluster of voices welcomed the restoration of ‘sanity’ and described the scenario where Europe could finally return to its destiny of a unified Christian culture, rejecting the abominations of the liberal and pantheistic thought which the Revolution ushered in, and which Napoleon facilitated in some measure with his following regime. Opposing voices noted that these new values and freedoms—fought for in the Revolution, embraced by Napoleon, and fundamentally accepted by the new king, Louis XVIII, as well—were sacrosanct.

“These principles must be regarded as permanent changes and part of the newly recognized foundations of the Universal Rights of Man and the Enlightenment. France has led the way in an historic step in the progress of civilization,” one well-heeled advocate proclaimed behind the smoke of his small clay pipe.

“Humbug! All this nonsensical blather is destined for the trash heap of history,” declared the brash, handsome and fair-haired duc Henri de St. Pré, notorious for his rude, abrasive sarcasm, short temper and a member of the royalist minority in attendance at the gathering.

In response to the elite societal caliber of the scorn’s author, other guests attempted to redirect the discussion at the table to a potentially more neutral subject: the discoveries in the New World and how Baron Von Humboldt’s recent explorations brought to light an important study of the exciting and mysterious pyramids in Mexico. A prevailing view of many at the table expressed how these monumental structures most certainly provided

evidence of the ancient influence of the Universal Intelligence which also guided the storied and legendary Egyptians in their millennia-long legacy of glory and accomplishments along with their own building of the venerable pyramids.

Reflections on the recently achieved independence of Mexico from Spain also sparked observations of lost opportunities for this young culture of the New World to gain from the advantages of sage wisdom and guidance from the Old World. Adding to this point, another participant observed the missed opportunity for Mexico to enjoy the benefits of achieving liberty, equality and fraternity, and the ideals of the French Revolution, carried forward by Napoleon's vision, and now being 'supported and shepherded' in France by Louis XVIII.

In stark contrast, and in counterpoint, this discussion gave way to the duc de St. Pré's didactic report on the important developments of Hegelian philosophy currently being inculcated into and across the Prussian culture. He specifically noted the critical role of Hegelian thought being incorporated into mass education, its part in re-formalizing and rigidly stratifying class distinctions, as well as focusing the guidance of the 'ignorant masses' properly so they dutifully fulfilled the roles and responsibilities that were expected and required of them.

The duke's point emphasized that the State was inherently the presence of God in the modern world and must be obeyed without question. Rapidly gaining in recognition, acceptance and popularity in the German principality states, this philosophy carried an exhaustive organized system of thought which promoted the concept

that the ideal ruling class held positions of power without the tedious distraction of democratic elections. This new system would benefit from the authoritatively directed labors of the underclass, which were ultimately meant to benefit the world in a grand vision of proper and ordained order.

The duc de St. Pré pushed this discomfiting view further. He pontificated: “This educational model would be most suitable for France to facilitate the culture’s return to the fold of the Christian kingdoms within the Holy Alliance. Implementing this philosophy of governance in France will be an excellent first step to rehabilitate the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire which Napoleon recklessly dismantled during his rule.”

This extreme royalist perspective stood in direct opposition to the general sentiments being expressed at the table. The noble personage imposing so patronizing and didactic a line of discussion, the brilliant and privileged duc de St. Pré—a close confidant of the newly re-installed Bourbon king, Louis XVIII—was rumored to be part of the King’s closest circle of policy advisors.

Notoriously handsome, he was supported in his assertions by two well-dressed companions: a heavysset British member of minor nobility, Lord Cornelius Bluefield, and a dark, lean Russian noble of comparable social stature, Count Vasily Petrovich Kotrouzko. The Cossack noble had been in command of one of the Tzar’s cavalry battalions which marched into Paris after Napoleon’s defeat almost a year ago. Most at the table knew this, and so his presence brought with it some understandable discomfort.

These members of minor European nobility, as well as a

few other noble Frenchmen, part of the duc de St. Pré's entourage, and accompanied by their valets, represented in total a sizable party of over a dozen people. And in point of fact, the duc de St. Pré, who perpetrated these antagonistic pronouncements, had not actually been invited to the Comtesse de Narbonne's salon. Yet when he appeared at the door with his entourage, it seemed virtually impossible for the Comtesse to gracefully turn them away. Instead, she behaved as though nothing was out of place and welcomed him and his clique with charm and hospitality. The consummate hostess, she also directed her staff to assure food and beverage were offered in ample supply. Currently ordering more oysters and champagne, the duke and his cronies consumed the countess's hospitality with an entitled sense of predatory satisfaction.

Sitting at the 'main' table of the salon, the duke enjoyed ensuring the royalist point of view was expressed with overbearing confidence, in an insinuated exercise of unlimited power. Indeed, while the new king was considered a 'good man' for supporting and ratifying the essence of Napoleon's socially inspired changes, many of those who returned to royal power with him, however, did not maintain the same perspective. Far from it. The duke emphatically disclosed he aligned with the latter classification when it came to his political stance.

"With the Congress of Vienna currently in session, and all the *rightful* crown heads, or their suitable representatives in attendance, His Royal Highness expressed to me that he is confident the divine order will ultimately be restored so that *all* of the royal and noble families may rightfully execute their *righteously* anointed powers and finally return the

continent to the proper order of affairs. These Hegelian measures present an intelligent and appropriate means to an end, to forging a new Holy Roman royal alliance, where the masses finally understand their proper and subservient place in the divine scheme of things, exactly as God wills it. This obscenity of the Corsican artillery officer's rule will merely be recalled as an aberrant and bad memory. Nothing more," the duke declared officiously.

Many at the table took clear offence to the duke's imperious remarks. The majority, however, remained hesitant to confront these statements. While the Bourbon king was initially perceived to be the 'good man,' who accepted and adopted many of the social reforms implemented in the Napoleonic Code, the message the duke conveyed was that these would eventually be swept away in the King's name.

Bringing undue attention to one's opposing view, here in this setting, could later result in misfortune. Many in attendance could confirm that perception since numerous accounts in circulation described the King's ministers enacting vindictive measures, some directed as clear revenge on individuals, for which no recourse was possible. Openly challenging the duke's declarations risked putting oneself in the sights of some vindictive royalist vendetta. Yet to sit in silence, however, expressed a spirit completely counter to what everyone there was about—a free and open exchange of ideas.

One attendee at the table took it upon himself to respond with reason, as respectfully and as articulately as possible. "Excuse me, and with all respect, duc de St. Pré, but is this truly King Louis's view? Having affirmed the

‘Rights of Man’ just back in October, would this not suggest he fully supported the people’s work, the social progress, a sacred concept for which so many sacrificed their lives defending the ideals of the Revolution?” Pierre de Molay, a friend of the Comtesse, suggested politely.

The duke glanced at his two noble companions with a wry sense of vexed entitlement and venomous savor before he turned to his deferential challenger. They rolled their eyes with dismissal as they continued to consume Normandy oysters and wash them down with champagne. The duke viewed de Molay with thinly veiled disdain. “And you, sir, would have the courtesy of giving me your name?”

“Pierre de Molay,” the man replied after a pause, somewhat intimidated, but unwilling to be completely cowed by the royalist’s manner. The duke nodded to one of his attendants nearby, who pulled out a small leather secretary, opened it to retrieve a pencil, and proceeded to dutifully record the name, offering a glance at the unfortunate target of the duke’s attention. The duke gave de Molay a withering stare.

“‘*De Molay*’... Now why does that name sound so familiar, and yet so disagreeable? Monsieur de Molay, the king is a realist. In the short term, he allows the *perception* of sustained social progress, as you quaintly call it. However, once he consolidates power throughout all the provinces, and he has finally replaced all the old corrupt ministers and military leaders with those who can be completely trusted, then you shall see a true rebirth of the Bourbon line and the rightful destiny of the noble class of France. I’m telling you all of this now, so you can become part of the new divine plan which is inevitable for the entire continent. To oppose

this, of course, would risk the complete extinction of one's family."

An oppressive silence ensued. The threat was palpable. Those present did not wish to engage the duke further at the risk of seeing their name entered into this nobleman's little black book. Satisfied he now commanded the spirit the evening in the salon, the duc de St. Pré continued his casual imperious rant. He breezily pointed around at the neo-Egyptian décor of the salon with dismissive disgust.

"And the Inquisition, which as you all know has recently been reinstated by our blessed Holy Father, the Pope in Rome, would view this extravagant abomination and display of pagan paean, with very grave concern indeed. I too would share that very, *very* grave concern." The duke drank deeply from his champagne, enjoying the impact of his words, as he glanced across at his two companions with a lofty and satisfied pursing of his lips and arching of his eyebrow.

Another dreadful pause hung over the table, none in attendance seeming willing to venture an intellectual retort or challenge to the duke. Yet as this uncomfortable moment extended, boisterous laughter came from the adjoining table. Those who sat at the duke's table first assumed this merriment was part of a separate discussion concerning the next table. This perception, however, dispelled completely when the duke observed one of the guests at the second table mimicking him in an exaggerated *commedia dell'arte* theatrical styling of the duke's gesture of pursed lips and arched eyebrow. And more laughter came forth. Infuriated upon recognizing this insult, the duc de St. Pré stared coldly, with a direct lock of eyes at the man with the white eyebrow who clearly ridiculed him.

Seeing the duke's threatening gaze, the Marquis de Rennes merely stared back, blithely. He then turned to the guests at his table, mimicked the cold stare, bulged his eyes in a grotesque mockery and shook his head side-to-side in a crude clownish gesture, then finally stuck his tongue out and puffed his cheeks. And the entire table again burst out laughing. The duke's eyes widened as he blustered in indignation and signaled to his secretary to get ready to write another name.

"*Excuse* me, sir?" the duke challenged.

"I sincerely believe, sir, there is *no* excuse for you," the marquis at the adjoining table countered promptly.

"Do you *know* who I am, sir?" the duke challenged the stranger with the most implicit threat his voice could deliver.

"I know *what* you are. The critical question is, I believe, sir, do *you* know who *you* are, sir?" the marquis replied casually, taking a drink of sparkling water from a stemmed crystal glass.

With a huff of officious body language the duke delivered what he intended to be the big weapon: his title. "I, sir, am *the* duc de St. Pré, close confidant of the King, Louis XVIII, and advisor to the future of the kingdom. And you are...?"

The duke clearly intended to convey threat and dreadful consequences to the man who dared to laugh at him in such a public and critical social setting. Everyone present knew this was no place to lose face, since gossip spread like wildfire from salon to salon.

"I, sir, am... unimpressed and frankly disappointed."

"Excuse me, sir!" the duke quickly replied indignantly, trying to reinstate his sense of threat in the room. The

marquis, who graciously thanked a servant who just refilled his glass, glanced at the imperious duke with sincere patience, and spoke slowly as though he might to a child, or an imbecile.

“It would appear, sir, that I repeat myself when I state that there seems to be no excuse for you at all. Was I not clear? You arrive at a salon without invitation. Our hostess gracefully allows you entry without objection. While drinking her finest wines and eating her exquisite cuisine, you proceed to intimidate and insult her guests with impunity—here in the house of a family whose noble bloodline goes back more than six centuries. In stark contrast, *sir*, your modest line of nobility only goes back as far as your father. And he bought his title after great success in the slave trade. While your representations of proximity to the royal house might indeed intimidate some, your behavior and breeding reflect nothing more than a common thug... *sir*,” the marquis replied with calm confidence, as he then took another drink from his glass of sparkling water. He smiled at the beverage and commented, “Ah, yes, how refreshing!”

The main table tittered with guarded laughter, and as the duke’s rage built, his eyes narrowed.

“I take offense, sir! And you may not quite understand the gravity of your actions here tonight,” the duke intoned with as severe a sense of threat as possible.

“Unfortunately you are painfully easy to offend. I suspect you would take offense at someone simply sneezing in your presence.”

At which point, the man with the white eyebrow proceeded to muster a theatrical sneeze and then roll his

eyes for the benefit of those looking on who all remained rapt with attention at what might happen next. Following his sneeze, the man's smiling gaze calmly returned to the duke who was turning red, apoplectic with fury.

"Indeed, I do believe my sneeze has offended you!" the marquis observed with bemusement.

"Sir, I *demand* your name!" the duke ordered as he stood in a threatening manner.

"Is it because you are so very unhappy with your own, sir?" the marquis quipped. "Sorry, but mine is taken already."

More laughter ensued. Before the duke could respond and certainly escalate the exchange, the Comtesse de Narbonne swept into the space between the two tables, having been summoned by one of her dutiful servants. At this same moment the Vivaldi quartet completed their performance and the uneasiness at the duke's table had become all the more accentuated by the silence left following the polite applause for the musicians. With deft wit, timing and decorum, the Comtesse immediately redirected the energy of the room with the dramatic flair of a hand gesture which featured her elegant fan.

"And now, dearest friends, we arrive at one of the much anticipated features of the night's festivities! Coming direct to you after his studies in Germany with the world-renowned Dr. Anton Mesmer, pioneer in the art of hypnotism, I present to you the Marquis Jean-Marc Baptiste de Rennes. He will present to you a demonstration of the mystical art of hypnotism and explain the practical principles of human science at work in the process. And without further ado, I proudly introduce my dear old friend:

the Marquis Jean-Marc Baptiste de Rennes.”

The Comtesse proceeded to clap, and all guests in the room followed suit. The man with the white eyebrow stood, then leaned slightly over to the duke, with a charming smile, which he also shared broadly with the entire room.

“Now that you have my name, sir, I hope you may enjoy the rest of the evening without further agitation or distraction,” the marquis bantered to the duke.

This statement, of course, only irked the duke further, as he glanced over at his valet to assure he had dutifully recorded the name of the duke’s newly chosen nemesis.

As Jean-Marc now stood before the assemblage, he saw his presence also drew the men from the library, curious to see how this new diversion might enhance the evening.

“First, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the lovely Comtesse de Narbonne for inviting me to this elegant soirée. I think anyone *invited* here tonight should feel deeply honored. And if you’re here, and you were *not* invited, might I ask, ‘Have you *no* shame?’ ”

Light laughter rippled through the gathering; and some knowing guests glanced at the duke, who scowled silently.

“Tonight it is my honor to present to you a demonstration of what people currently call ‘hypnotism’, but which has been a practice of the ancients for millennia. Only recently here on the Continent has an interest in the art gained some sense of growing popularity. May I see with a show of hands, how many of you are familiar with the term ‘hypnotism?’ ”

Most of the people in attendance raised their hands.

“And how many of you have witnessed a demonstration of this *modus operandi*?”

Only a smattering of hands remained up in the air.

“Excellent! I only hope I might humbly provide some service to you all in demonstrating one set of practices related to this much talked about, yet little understood, phenomena of the human experience.”

The marquis then provided additional context to his presentation, indicating that, while Dr. Mesmer had indeed pioneered a European system of technique and application, the general practice of hypnotism had roots in ancient Egypt, India and China, where the technique was employed for very practical and useful applications. One specific example was the invaluable medical treatments which, in selected cases, had been powerfully effective. And with that, the marquis asked if anyone in the audience had been suffering from consistent pain either in their legs, or arms, which made their lives more difficult, and which had possibly persisted for an excess of six months. An embarrassed pause ensued. It seemed among this elite crowd a common hesitancy to admit to pain or any sort of vulnerability. Yet after a short pause, where the guests casually glanced from one side to another, one man who stood in the door of the library raised his hand as he walked toward the marquis.

“I have had a condition which forces me to walk with a cane; and it has been with me for more than five years, sir. Are you saying you can do something for me?” the guest challenged as he approached Jean-Marc. While stylishly dressed, and somewhere in his early sixties, he clearly depended on his ornately carved cane, with an ivory and gold handle, to make his way toward the marquis.

“I hope I can be of assistance,” Jean-Marc responded as

the man arrived. “But first, I must state, sir, that we have never met before. Would you be so kind as to confirm that?”

“If we had, I certainly have no recollection. But enjoying my fifth glass of the good Comte’s private reserve of port, what I recollect is now open to challenge!” the old man quipped, to which Jean-Marc and the guests laughed heartily.

“Good enough. And while you are in some ways feeling less pain from the port, your condition nonetheless still persists. May I ask where your malady troubles you, sir?”

The distinguished guest with the cane described an intense and persistent pain in his hip and right side, shooting through his leg, which made walking very difficult, especially in damp and cold weather.

Jean-Marc nodded, studying the man with an empathic intensity. From his velvet jacket pocket, he withdrew a golden chain with a large diamond setting at the end. The marquis instructed the guest to stare into the diamond’s luster as he gently swung the gem back and forth, and quietly guided the man with the cane into entrancement. Once achieved, Jean-Marc placed the suggestion, that once out of the hypnotic state, the man would experience no pain, that indeed he would feel ten years younger, and even be compelled to spontaneously hop a jig to demonstrate his vitality of youth and the departure of his infirmity.

Once the hypnotic spell was released, the elderly man acted as if he had not even been under the spell. Yet as he stood, he expressed surprise at the absence of pain in his hip and leg. He spontaneously hopped slightly in the air, testing his right side, and then with a sense of surprised jubilation,

danced a jig in celebration. The ecstatic crowd applauded enthusiastically—all except for one: the duke.

“It’s all a scandalous fraud! A disgusting disgrace!”

A palled silence descended as all eyes fell on the imperious duke. He stood, pointing his accusing finger at the marquis as he spoke through his teeth with venom. “This’s nothing more than a carnival sham and an insult to the intelligence!” the duke continued, as he began to advance toward Jean-Marc. “And despite claims to the contrary, I submit forcefully that a connection will ultimately be established between the subject and the perpetrator of this fraud. It is disgraceful that none of you can see this and that you accept these charlatans at face value,” the duke snarled in a shrill contemptuous pitch.

“Sir, among all the guests here tonight you display the most unfortunate set of manners. And under the circumstances, I of course use the term ‘guest’ lightly, since you attend without benefit of an invitation. And I must declare, here and now, in front of all the Comtesse’s guests, that my honor has been impugned, and I feel there can only be but one true recourse,” Jean-Marc protested with a surprisingly casual tone. Yet the declaration of ‘impugned honor’ and ‘true recourse’ had an unmistakable and resounding resonance in the room. The marquis let the pause hang, for many in the room took this to be a challenge to a duel. Yet to undercut this perception, the light smile which hung on the marquis’s face displayed an enigmatic and playful demeanor as he continued.

“If you claim I am an imposter, sir, then the only proof possible is for you yourself to submit to my hypnotic suggestion. If I am unable to deliver results, then I shall

publically apologize to you and the gathering. And to further that point, I shall put in your possession, this diamond from ancient India along with its solid gold chain. It is a duke's ransom, and which I have used for years to aid me in this procedure," Jean-Marc announced.

"I fully expect the diamond to also be a fake, sir. But if you desire this manner of satisfaction, I counter your suggestion. If you are unable to hypnotize me, then you will surrender yourself for arrest by the authorities, with charges against you as a sham, a charlatan and a troublemaker. This would presume the likelihood of your spending many months in prison for your fakery, while a complete investigation into your background and activities is performed. At which point, depending on what is revealed in this investigation, you may never leave prison until you are a very, very old man. For I am certain we shall find ugly perfidy hidden behind your pretty clothes and distracting parlor tricks. Are we agreed with the contract, then, with all these good people in witness of it? Sir, do you agree, or are you a coward, a liar and a fraud?"

Excitement murmured through the room, abuzz with the high stakes nature of the wager. Jean-Marc, however, remained unfazed. His serene smile remained on his face, seemingly exuding a sense of bemused satisfaction.

"Sir, one might observe you have biased the wager from a gentleman's bet to one more weighted to a vindictive design. A wager to stake one's very life on the line, isn't it? So to balance the scales, I suggest one additional condition of this bet. If I am able to hypnotize you, then you must agree to allow me to place the suggestion in you that you run naked through the streets of Paris, yelling 'I am the fairy

princess of the sacred goddess Isis and I pray to her undying glory daily.’ I think that would make the risk and the stakes comparatively even on both sides. You must also follow my directions during the procedure and do exactly as I say while undergoing the hypnosis, or this will all indeed be a sham, but one of your making, not mine. Are we agreed, sir?”

The room remained stone silent as all eyes now focused on the duke, who came to realize on some level that he just might have bitten off more than he could chew. If so, it was the smaller, more silent, part of his consciousness, because the dominant personality facing this social setting now craved blood. The thought of seeing this man in the king’s prison, without ever again seeing the light of day, was too much a temptation to let more reasonable thoughts intervene. Though he secretly knew a hasty, abrupt and rude departure now could still keep his social status intact, the thought of losing this wager remained inconceivable to him. Granted, to lose this bet, and be required to honor the debt, would result in public humiliation he might never live down. Also, to lose the bet and not fulfill his agreement would besmirch his vaunted honor, which would most certainly affect his standing in the king’s circle. Indeed, only a quick retreat now would assure the safest and most sensible route. He was, however, certain this charlatan had no hope of hypnotizing him.

“Agreed,” the duke declared boldly.

Jean-Marc smiled slightly. “Very well then, sir. We have a duly witnessed wager. Prepare to be hypnotized.”

The marquis then requested the duke approach him, in front of the entire salon, for all the attendees had now assembled to eagerly witness whatever might take place

next. With the duke standing before him, and his eyes directed where the marquis instructed him, Jean-Marc then held the diamond pendant and swung it slowly in front of the duke's eyes. At first the duc de St. Pré looked away, around at the gathering, and sensed on some level how deeply he had ventured into uncharted territory. Jean-Marc calmly and insistently encouraged the duke to re-direct his attention to the diamond pendant, which glittered enigmatically in the salon candlelight.

Before long, despite his iron-willed determination to resist any possibility of falling under an unintended influence, the duke became hypnotized. The duc de St. Pré's body relaxed and Jean-Marc explained to the audience that he could not place a suggestion against a subject's character or will. For example, one could not hypnotize someone to commit murder, unless the subject was already inclined toward violence. With the duc de St. Pré, Jean-Marc explained, it was critical to demonstrate the fact that the duke had indeed been hypnotized.

The marquis queried the audience for what might be a suitable suggestion. Some guests joked, while others offered serious recommendations. And finally, Jean-Marc took one suggestion, and modified it somewhat.

The original idea had been for him to have the duke run around the room bare-chested. As a result, Jean-Marc observed to the duke that it was extremely warm in the room, and he might want to remove his elegant coat to help make him more comfortable. The duke complied. Continuing with the suggestion, he told the duke it was still quite hot; and ventured it might be more comfortable for the noble to remove his shirt, mentioning as well that many

people would most certainly admire his manly bare-chested form, especially the women present, if he were willing to grace them with this elegant display of “virile magnificence.” The audience stood spellbound, expectant at what would occur next. The duke’s entourage shifted uncomfortably, already dreading the outcome.

De St. Pré smiled in a preening way as he disrobed his fine silken blouse and showed his chest, flexing for the audience, who applauded. He of course took the applause as an affirmation of his extreme manliness, and encouraged by Jean-Marc, took a flourishing bow.

The marquis then whispered something very specific in his ear, to which the duke nodded pleasantly in agreement. Stepping back, he then spoke to the duke indicating the temperature in the room was cooling down, quite quickly, and it would most likely be advisable for the duke to re-don his clothing, to which the duke complied.

Once dressed, and again standing in front of the audience, Jean-Marc explained that when he clapped his hands the duc de St. Pré would return to his normal state and have no memory of what had just transpired. Indeed, the marquis suggested, it would seem as though, from the duke’s perspective, that the duke had successfully resisted any attempt at Jean-Marc’s hypnosis. And with that, the marquis clapped his hands.

The duke reassumed his imperious manner, staring at Jean-Marc with impatience. An expectant silence gripped the room.