

Chapter Four: When the Truth Hurts

Paris, March, 1899

As André's visit approached, my stomach tightened into a knot. How to explain my feelings to him worried me. We were childhood friends, therefore I thought about leaning on our friendship and asking him to release me to my happiness. Should I tell him that I would make his life miserable if forced into this marriage? Nothing felt like the right choice of words as I practiced my speech. When the day arrived for his visit, I decided that I would just pour out my heart and tell him the truth.

André arrived at my home and we sat in the parlor. My parents were both in the dining room entertaining our neighbors, the Montes, and we were alone.

"Hello darling," André said smiling. "I've missed you so. It is lonely without your smile. If you only knew the nights I spent thinking of you."

"How are your studies?" I asked.

"I have realized that attorneys are some of the most intelligent men on the planet. You shall be happy to know that I'm in the upper five percent of my classmates; therefore you may conclude that I'm one of the smartest men in all of France. You may be proud to be sure. Boast to your parents if you like."

"My parents already adore you. They are well aware of your qualities."

"Thank you for saying that, my dear. You're kind."

"André, I wish to discuss a matter of grave importance."

"Of course, my sweet, pray tell, what is it you must share?"

"I'm not in love with you."

"You're not in love with me? Why are you stating this now? What's the point you wish to make?"

"I do not wish to marry you."

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“Cherish, you’re not serious. You must be confused. You have hardly been in my presence for three years. The distance has provoked a bit of doubt. My darling, I assure you that there is not a thing to doubt. We are betrothed and it’s a good choice for us both.”

“Forgive my directness, dearest André. We are betrothed because our parents intervened in our lives, deciding for us that we should have wealth above love, passion and free will.”

“My sweet, you’re naïve and know not of what you speak. The word passion is derived from the Latin; *passio*, which means suffering and submission. Is this what you seek more than a marriage to me? Additionally, do not undervalue wealth, for love will subside, therefore security is ultimately more valuable. Free will, at your tender age, is not recommended. Maturity lends itself to wise choices, through experience. That’s why you must allow your parents to make this important decision for you.”

“André, you’re not listening to me. I do not love you.”

“I know that you love me darling. We have been close friends for most of our lives.”

“Oui, oui. However, I’m not in love with you. I do not desire you.”

“Desire comes with time, precious. I love you enough for both of us.”

“Are you in love with me?” I asked.

“Absolutely.”

“What is my favorite dessert?”

“Mmmm...Sweet pastries, I believe,” André replied.

“Non. What is my favorite activity?”

“Ah...Reading...non...walking in the park, or shopping.”

“Non. How can you be in love with me if you don’t know me, André?”

“Cherish, I’m in love with you because these things do not matter to me. You could love any dessert you wish, you may enjoy whatever activities you wish and I shall still be in love with you.”

“Why do you call me Cherish? I don’t like it.”

“It is your given name. It is a beautiful name.”

“Oh André! You frustrate me. You know that if I were to marry you I would be miserable and unhappy and make your life the same. This is not what we must do.”

“I shall work tirelessly to win your affection and cause you to be happy.”

“How shall you do that? You don’t even know what makes me happy.”

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“Won’t you share with me what makes you happy, darling?”

“Call me Cherie. That makes me happy.”

“Then I shall call you Cherie darling. What else?”

“André, there’s more that I need to tell you. I am keenly interested in another man.”

André’s face turned red as his lips pursed tightly. He took a deep breath and spoke slowly with a low, stiff voice. “Of what do you speak!? How could you know another man? Cherish, do you know the seriousness of what you speak? You’re to be my wife. There is a commitment. You belong to me!”

“I’m trying to explain to you André that I don’t belong to you. The commitment made to you was not by me. My parents made a commitment on my behalf. There is no law that states that I have no choice in this matter. My parents made a choice that affects the rest of my life, my happiness. There is nothing fair and right about this.”

“I do not believe that I’m hearing you speak this way. What has happened to create this asinine change in you?”

“I grew up.” I paused. “Before you is not the young girl wondering what love is, what marriage means and what I want. The woman who sits before you is committed to following her heart, doing what’s best for her, not just what others want.”

“You’re too young to know what you want.”

“You’re incorrect. You do not understand what matters to me most.”

“You’re being unfair. You haven’t told me what matters to you most. How can you judge if I shall understand or not?” he asked.

“Because, I know you André.”

“And you suggest that I don’t know you? Tell me what matters to you more than wealth, security, family and tradition?”

“The freedom to make my own choices and not live the same life as my mother. I desire adventure, experiencing new places, and expanding the limited horizons of my world.”

“You’re not making sense. This is a small tantrum and it shall pass. You need time to settle yourself. You may apologize when you feel better.”

“Apologize for what fault?”

“For threatening me with another man and tempting me to jealousy. It’s baffling to know your motive for this behavior. You know that I shall make you a great husband. I will provide

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well for you, be kind and keep your parents well pleased. You cannot be serious to tell me you do not want to marry a man of my stature. Another thing Cherish...it's inappropriate for you to speak to me about such things. It's not your place to threaten me. You will be forgiven if you withdraw what you have said and not speak of it again."

I sat in silence, shocked and angry. André was an old friend. I assumed he would care for my happiness above the wishes of our parents. He knew, on some level, that he wasn't really in love with me. What were his motives for the marriage if I didn't want him? I couldn't think of anything to say without screaming in frustration.

In silence, I thought of the boy I once played with, who used to make me laugh and chase me around the house for hours, the same young boy who would pull my hair just to hear me say ouch. I remembered the time when he found a frog and snuck up behind me to place the creature in the back of my blouse. Then he sat laughing as he watched me scream and cry. Perhaps I hated him forever after the scared amphibian left my clothing. When I cried to my mother she explained the nature of young boys. She promised that André would grow out of his mean behaviors and turn into a gentleman. Looking at him today, I question whether André would ever be a kind man.

André finally spoke. "I shall give you some time to consider what you've done and decide to apologize. I'm a patient man Cherie. I can wait. I am certain that we will spend our future together."

For a few moments I sat quietly. Then I said, "I wish to be alone André."

"Very well, we will meet again when you feel better. Perhaps you're simply angry with me for staying away. I shall be in Paris for two weeks. We can spend every day together and you shall be in love with me before I depart. Tomorrow I will call on you. Feel better darling. We shall have a sweeter conversation tomorrow."

André stood, leaned over and kissed my cheek, then walked to the front door without looking back at me. As I watched him, I felt a stinging pain in my heart, then a bitter resentment building. Suddenly I felt motivated to prove to all of them, my parents, André and his parents, that they couldn't control me. They will not decide my life for me. All of them were wrong to think that my life was their chess game.

Jean-Paul would make me feel better. Perhaps Auntie Martine knew what to do. How could I maintain my relationship with my parents and have what I wanted? My best strategies were not

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working for me. I went to my room and wrote a letter to Martine, explaining my urgent need to see her.

The next morning I walked to town to the courier office, asking for a rapid delivery. It could be days before Martine received the letter. Jean-Paul had decided not to meet me at the park while André was in Paris. I went to the park anyway, hoping he was there by some miracle. He wasn't anywhere to be seen.

Sitting on a bench in the park, I began to let the tears flow. With my face down, I sobbed holding my cheeks in my palms. Why had life become so complicated? My parents didn't understand me, and André didn't care what I wanted. There was the irony of liking the idea of marrying André at age eleven and being repulsed by it now. Why hadn't my parents betrothed me to Jean-Paul instead of André? My heart felt like it might burst from the pain of being alone and misunderstood. Gently a hand came down on my shoulder. I didn't want to look up through my swollen, tear-filled eyes. Embarrassment spread over me for my show of emotions in public. The hand didn't move. The shoes belonging to the person standing there were familiar. Looking up I saw Jean-Paul looking compassionately.

I stood quickly and embraced him right in the park. His arms surrounded me. Comfort spread over me. Taking in the sweetness of it, I needed this embrace more than food and water. "Jean-Paul, I'm happy to see you."

"Why are you sad, Cherie?"

"Oh, Jean-Paul, it's terrible."

"Pray tell."

"André..." I paused as if that was all there was to say. How could I explain what happened? "He was...simply selfish. He only thought of himself. He disregarded my request completely, as if my wishes meant nothing. He asked me to apologize for my inconsiderate treatment of him. Of him!"

"Cherie, he's a man. It's in a man's nature to fight for the woman he loves."

"He doesn't love me...romantically. He loves the idea of being married to me. He loves me as the friend with whom he grew up. He loves that I'm a woman and he desires to know my body. However, he knows nothing of who I have become. He does not know the essence of what makes me unique."

"He knows that he is a fool to let you go."

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“You’re not helping me feel better. If he will not back away from the betrothal then my father will resist your request for my hand. This is a quandary. Please say something to help me cope with this dilemma.”

“My Cherie, please sit.” Jean-Paul gestured to the bench and we sat together. “I wish I could change what is true. Alas I cannot. I see the impasse. We are in a more serious circumstance than we previously knew. You will never need to choose between your family and me. I could not live with myself if I were to be so selfish. I must step back and allow your life to unfold. My presence can only complicate your situation, causing you more distress.”

“Jean-Paul, what are you saying? You’re the only sanity that I find in Paris. Please do not suggest that André must fight for me because he loves me and you will not fight for me. This would destroy my world.”

“My sweet, I love you enough to not want to cause you a day of pain. I love you enough to let you be with your family and not pull you apart from them.”

“Do not give up Jean-Paul. My father is more reasonable than my mother. Allow me the opportunity to speak with him. Have more faith. Please!”

“Of course. This seems reasonable. Speak with your father and if he is amenable to speak with me, then I shall communicate my desires to him.”

“Merci, merci. Shall we meet here in three days’ time?”

“Absolutely, my cherished, my love goes with you.” Jean-Paul stood and kissed my lips gently. He reached for my hand to help me stand. He gazed into my eyes and smiled. “It shall be a lonely three days for me. Your smile shall reside in my heart.” He kissed my hand and turned away.

Sitting down again on the bench, I wondered what I could say to my father that would convince him to set me free of André. The truth hadn’t worked with my mother or with André. Perhaps I should invent something. Nothing intelligent came to mind. The only idea that materialized was to use my father’s deep love and compassion for me. I knew how to get my way with him. I could even manipulate him when I planned carefully. Being the only daughter had its advantages. Playing sick often gained his sympathy, as did tears, deep emotions and silence when timed correctly with a look of sadness and a pout. If I were calculated in my behavior, I would sway my father.

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My father was dear to me. I didn't want to manipulate him or be cruel. But this matter was of grave consequence. If my father did not change his mind, once he knew my heart's desires, then I would have no choice but to follow my happiness without my parents' approval and face the consequences of that option. Hopefully I wouldn't have to make that choice.

The next morning I requested my father's attention. He agreed to go for a walk, to speak to me away from mother. We walked towards the Louvre at a slow pace. "What is it that you wish to address with me my precious?" my father asked.

"Father, my heart aches with great pain. I'm distraught and quite ill. My stomach hurts, my head hurts. Comfort eludes me."

"What is causing you such grief?"

"André is in Paris," I said with pain in my voice.

"Oui."

"He's the cause of my grief. When I haven't seen André, I'm most happy. Then when I spend a day in his presence I feel ill. The thought of marrying André destroys my happiness. After André and I had our first kiss, I didn't ever want to kiss him again. I don't want to be his wife or bear him children. I told this to mother and she said that I was too young to know what I wanted."

My father and I walked side by side as he pondered my words.

"Do you understand what it is that you don't enjoy about André?"

"He's arrogant. He doesn't know my needs or wish to know them. I do not desire him. I do not have joy when I'm with him."

"Cherie, you understand that the matter is complex, non?"

"Oui. Father, this matter is to impact every day of my future. It's not natural for me to sit quietly and allow my happiness to slip from my grasp."

"Daughter, happiness is not a guarantee. If you're not to marry André, a very well suited husband, provider and deacon of the Catholic Church, then you have no assurance that happiness shall be found elsewhere. With André, your foundation for a good life is set. Finding a husband is no easy task."

"It shall not be difficult for me Father. I'm already loved by another."

"Of what do you speak child?"

"Jean-Paul Soule. He loves me."

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“How is this known?”

“He has expressed it to me.”

“If this is true, then you must come forward with this to André. If there have been any inappropriate activities for a betrothed woman, then André must decide if he is still willing to marry.”

“André and I have spoken. He knows what has occurred. He doesn't believe it and wishes for me to apologize for saying it. I do not want my future to be decided by André. Jean-Paul is who I wish to marry.”

“You wish to breach a promise of marriage, a commitment of faith and to God?”

“Father I was eleven. An eleven year old girl does not know whom she should marry.”

“Cherie, do you realize how your behavior will be viewed in the eyes of the Church?”

“It's more important to me to smile at my children because I'm proud of their father, than to impress the clergy,” I replied.

“Cherie, you know that I adore you. Your wellbeing and security are my priority as well as your standing with the Lord. I can't condone your behavior.”

“I adore you as well. You're a wonderful father. Please don't leave me alone in this matter. I must be released from this promise.”

My father stopped walking. He turned towards me and was silent for a few minutes.

“There's a way to breach this commitment. It's not, however, an easy or uncomplicated matter. I shall not advise you to take this route. However, I will allow you to make the choice for yourself, without my counsel. The only thought I shall leave you with is this; you have to live with your decisions. All of us must. Sometimes we don't consider the final consequences of our decisions. Eventually we realize the consequences that were created by our actions.”

“Father, I would rather live with the results of my decisions than the result of a decision others made for me.”

“Very well child. Then I shall tell you everything that I know on the matter. The way to change the commitment is if you become engaged to another man. Bear in mind that it's not an appealing way to be seen by the Catholic Church or congregation. It does however breach the agreement. Following the engagement, you and your new betrothed shall need to discuss the matter with the Bishop. If both parties are in good standing in the Church, then the new

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engagement is usually accepted. If this occurs, and your betrothed can provide well for you in Paris, then Mother and I shall be well pleased.”

My heart skipped two beats as my breathing stopped. Jean-Paul was not an active member, therefore not in good-standing, and he wouldn't change that. My teeth clenched together to hide the emotions I didn't want to show on my face. I swallowed hard and pretended that the situation was different. My face showed a smile while my heart nearly broke. “Then you support me Father?”

“I love you for your courage and for being who you are. What you have said has not made me happy. However, you have made up your mind. This old man is wise enough to know he cannot sway you from your stance, or love, or whatever is holding you firm.”

“Thank you, Father.”

“Did I help you daughter?”

“Oh you helped far more than you know. Would it be permissible for Jean-Paul to ask for my hand in marriage?”

“Oui, after he has the blessing from God's Church.”

It was apparent that my father was not going to relent on the church issue. My hands began to shake so I stuffed them into my pockets. My eyes widened and my lips pressed firmly together. With all of the fortitude I could muster I responded, “Of course, Father. As you wish.”

After my walk with my father, my spirits were laden with worry. The depression and fear of the past few weeks was still with me, now with new concerns. How will I share this news with Jean-Paul? Perhaps he might love me enough to reconsider his position with the Church. I didn't want to manipulate him. He had to love me and make his own choice if I were to have true love. If it were not his decision, then I didn't want him.

If only he would change his view of the Church, he could propose before André left to return to law school and the matter could be finalized while André was in Paris.

After sending a letter out, I waited at the park each day at noon. André asked me several times why I insisted on taking Lou Lou to the park alone each day. He begged that he might join me and I explained that it would not make me happy.

Three days after I sent the letter, Jean-Paul met me at the park. “Did you receive my letter?”

“What letter?”

“I sent you a letter. How did you know to come here?”

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“Because my dear, the last time we spoke you asked me to meet you in three days’ time. I recalled your request and I’m here.”

“Oh yes. Please forgive me. Thank you for remembering.”

“Have you spoken with your father?”

“Oui. My father delighted and surprised me. He said that I may get out of my commitment by making a new one.”

“What new commitment must you make?”

“A commitment of marriage.” Jean-Paul looked at me without understanding my meaning. I explained further, feeling a little embarrassed that I must tell the man I desire to ask for my hand. “If I’m engaged to another man, the first agreement will be broken. Of course it looks unpleasant to others, but that’s of no consequence to me because I value happiness over status.”

“So your Father suggested that you become engaged?”

“Oui.”

“So I may ask him for your hand in marriage?”

“Oui, after we receive a blessing from the Church.”

“The Catholic Church? Are you serious?”

“Oui.”

“Cherie, the priest of our congregation considers me a fallen soul. He knows my objection to the ways of the Church. It is not likely that he will give a blessing to our union.”

Jean-Paul and I sat quietly on the cold, stone bench. “Tell the priest that you have had a vision and a change of heart. Could you not convince him that you’re a reformed, obedient member of the congregation?”

“You mean be untruthful to what I believe? It’s one thing to tell a lie to a man that you do not respect who stands between you and your desires for a woman. It’s another thing to turn against your own values and principles.”

“You would not actually be abandoning what you believe, non?”

“Non, not abandoning what I believed, but I would be a hypocrite, like them; saying one thing with my lips while doing and believing something else. Playing their game will cost me my integrity. Then I’m acquiring you, but not worthy of you. There’s no greater disappointment.”

“Jean-Paul, if you love me you will compromise to be with me. If you believe in love you will do what it takes to have it.”

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“I must be true to myself before I can be true to you.”

Light-headedness and nausea overcame me. I felt that I might fall off the bench.

“Jean-Paul? Hold me. There’s too much heaviness,” I said not knowing what I should do. Jean-Paul helped support my head on his shoulder as I leaned my body against his. “Jean-Paul, I need to rest. I am afraid. This stress is overwhelming. I need some privacy and reprieve from trying to satisfy everyone at once. I need to be in your arms.”

“Cherie...” he said with such love and tenderness.

“Please, Jean-Paul. I might die without being in your arms. I’m most sincere.”

“Very well, my cherished. We must be careful however. If others see us...”

“I don’t care! My life is too vulnerable to the eyes of others. I must live my life as I please. They may all die.”

Jean-Paul seemed to detect how distraught I felt. He gently put his arms over my shoulders and led me away from the park without a word. We walked unconcerned if others saw his touch upon me. Jean-Paul held me closely, making me feel loved. I knew right then that he put my welfare above the opinions and rules of society, so my heart let go and committed to Jean-Paul. Someone besides my father put my needs above anything else, which caused me to forever belong to him. My voice failed me, yet I wanted to say that my love could not be held by another as long as he existed. It felt as if something inside of Jean-Paul changed as well, as he led me away. Possibly I imagined the difference, yet it seemed to me that he claimed me in that moment, deciding that he was responsible for my wellbeing.

He held a key to the door and turned the lock and the door handle. He pushed the large door forward and waited for me to enter the flat. Crossing the threshold, I felt that I might collapse from the emotional burden. My head dropped, my eyes closed and my body immediately began to sink to the floor. Jean-Paul rushed forward, grabbing me under both arms to lend support. I managed to toss my head forward against his firm chest, but my legs would not support my full weight. Jean-Paul scooped me into his arms and brought me to the bedroom. He laid me down gently, and then pulled a soft comforter over my supine form.

“Rest here my sweet. I shall be in the next room.”

“Non! Please stay. I’m scared. Don’t leave me alone.”

“As you wish.” Jean-Paul climbed onto the bed beside me and lay close. I wiggled in next to him and placed my head on his left shoulder, closing my eyes and finding comfort in his loving

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touch. He wrapped his left arm around me. With his right hand he gently stroked my hair, running his fingers through my bangs and caressed my cheek...easing me into a deep rest. As sleep overcame me, I felt a sublime contentedness. I couldn't know at that moment the future pain I would endure from knowing such bliss.
