

## Excerpt from A TRYST IN PARIS by Anne Armistead

### Chapter Six

Animated voices speaking French awakened Mira. She flipped onto her back and stretched long, wondering if Sylvie's neighbors were having a row. When she opened her eyes, a spackled plaster ceiling greeted her instead of the canopy above her godmother's guest bed.

Mira bolted upright, digging her fingers into the red woolen blanket covering her. Her sudden movement triggered a burst of pain behind her eyes. She swallowed against a surge of nausea. Her body ached as if she'd run a marathon.

The flimsy cotton nightgown she wore did little to dispel her chilled-to-the-bone shivering. The room's small old-timey wall radiator provided little heat. The numbness of her hands caused her moonstone ring to turn loosely on her finger. Shivering, Mira tucked the woolen blanket tightly around herself. She saw only a brick wall from the window. The view provided no hint of her geographic location, but she assumed she was in Paris.

The set designer in her catalogued her surroundings. The room's furnishings reminded her somewhat of the Van Gogh painting, "The Bedroom." Lilac-painted walls. Dull-yellow-painted headboard and matching bureau. Orange wooden table holding a pitcher, basin, and vintage men's toiletries. A wooden slatted-back chair, with a lady's wide-brimmed hat adorned with plumage and gloves resting on its the seat and her cape folded over its back. In the other corner, an articulated dressing screen with butterflies flitting among vines painted on its panels. A skirt and bodice and undergarments hung from it. Boots belonging to a lady sat on the floor beside it.

The raised voices of a man and woman drew Mira's attention once more. She recognized their names tossed back and forth: Jaco, Béb . Jaco was insisting B b  not mention taking "that woman" to Susette again.

*I assume he is referring to me as "that woman" but who is Susette?*

Mira pressed her fingertips to her pounding forehead. Memory fragments began sorting into place, like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, until she accepted the unacceptable fact: Le Veille transported her to 1900 Paris to do his bidding.

*Vanish into the past which holds your future. Return only if you right the wrong destiny that has befallen him.*

*A paradox. I hate paradoxes.*

Her body trembled, not from the cold but from remembering Carolyn's unfinished text: *Mira, catch the next plane. Your mother has . . .*

That's why she had been searching for her phone. What did the rest of the text say? She closed her eyes tightly, and tears slid from them.

The voices outside the room grew louder. Her breathing became short and shallow. What did she know of these two? What if they held her prisoner for evil purposes? If Le Veille had not given her the antique coin purse with the odd message in it . . . if she had not followed the message's instructions . . . she'd be at Sylvie's, where she belonged.

She must find her way to her own time. What was the law of science she learned from suffering through high school physics?

"For every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction." Mira spoke the words aloud, a plan forming. "If the Carousel's elephant thrust me back in time, it should operate in reverse to thrust me forward, to my present day."

A sharp rap at the door silenced her. Terror shimmied through her. The small room offered no hiding place. Her eyes landed on the large silver hairbrush with a handle amongst the men's toiletries. She leapt to grab it. The chair toppled from her hasty movement. Satisfied with the brush's heft, she stood against the wall where the opened door would hide her.

"Mirabelle?" The door creaked open against where she hid. "It's Bernadette. Are you awake, *mon amie*?"

"May we come in?" The slimly built girl pushed the door open and entered the room.

Mira jumped out from behind the door, wielding the hairbrush against her.

Bernadette's scream pierced the air.

Jacques charged through the door and gripped Mira's wrist tightly.

Instinctively, she flew into a Jujitsu move her ex taught her. She rotated her wrist clockwise in his grip, so her palm pointed toward her face. She forcefully thrust her hand onto Jacques', and his hand flew from her. Her move worked like a charm, except Jacques' muscular frame blocked the door.

"She beat you, Jaco." Bernadette burst into nervous laughter. "Mirabelle, do all American women know how to fight? Or only you, a mysterious woman, who suddenly appeared in my path?"

She snapped her fingers in the air. "You were not there, and then you were. A magic trick. *Poof*. In a disoriented state, may I add. You appeared to have been pushed into the wringer."

"Gone through the wringer." Mira whispered the correction, thinking how accurate of a description.

"Mlle, you have nothing to fear from us." Jacques stepped toward her.

Mira surrendered the brush to him. Her face heated at the memory of collapsing into his arms.

He tossed the brush onto the bed, leaned against the doorframe, and crossed his arms. "Bernadette describes you correctly. You are mysterious." He slowly flicked his eyes over her.

His lascivious attention reminded her of the nightgown's transparency and of his insulting innuendos when they first met.

*Gueule de bois.*

*How dare you assume the worst of me. Why does Le Veille expect me to help such an utterly disgusting man.*

“*You* are rude, M. Thibaut.” She wrapped herself into the woolen blanket from the bed and sat stiffly on the edge of it.

Jacques dipped his head, his grin still in place.