



The Secret Diary of a Princess

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Contents

[Title](#)

[Other books](#)

[The Secret Diary](#)

[1765](#)

[1766](#)

[1767](#)

[1768](#)

[1769](#)

[1770](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Author](#)

The Secret Diary of a Princess
A novel of Marie Antoinette

Melanie Clegg

By the same author

Blood Sisters
Before the Storm

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For Dave and all the boys with all my love.

Thursday, 13th June, 1765, Schloss Schönbrunn.

Dearest little sister, I hope that you will enjoy using this book to write down your most secret thoughts. I know that you do not like to write but may I suggest that as you are very fond of conversation then perhaps you might consider writing as you speak and allowing your words to flow in your own particular and delightful way? I am sure that if you did so then you would soon fill these pages. Imagine what a joy it will be to look back through this book in years to come and remember how happy you were as a child.

Much love to you on the occasion of your name day.

Your fond sister, Maria Amalia.

1765

13th June, 1765, late at night, Schönbrunn.

I do not know what to write. I am not witty like my sister Christina or funny like Elizabeth or interesting like Amalia or clever like our eldest sister Marianna or sweet like Josepha. I am just me, the youngest and some might say, most insignificant daughter of the Empress Maria Theresa, the most powerful female monarch in the world. One might well think that the youngest daughter would also be the most pretty and the most loved but life here in Vienna is not so very fairy tale like and I am not only the youngest but also the least important, which is very unfair but there, as Mama would say, it is and we must make the best of it. Besides, Christina is Mama's favourite and Elizabeth is the beauty of the family which means that I must find some other way to make my mark. Amalia says that I could always aspire to be the naughtiest of Mama's daughters but I rather fear that Carolina takes that particular crown, if not Amalia herself for we have all seen the way that she flirts with the Swiss Guards at the Hofburg.

Oh, how I wish that I were beautiful too. In fact, secretly I would much rather be beautiful than clever anyway. Mama says that I will be a very pretty little lady when I am fully grown but that is such a long time away and I would like the young men of the court to look at me as they look at beautiful Elizabeth with her perfect complexion and bright blue eyes or to flirt with me as they flirt with Amalia. It is so very hard sometimes to be the youngest and smallest of so many sisters and to always be looked at last. If it were not for Papa then I am sure no one would remember me at all. One of my earliest memories is being brought in to one of the big court galas in the enormous lilac and beeswax scented, yellow and gold ballroom at the Hofburg and losing hold of my governess' hand in the midst of all the hundreds of people who pressed close to stare at me. 'It is the youngest girl,' I heard them whisper to each other. 'What a pretty little child she is.' I was surrounded by a sea of musk and Jasmine scented, brightly coloured silk and brocade skirts and the spindly legs and high heeled shoes of the court gentlemen and was just about to scream with panic when all of a sudden my handsome Papa appeared in his red velvet coat and swung me up up up into his arms high above the crowd before carrying me to my mother, whose diamond encrusted yellow brocade gown blazed and glimmered in the candlelight. I

remember pressing my face into his broad shoulder, breathing in his Papa like smell of rosemary, ambergris, wine and horses and thinking that I loved my Papa more than anyone else on earth. I think that I still do. I love Mama of course, but I fear her too whereas with Papa it is all love and nothing else. It would be impossible to fear him, to be in awe of someone so honest and kind hearted, who thinks only of the happiness of the people around him.

I must think of more pleasant things and this is such a pretty book (it is blue silk and embroidered with pink flowers) that I have promised myself that I will only ever write pretty thoughts within it.

Today was very splendid. It started with breakfast in Papa's private breakfast pavilion in the very centre of his menagerie, where we can watch the giraffes and elephants stroll about as we eat our pastries, delicious crescent shaped *vanillekipferl* and drink steaming cinnamon flavoured hot chocolate with cream and curls of chocolate scattered on top. My actual birthday is in November but it is considered far less important than the feast day of my very own saint, Saint Anthony, which I much prefer because it means that I have a party at our yellow stone Summer palace of Schönbrunn instead of at the gloomy old Hofburg, where I was born almost ten years ago. But I digress. My presents this year included this book (which I think I do love after all, although I was not so sure when I first saw it as I thought it was a very boring present indeed), a very pretty doll all the way from London from Mama, a new harp from Papa, some small things like books (boring!), games (much better) and chocolates (best of all!) from my brothers and sisters (which amounted to quite a large pile as there are so many of us) and best of all my very own pearl bracelet with a cameo clasp from my godparents, the King and Queen of Portugal. How very kind of them. Carolina is terribly jealous about this, which I hardly think very fair for her godfather is King Louis of France and every year he sends her something lovely from Paris. I once heard Mama say to Christina that she thought Madame de Pompadour must have chosen the gift (a very pretty silk parasol with brightly coloured flowers painted on the shade and dragons twisting up the carved handle) which she clearly disapproved of very much for she looked annoyed and pouted her rouged lips a little. I do not know who this Madame de Pompadour is but she obviously has very good taste. I wish she would choose a present for me.

I always feel very guilty about my godparents though because I have been told so many times about the terrible earthquake that struck their capital of Lisbon on the day before I was born. The poor king and queen had been forced to flee their

capital (I have heard that the poor king was so frightened by the earthquake that he has never set foot in a building since that day and instead chooses to reside in a very large and opulent tent) and Mama was very afraid that they would not want to be my godparents after all or worse, that the disaster was an omen of impending doom for myself. Mama can be very superstitious like that and we all know that she likes to secretly consult with fortune tellers and soothsayers. I do not know what they had to say about me when I was newly born and I do not think that I wish to know either.

After breakfast and a walk with Papa to pat the rough, grey trunks of the elephants and feed them the apples he keeps in his coat pockets for this purpose, we proceeded in a procession of coaches to a Te Deum in the Church of the Minorities in Vienna, which is always very long winded and gloomy but I must sit up straight on the hard wooden bench beside Carolina and look like I am paying attention because it is being said in my honour. It always makes us giggle though to think that a Mass is being said in thanksgiving for my continued existence. It seems terribly conceited somehow doesn't it? Carolina and I were very good today and hardly giggled at all but even so I think we must have made some noise because when I looked up at the end, Mama was watching us both with a terrible frown on her face, which softened when Papa leaned towards her and whispered something in her ear. I ought not to mind that though as we are always doing something wrong. It is almost a daily occurrence, although it is only my brother Leopold who dares to suggest that only Christina (or Mimi as Mama calls her, which always makes me feel a little sick with envy because I would love a pretty little pet name like that but instead am always plain old 'Maria Antonia' which isn't very pretty at all is it?) never does any wrong here. Marianna does not have to endure any criticism or harsh remarks either but that is because she is the eldest of us all and is an invalid and so must never be upset. She is twenty seven now and has always lived at home with us. Imagine being twenty seven! I think it sounds very old indeed.

I haven't explained Carolina yet have I? She is my favourite sister, my best friend in all of the world and my closest ally as she is only three years older than me. They say that we are very similar but sadly an attempt to confuse our governess, the Countess of Brandeis, by swapping clothes like the Princesses in a fairy tale backfired totally and we found that we are not so very alike after all for she recognised us both immediately. It would have been wonderful though to be able to swap clothes and pretend to be each other for a while, not that it would make so much difference perhaps as we are so seldom apart although Mama

often threatens to separate us because she believes that we provoke each other into bad behaviour. Which, I am sad to report, is probably quite true.

'You are a pair of exceedingly naughty and disobedient little girls,' Mama is fond of saying to us, her big blue eyes very cold indeed. 'You are an ill behaved and disgraceful rabble and I am ashamed of you both.' Christina can smirk as much as she likes at this, but I am sure that I can hear pride in Mama's tone as well as censure. I have heard her tell people that Carolina's high spirits remind her of herself in her own youth and that my own 'freshness, levity and disregard for etiquette' bring to mind our darling Papa. This is praise indeed so pooh to you, Christina. I am sure that I would much rather be just like Papa than like anyone else in the whole world.

I am afraid that Carolina and I were not at all well behaved at my party this afternoon in the gardens of Schönbrunn. I was very conscious at first of the fact that it was a gala in my honour and that the eyes of all the court were therefore upon me, which was very nice at first because my maids had dressed me in a new and very pretty blue silk dress with a blue ribbon in my hair but even that soon became very dreary indeed and so I relinquished all elegance of manner and appearance in favour of running about the wide parterres with Carolina, my friends and Mama's yappy little dogs and then dancing for a long time with my elder brothers Joseph, Leopold and Ferdinand. I always love to dance with my eldest brother Joseph because he is so very tall and handsome with twinkling blue eyes and a shy smile. He tells jokes as well and makes me laugh so much although I often do not quite understand what he means. All of the girls at the court stare at him when he walks past but he barely seems to notice them because of course he is the heir and so is already married to a princess, Josephina who is a cousin of ours from Bavaria. She does not much like to dance and I do not think that Joseph likes her very much for he was married before to the King of France's grand daughter, Isabella and fell madly in love with her, as did we all for she was so very pretty and was always so sweet and kind if a little melancholy. Isabella died though, while having a baby and Joseph has looked really quite sad ever since. I feel sorry for his new little wife though – it must be very hard to be married to someone who is in love with a dead girl. How can one compete with that? Poor Josephina, she has only been here for six months and already she looks thoroughly miserable and like she would very much like to go home, but of course even I know that this would be quite impossible and really, who would rather be in boring old Bavaria than here in Vienna?

When my feet began to hurt in their blue silk slippers because of all the dancing, Carolina and I hid some cakes in our skirts and sat underneath one of the trees lining the great parterre to eat our spoils and talk about boys. I am not so very interested in that sort of thing but Carolina is thirteen and 'boy mad' in the opinion of our governess. I find boys fun to run about with but can't even imagine the sorts of things that Carolina would like to do with them. Kissing, I suppose, and silly stuff like that. I ought not to know about such matters of course, but perhaps the only advantage of having seven elder sisters, all sighing about boys and daydreaming about weddings and princes and babies, is that somehow information does tend to filter down through the ranks although it is, as yet, mostly incomprehensible to me. One day though, I will know what they are talking about.

'Just think,' she said to me, her blue eyes as wide as saucers. 'Just think, you are now almost ten and so they will be thinking about finding a husband for you soon.'

'How disgusting!' I exclaimed, although really, just like every other girl, I am desperate to be married, to be a bride and have everyone look at me as I walk down the aisle in a gown of ivory and cloth of gold with orange blossom in my hair. I try not to consider the possibility that I will end up as miserable as poor Josephina though. No. I will be married to a man just like Papa and live in a castle and have dozens of children and be very happy indeed.

Carolina looked thoughtful as she munched on an iced pastry. 'I wonder who they have in mind for us,' she said presently. 'I do not think that there are enough kings to go around so I imagine that our sisters will get all the best princes and we will be left with the boring electors and dukes.'

'That would not be so very bad,' I pointed out, still thinking of my imaginary castle and vast brood of children. 'At least then we might be able to stay near Vienna and Mama and Papa.'

Carolina laughed. 'Do you not want to travel, Antonia?' she asked, flinging herself back on to the narrow strip of grass beneath the trees and squinting up at the sky with one hand thrown over her eyes. It was starting to get dark and I was beginning to shiver a little. 'Imagine. There is a whole world out there and we are stuck here in Vienna waiting for our princes to come along and set us free.' She sighed. 'One day I will travel and see the world.'

'We could run away and become explorers,' I said with a giggle. 'Mama would be furious at first but we would soon cheer her up again when we sent her back lots of gold and jewels and precious things.' I finished my last cake and dusted sugar from my fingertips. 'We could become pirates!'

'Pirates!' Carolina sat up and grinned. She had grass in her long blonde hair, which she had carelessly tied back with a black velvet ribbon and I leaned over to pluck it off. 'Oh, how much fun that would be!'

'It would be fun but frightening at the same time,' I said, standing up and shaking the grass out of my blue silk skirts. One of the dogs had left a large and rather ugly paw print on my pearl embroidered bodice and I wet my finger to rub it off, hoping that Mama would not notice the telltale damp patch.

'Just like all of the best things in life,' Carolina said with a smirk. 'I like to be scared sometimes, don't you?'

I shook my head. 'No. No I do not.' I remembered the time our brother Leopold put a sheet over his head and hid behind a statue in one of the dozens of long and gloomy corridors of the Hofburg. I had cried for a long time when he jumped out on me but Carolina had merely laughed and then asked him to do it again.

'There you are!' Our little brother Max, who is the youngest of us all and the pampered pet of the court, who have nicknamed him 'Fat Max' in tribute to his plump sturdiness (I am being charitable here), appeared beside us, with a trio of Mama's fat, spoiled little pugs at his heels. 'They are about to start the firework display and Mama is wondering where you are!' He hopped from foot to foot with excitement as he absolutely loves fireworks. 'Come on! They can't start without you!'

We ran back to everyone else, where they had assembled on the stone terrace and steps leading down to the gardens and Mama said that as it was my party then I should be the one to give the signal for the fireworks to begin; it was quite dark by that point and so I do not think that she saw the stain on my bodice, or if she did then she pretended not to. Watched by everyone, I danced forward and lit the fuse of the very first rocket, before springing back as it streaked up into the

sky, trailing glittering sparks behind it. With a great crackling and fizzing which set all of the palace dogs barking noisily, the other fireworks followed and I forgot everything as I linked arms with Carolina and we stared up into the wide, navy blue sky, now lit up with flashes of blue, green, yellow and pink. It was all so very beautiful and I thought that perhaps I must be the luckiest girl on earth.

Wednesday, 3rd July. Wednesday, 3rd July.

It was I who put the mouse in Countess Brandeis' shoe.

Monday, 15th July, a very hot evening.

Poor Josephina, Joseph's little Bavarian wife was sitting all alone in the middle of the huge hedge maze in the gardens. I think that she wanted to be by herself but she looked so very sad that I could not help but come out from the bushes and sit down beside her. I ought not to have done so of course, as I was supposed to be at my lessons but Countess Brandeis decided that Carolina and I might spend the rest of the afternoon playing outside instead of learning more boring old Italian. We had instantly run to the maze and it hadn't taken me long to lose my sister amongst all of the paths although I could still hear her shouting for me. I was breathless and giggling as I reached the very centre but then stopped still in shock when I saw Josephina quietly sitting on the bench reading a book. My first instinct was to turn on my heel and run away but instead I lifted my chin bravely and went up to her.

'Would you like me to sit with you for a while?' I felt very shy, as we have not spoken much since her arrival in Vienna. I do not think that any of us have spoken to her as much as perhaps we ought to have done. Other than Papa, of course, who makes a point of talking to everyone and anyone who enters his presence and has been very kind to Josephina. I think that perhaps we were all still very sad about poor Isabella when she arrived and Joseph was the saddest of all and the arrival of a new wife just seemed so wrong somehow and so poor Josephina ended up neglected, when really we ought to have been kind to her.

Josephina looked at me and smiled in a way that somehow managed to make her seem even sadder than before. 'Of course,' she said politely, carefully marking her place in her book and then putting it down beside her on the bench,

where a small, plump black and white spaniel lay asleep, his tail wagging idly as he slumbered. 'It is a lovely day is it not?'

I nodded, understanding that she was making conversation. 'Yes, it has been lovely this year. Have you walked down to Papa's botanic garden yet? It is very pretty at the moment.' Papa loves gardening and has been building a collection of rare plants and trees in the vast parkland that surrounds Schönbrunn. Mama likes to tease him by saying that he loves his plants more than he loves her, which is silly of course but sometimes he talks about his rare flowers in such a way that it is almost as if he loves them more than anything.

Josephina nodded. 'I love to walk there.' Her voice is very low and almost gruff, which is not as unpleasant as that sounds. 'You are very fortunate to have such a father,' she said suddenly. 'My own father is dead and I still miss him very much.'

'Oh.' I did not know what else to say. 'I am sorry.' I tried to imagine what it would be like to have my Papa taken away but just couldn't. It is just too awful to think about.

'He was a good man,' she said. 'Like your father.' She smiled and I could tell that she shares my hero worship of Papa, which made me feel much more friendly towards her. I stole a look at Josephina from beneath my eyelashes, thinking that actually she isn't really ugly after all although we all laughed at her when she first arrived because she is much smaller than all of us and has thick dark hair and brown eyes. 'Like a monkey', Amalia had commented and of course, secretly, the nickname has stuck. Her eyes are nice though and she has a pretty mouth and a straight nose, which is very important. She could look worse, in other words, but would look even better if she dressed in lighter, prettier colours (she has a fondness for dark blues and greens and a horrible maroon) and asked her maids to arrange her hair in a more flattering way instead of pulling it back very tightly into a bun and then pinning an absurd little lace cap on top. It looks worse when she powders it though as the contrast with her thick, dark eyebrows is quite absurd. Do they not have tweezers in Bavaria?

'It must be very horrible to be so far away from home,' I blurted out. 'I expect that I will be going away one day to be married as well and I do not think that I

will like it at all.'

Josephina laughed. 'Oh, but that will not happen for many years to come,' she said. 'You have many years here with your family ahead of you.' She sighed. 'I am already twenty six years old and believed that I would always be at home with my mother. It did not seem like anyone wanted to marry me and I had long since reconciled myself to the prospect of remaining a spinster.' She shrugged. 'I was quite amazed when my mother told me that a proposal had arrived from Vienna.'

Twenty six? I knew that she was old but had no idea that she was quite so ancient! No wonder Joseph is annoyed with her. I struggle to hide my consternation but find that Josephina is watching me with amusement.

'You are wondering why your handsome brother agreed to marry such an elderly bride, are you not?' She smiled and patted my hand. 'I often wonder that myself and I am afraid that I have no answers. All I know is that he asked your mother to choose his wife for him and her choice fell on me.' She started to nervously play with a fold of her dark blue silk skirt, pleating it into a fan shape then smoothing it out and beginning again. 'It is not easy to be married to someone who is still mourning for his first wife,' she said after a pause. 'My cousin, Maria Josepha of Saxony, was in exactly the same situation when she was married to the widower Dauphin of France. Her husband was still in love with his dead wife but in time she managed to make him love her instead and she often writes to say that they are very happy together now.' She sighed, before giving a start and turning faintly pink as she recollected to whom she was speaking. 'I am sorry, I ought not to speak to you like this. Please do forgive me.'

I smiled. People often tell me things that I really ought not to know. I think that it is because I am so very small and they think that I do not quite understand or perhaps it is because I am very good at listening to people's problems. 'It is not important,' I said reassuringly. 'I will not repeat any of this elsewhere.' I absolutely meant it as well. I wanted to hear more about Josephina's glamorous cousin, the French Dauphine, but decided to leave this for another day.

Saturday, 20th July, a very dull French lesson.

Consternation! My elder brother Leopold is getting married next month in Innsbruck and Ferdinand, Max, Carolina and I are being left behind in Vienna with the servants while everyone else goes off to have a lovely time at the

wedding. This is so unfair! Joseph's wedding was held in Vienna and we even got to dance in a special ballet composed by Gluck for the occasion. '*Il Trionfo d'Amore*' with me as a shepherdess (in a very pretty blue and white swagged silk dress and with flowers in my hair) and Max playing the fattest, sweetest cupid ever with tiny little pink wings on his back. It was such good fun and afterwards, Mama took me upon her knee, kissed my hot cheeks and said that she was very proud of me.

Why can't Leopold's wedding be just like that?

Thursday, 1st August.

They have all gone and it is now oddly quiet here at Schönbrunn. The palace was in uproar all day as the court packed up and prepared to move on to Innsbruck. Mama, of course, was ready to leave days ago as she plans every move with military precision and cannot abide to be kept waiting by anyone. Papa and Joseph however were in disorder until the very last minute and so dozens of servants have charged up and down the sweeping marble staircases all day in search of 'the Emperor's boots' or 'the Archduke Joseph's favourite dog', the latter being discovered cowering underneath Amalia's bed. Poor animal. We tempted it out with chocolates and gingerbread biscuits.

Our sister Josepha came to see us in our schoolroom before she left and promised to bring us back sweets and all manner of treats to make up for being left behind. 'I would not have liked it either,' she said with a sympathetic smile. 'It will be different when you are my age.' She is fourteen now and is treated like a grown up by Mama and Papa, although I know she enjoys playing in the gardens just as much as I do. Elizabeth is considered to be the beauty of the family but I think that Josepha is far prettier – she has thick corn coloured hair, enormous soft blue eyes and a pretty pink and white complexion with cheeks that flush bright red whenever she is the slightest bit embarrassed or excited. She looks just as I would imagine the princess in a fairy story to look, wears pretty pink silk dresses and always smells deliciously of roses and violets.

'Oh, Josepha, I will miss you so much.' I flung my arms around her slim waist and for a moment we embraced before she smiled and held me at arm's length.

'Promise that you will be good while we are all away?' she said, just as Mama would do except with a smile instead of a fearsome frown. 'We will be back

before you know it and with a new sister to love as well.'

She said this as though it was the most delightful thing imaginable but I pulled a face. A portrait of Leopold's bride, the Princess Maria Luisa of Spain was sent to Vienna a few months ago so that we could all see what she looked like. The couple had already been married by proxy over a year beforehand but had yet to actually meet in person so Leopold was full of impatience when the portrait arrived and then was unveiled before the entire royal family in the small gallery. Maria Luisa is not ugly but she is not as pretty as any of us (I am pleased to note) and has a big nose, thin face and mean little eyes. Like a shrew. I am not disposed to like her.

Josepha saw my mutinous expression and laughed. 'I do not expect the Princess of Spain to be very pretty but she is said to be very amiable indeed.' She leaned down and kissed my cheek. 'Promise that you will be nice to her?' she whispered. 'It must be horrible indeed to come to a new country and a new family and it is a fate that will befall us all one day so we must be understanding and take care not to hurt her feelings.'

'I suppose so.'

Countess Brandeis took Carolina and me downstairs to watch everyone leave from the palace courtyard. It was madly exciting as everything was in chaos as hundreds of courtiers bundled themselves, their little dogs and their belongings into their carriages and then bickered about precedence and who should be the first to leave after the royal family, while liveried servants dashed smartly in between the vehicles with band boxes, dogs and luggage piled high in their arms. It was hard not to feel aggrieved when our elder sisters swept past on their way to their gilt decorated carriage, all looking divinely pretty in matching traveling dresses of dark pink silk, with adorable little feathered hats set at an angle on their powdered ringlets and with their pug dogs tucked under one arm. Christina pretended not to see us (we are too young and insignificant to be worthy of her attention, of course) but the others all smiled and blew us kisses from the windows.

Mama was already in her huge carriage at the front of the procession and she beckoned the Countess to bring us both forward to say our goodbyes. An attendant footman in the Imperial livery let down the wooden steps with a thrilling clatter and opened the door and we both climbed inside and sat on the

pale green velvet seats so that we were facing her. She was dressed in a voluminous traveling dress of soft crimson velvet and smelt of lilies and jasmine. Her favourite pale grey pug sat on her knee and closed his eyes sleepily and yawned revealing black speckled gums as she slowly stroked his sleek head. 'I trust that you will both be good girls in our absence,' she said, looking at us both with her bright blue eyes that seemed to see absolutely everything. 'The Countess will be writing to me every day with reports about your progress, so rest assured that I will be kept informed of even the slightest and most insignificant misdemeanors.'

'Yes, Mama,' we both chorused, trying not to smirk as we both knew that the Countess does not know about half of the naughty things that we get up to.

'Maria Carolina, I hope that you will pay especial attention to your Italian while we are away,' Mama remarked with a sigh. 'The Countess has informed me that your grasp of grammar is still less than perfect and there is much room for improvement.'

'Yes, Mama.' Carolina dipped her head submissively and gave me a swift, sidelong look. 'I am sorry, Mama.' She did not really sound very sorry at all.

'As for you, Maria Antonia...' Mama gave another great sigh and brushed imaginary crumbs from her crimson skirts, disturbing the little dog on her lap who stared up at her reproachfully. 'I hardly know where to begin. You *must* pay more attention to your teachers.' I chanced a quick glance up at her face and then quickly looked away as I met her disappointed gaze. 'I am told that you are barely able to read and write and that your French is appalling, your Italian barely passable and even your written German is flawed beyond what can be considered excusable.'

I felt sick. 'I am sorry, Mama.' What else could I say? I know that I am not very clever but there is no point at all trying to explain this to my mother, who expects, nay demands, excellence in all things and especially in her children. 'I promise to try harder.' Lies, of course, because just the thought of it makes a headache come on and I know that an hour spent playing outside with my friends will push all thoughts of educational self improvement straight out of my head.

'You are not a stupid girl, Maria Antonia,' Mama continued, still in that dreadful disappointed tone of voice that I knew so well. 'If you would only apply

yourself more than I am sure that you could be a very fine young woman indeed.'

'Yes, Mama.' I looked down at my feet, impatient now to escape. Why must she always be so critical and dwell so much on our failings? Note how she never seems to make any mention of the things that we happen to be good at? I am good at dancing and music, for instance and Carolina's French is superb. If only she would give some praise once in a while – perhaps it would encourage us to try harder at everything else.

She beckoned us forward one after the other to kiss the violet powder scented imperial cheek and then we were summarily dismissed and handed down by the footman into the care of the Countess, who looked flushed and desperately guilty now that we knew that she had betrayed our shortcomings to Mama.

'I do not blame you, Countess,' Carolina said, as soon as we were safely out of Mama's annoyingly formidable earshot. 'I know that you have to tell Mama everything or lose your position.'

'I am sorry, Archduchess,' the Countess said miserably, looking like she would like to say even more but hardly dared to do so. 'I know that her censure comes from her great love and concern for you all.'

'Strange then that the only one of us who can do no wrong is Christina,' Carolina muttered grimly, kicking a stray pebble across the cobbles. The Countess sighed but said nothing.

Papa was last to leave and he came over to give us both one last kiss before mounting his white horse. He is a large, active man and hates to feel cooped up inside a carriage and so likes to ride with his friends whenever the court travels anywhere. I am sure that Mama would much rather that he traveled in her carriage with her but she always smiles and allows Papa to do exactly as he pleases.

'I am sure that your Mama has already told you to be a good girl, Antonia,' he said with a deep laugh, as he picked me up easily into his arms and kissed me soundly on both cheeks, the feathers on his black tricorne hat tickling my cheek, 'so I will only make you promise to be a happy one.' He kissed me on the nose and then placed me carefully back on the ground, before digging some lemon

bonbons out of his spacious riding coat pockets and cramming them into my hands.

'Thank you, Papa.' I smiled up at him. 'I hope you have a good journey.' We stood back and watched admiringly as he swung up onto his horse and gathered the red leather reins, ready to ride off. Mama calls him the most handsome man in all of her lands and we absolutely believe this to be true. No one could look more splendid or better looking than our Papa when he is astride his white stallion.

The great imperial cavalcade slowly began to rumble out of the huge courtyard and we dutifully stood aside and waved as Mama and our elder brothers and sisters drove past in their splendid carriages and they just as dutifully waved back, looking faintly smug that they were on their way to all the fun of a wedding while we were left behind at Schönbrunn. Max and Ferdinand joined us in the courtyard, both of them looking grumpy and faintly rebellious. I guessed (rightly) that they had both been lectured by Mama as well.

'When I get married, I will not be inviting Leopold to the wedding,' Ferdinand muttered with a scowl. 'I shall not even send him any of the cake.' It is only fair to explain at this point that Ferdinand is exceedingly fond of cake. He has also been engaged for several years, since they were both infants in fact, to the daughter and heiress of the Duke of Modena. We often like to tease him about his '*petite fiancée*' that he has never even seen.

We all laughed at this and even Ferdinand cracked a begrudging smile. 'Alright, he can have some cake but he isn't allowed to come to the ceremony or to any of the parties afterwards.'

We watched the carriages for a while but this soon became very boring as they moved so slowly and there were so many of them. 'Oh, it is so unfair!' Carolina ejaculated, turning away impatiently. 'I wish that we could have gone with them!' Countess Brandeis took her by the hand and began to lead her up the steps and back into the palace, with myself and our brothers following close behind. There was nothing else to see after all, now that Mama and Papa had gone.

There was a clattering of horse's hooves and a great shouting and fuss behind us. We turned around in some surprise and there was Papa again, weaving his great, white horse in between the carriages and waving at us to stop.

'I wonder what he has forgotten this time,' the Countess muttered with a sigh. Papa is well known for being scatter brained and somewhat forgetful. Mama laughs and calls it one of his more 'endearing qualities', which is surprising because she would be furious and impatient if it was anyone else and especially one of her children.

The horse drew up alongside us and Papa jumped straight off. 'I wanted to kiss my pretty Antonia again,' he said with an almost bashful smile. 'I did not want to go all the way to Innsbruck without one last embrace from my little girl.' He knelt down on the dirty cobbles and opened his arms wide to me and I laughed and ran to him, proud to be singled out for once. I wish that Christina could have seen it.

'Oh, Papa!' I found that I was crying and rubbed my wet cheek against his stubbly one. 'I wish that we could go with you! It is so horrible to be left behind!'

He laughed and kissed my cheeks. 'I am afraid that your mother has already given the order and I am not at liberty to countermand it.' He stroked my hair tenderly. 'There, there, do not cry about it. We will be back again soon enough.'

'Promise?' I clung to him and wept even more.

He hugged me tightly and I saw that there were also tears in his eyes. 'I promise.'

One last kiss on the forehead and then he was gone. 'God knows why, but I could not rest until I had given that child one more kiss,' I heard him to say to one of his friends as they rode away for the second time, their horses' hooves clattering merrily on the cobbles. 'The Empress has blessed me with many children and I love them all dearly but none so much as my little Antonia.'

Saturday, 10th August.

It was I who stole a monkey from Papa's menagerie and let it loose in Countess Brandeis' bedchamber. I am very sorry but it was worth it.

Tuesday, 13th August, late at night.

Today was Carolina's thirteenth birthday. We had a party in the gardens. There

was chocolate cake! Max fell into a fountain and had to be pulled out by one of the Swiss guards. He has made us all promise not to tell Mama.

Wednesday, 14th August, after luncheon (stew with dumplings - delicious!).

Carolina slipped past the footmen and guards and came to my rooms last night to sleep in my bed with me. It is usually forbidden for us to wander about the palace in the dark in such a way but we might as well take advantage of Mama's absence. Schönbrunn has almost two thousand rooms and it is very easy to get lost if one does not know precisely where to go and even then there is the risk of turning down the wrong corridor or going up the wrong stairs. Joseph and Leopold like to tease us by telling us stories about unfortunate maids who took a wrong turning and were never to be seen again or who were eventually discovered many years later as a mouldering skeleton in the attics. Mama says that this is all nonsense but even so we are forbidden to leave our rooms at night, just in case we get lost. Our apartments are on the second floor of the left wing of the palace, where all of the archduchesses have their rooms, while our brothers are housed across the cobbled courtyard in the right wing. It is very quiet on our side, without all of our sisters rushing about, chattering with their ladies in waiting and borrowing dresses and shoes from each other. They are young ladies now. I wonder what it is like for Max and Ferdinand without Joseph and Leopold and all their dogs and servants and fuss?

We each have five rooms – two antechambers, an audience chamber (which is not used very often as you can imagine), a bedchamber and a drawing room, with a small room hidden behind the panelling, where our maids sleep and keep their possessions. My rooms are very pretty with pale green and pink panelling, simple white painted furniture, paintings of flowers by my older sisters and white and gold ceramic stoves standing in the corners, as in all of the rooms in the palace. My precious harp and pianoforte stand in the drawing room along with a stand holding all of my music, including some pieces specially composed for us by Gluck and Mozart, both of whom are favourites with our parents. Herr Gluck even gives us as all music lessons.

Wolferl Mozart is an old friend of mine of course. Mama is very fond of telling us about the time he came to play for us in the crimson and gold Mirrors Room when he was all of six years old and a tiny little prodigy from Salzburg in a ridiculously over sized wig and tight pale blue silk coat. His sombre Papa had stood over him anxiously as his thin little fingers flew across the harpsichord

keys, while we all caught our breath and watched in wonderment, hardly able to believe that such a small boy could produce such heavenly music. It was really quite astonishing (and of course Mama compared us to him for many months afterwards) and we all applauded enthusiastically when he came to a halt and then bowed to us all before running up to Mama and clambering up on to her blue silken lap for a kiss. I would never have taken such a liberty but Mama was delighted and kissed the little imp on both cheeks! Wolferl tripped on the polished parquet floor when she placed him back on to the ground and I rushed forward to help him to his feet.

'I want to marry you!' he cried, clasping my hand to his heart, much to the amusement of all of the court. 'You are the prettiest and kindest girl that I have ever seen!'

Mozart is only a few months older than me and is now one of the most famous composers in all of the world. He seldom comes to Schönbrunn any more, as he always seems to be touring the courts of Europe with his parents and pretty sister, Nannerl but when he does he always has a wink and a smile for me and calls me his 'little *fiancée*' when no one can hear. He has been to Versailles and played for the King of France himself and all of his daughters. 'None of the French princesses are as pretty as the Austrian archduchesses,' he reported back with a grin. 'And as for Madame de Pompadour! She is pretty enough, if you fancy fat ladies with a turn for melodrama, but I quite took against her when she refused to give me a kiss.' He looked indignant. 'If the Empress herself took me on her knee and kissed me then you would think that a mere...' He giggled and clapped his hand over his mouth. 'Oops, I almost said too much.'

I wish I knew what he was going to say. People always clam up before they get to the interesting bits don't they?

Sunday, 18th August, I am supposed to be in bed.

It is unbearably hot. The Countess kindly gave Carolina and I permission to take our books outside and sit in the shade reading them but thanks to the heat and the incessant buzzing of the bees, I could hardly keep my eyes open and so ended up falling asleep with my head on the open page.

Consequently, I did not learn very much today.

Tuesday, 20th August.

Papa is dead.

It cannot be true.

No.

Thursday, 5th September, can't sleep.

It still doesn't feel real and I can't just can't accept that I will never see my Papa again. Not in this world anyway. It happened quite suddenly apparently, as he was leaving the Opera House in Innsbruck. He had been perfectly happy and healthy all evening; enjoying the music, laughing with Mama and teasing Leopold and his ugly new bride who were sitting in the box beside them. He had complained of a pain in his side when they left but no one thought anything of it and he himself dismissed it as indigestion after a particularly lavish dinner earlier that evening. 'It is too hot to eat partridge,' he joked with Leopold as he said goodnight. It was only when he was in his carriage that he had given a loud cry and then collapsed into Joseph's arms, dying almost instantly.

It was Joseph who rode all the way back from Innsbruck in the heat and dust to tell us the terrible news. He took each of us in his arms as we wept together and told us that we had lost the best father the world has ever known. He looked dazed and entirely disbelieving and had black smudges under his eyes and a darkly stubbled chin. He is emperor now, of course, but seems to care nothing at all about this.

'I would gladly trade it all just to have Papa back with us again,' he said over and over. 'He died in my arms.' He looked down at his hands and we saw that he was crying again. 'He died in my arms.'

Mama is distraught of course. She came home with Papa's body but immediately locked herself away alone in her own rooms, shutting all of the heavy brocade curtains to keep out the light and admitting no one. We did not see her until his funeral, which was very grand and solemn and took place at the *Kapuzinergruft* (Imperial Crypt) in the Capuchins' church next to the Hofburg. We were all there, weeping loudly and dressed in black with black veils covering our pale faces. When the big black carriage bearing Papa's body reached the wooden gates of the *Kapuzinergruft*, the court herald knocked on the door and one of the Capuchin monks of the monastery came out to ask 'who demands

entry?' The herald replied with Papa's name and a list of all of his titles (this took quite some time) to which the monk responded with 'I don't know this person' upon which the whole charade would be repeated again only with shorter titles being used this time and with the monk saying once again 'I do not know this person'. The herald then knocked for a third and final time and upon being asked 'who demands entry' replied simply with 'Franz Stefan, a sinful, mortal human being', at which point the gates swung open and Papa's carriage disappeared inside. It was very sad and incredibly humbling.

Mama came to visit Carolina and I a few days later in our schoolroom and we were both astonished by how different she looked – she looked many decades older, almost like an old woman in fact, and was dressed from head to toe in thick, unrelenting and miserable black and not her usual bright and glimmering silks, brocades and velvets. She had also cut off all of her thick, blonde hair, which Papa had loved so much and instead sported grizzled, short curls underneath a stiff and uncompromising black linen cap.

'You have lost the best Papa ever,' she said to us, echoing Joseph's words. 'I can hardly believe that he is gone.' Her eyes were red rimmed from weeping and we saw that still more tears were trembling on the edge of her long lashes. 'He loved you both very much and is still watching over you from Heaven. I hope that you will both strive to make him proud and to be worthy of him.' Even now there had to be a note of censure. She started sobbing and pulled a large black kerchief out of her expansive bosom.

'Yes, Mama,' we chorused, curtsying deeply and swallowing down our own sobs, as there is a selfishness to Mama's grief that made us instinctively know that any signs of our own misery must be kept well hidden. 'We will do our best to be worthy of him,' Carolina added, surreptitiously wiping her eyes with the back of her hand.

Mama nodded solemnly and then turned to me, taking my hand in her plump white one. 'I heard that he asked to see you again before he left,' she said, her voice cracking with emotion. 'I think that he loved you best out of all our children.' It sounded almost like an accusation and I stared dumbly at her, not knowing what to say. 'You are so very like your dear Papa, Maria Antonia,' she whispered after a long silence. 'You must work harder than ever to be worthy of him.' For a brief second she touched my cheek with her hand and then she stood up and was gone, releasing a cloud of lavender, thyme and rosemary perfume

from her heavy black taffeta skirts as she moved. She smelt just like Papa and I realised that she must have been using his cologne in an attempt to remain close to him.

Carolina and I burst into tears when she had gone; the sight of Mama's suffering and the still lingering scent of Papa's cologne was just too much for us.

Sunday, 20th October, the Hofburg.

Winter is fast approaching and so the court have moved to the Hofburg, which is Mama's Winter palace in the very centre of Vienna. Everyone complains a great deal about having to move here, as it is so large and old fashioned and isn't as pretty or comfortable as Schönbrunn although it is certainly very warm thanks to the large wood burning stoves in every room. I am fond of the Hofburg though, as I was born here and the move here in the Autumn always signifies that it is almost my birthday and that I am another year older.

I am currently sitting at the little walnut wood *escritoire* in my pink and white paneled bedchamber. I am supposed to be working at my French but it is so very dull that it is making my head ache. I try very hard but the pages of my book are covered with crossings out and splodges of ink, where I have made mistakes and tried to correct them. I do not think that I will ever be very good at French although the Countess has said that with more practice I might do very well at it. When Mama asks to see my work, the Countess often resorts to writing the exercises out in pencil and then making me write over the top in ink so that it looks like I have done the work myself. I do not think that Mama will be deceived by this for very long.

The Hofburg is much noisier than Schönbrunn and right now I can hear Amalia and Josepha having a music lesson with Herr Gluck in their rooms further down the narrow, gloomy corridor which is lined with pencil drawings by Joseph and Leopold of scenes from Greek mythology. They are both singing and occasionally pausing to giggle over some private joke. Amalia has a cold and you can tell from her rasping singing that she has a sore throat as well. I can also hear my brothers Max and Ferdinand laughing as they play with their dogs in their rooms downstairs and if I listen very carefully indeed I can hear the constant low rumble and hum of the thousands of Hofburg servants going about their daily business as they fetch and carry, light fires and open doors. It is the constant and reassuring background noise to our existence; the first thing I hear in the morning and the last thing I hear at night. If it were ever to stop then I

would think that the world itself had ceased to exist as well. From outside my window I can hear the every day sounds of Vienna – the constant clatter and rumble of carriages rolling in and out of the cobbled courtyard and in the distance the sound of a hundred thousand voices laughing, singing, shouting and enjoying life, while the church bells ring out into the crisp, fresh air and all the while the slate blue Danube flows quickly past.

It is now over two months since my Papa died and things have changed a great deal here. Mama still wears nothing but black and is very serious and severe on the rare occasions that we see her. She still spends a lot of time alone in her rooms but is appearing more and more often in public. I overheard some of the court ladies whispering that Mama had considered abdicating the throne and entering a convent when Papa died but that the thought of Ferdinand, Carolina, Max and I prevented her as we are all too young to be without any parents at all.

Joseph is now emperor, which makes poor Josephina the empress, not that it makes any difference while Mama is still alive for everyone knows that she is the real ruler here. Josephina always looks faintly embarrassed when she is in company with Mama and gives way to her at all times, which is only right but she doesn't manage to do so gracefully so that Mama always looks cross when she is there and Joseph gets a tight lipped, impatient expression on his face when once again she doesn't step back quickly enough as we walk into dinner to let Mama go past first. I do not think he likes Josephina very much and there have been no pregnancies yet even though they have been married for almost a year now.

Joseph's little girl Theresia, his daughter by Isabella, is here with us of course. She is three now and is loved and petted by us all for she is so very pretty and looks just like her poor Mama with wide dark blue eyes and fair, curling hair. Josephina is very kind to her as well but this does nothing to soften Joseph's dislike and he always looks like he would prefer her not to touch his daughter and would like to snatch Theresia away when she makes her sit beside her. It is all very sad.

Tuesday, 22nd October, a chilly afternoon.

The whole palace is in uproar. Christina has informed Mama that she is madly in love with Prince Albert of Saxony, who is the youngest son of the King of Poland and who has lived in Vienna for several years now. It isn't a bad match

really as his mother is an Austrian archduchess and one of Mama's cousins, also one of his sisters is the Maria Josepha who is married to the Dauphin of France and another one is Queen of Spain and mother to Maria Luisa who married Leopold last year. It seems though that Papa had intended Christina for one of his French nephews, the Duc de Chablais and Mama is loath to go against his wishes in this matter. Papa's last wish, being of course, sacrosanct as far as Mama is concerned.

The prince has asked Mama's permission to address our sister and Christina has publicly announced that she fully intends to accept him. It seems like a *fait accompli* (see, I have some French after all) but we are all in shock that she should have the courage to choose her own husband. It is entirely unheard of for an Austrian archduchess to do such a thing and we are all desperate to know what is to happen to them both.

'I hope Mama refuses to let her marry him,' Carolina muttered to me last night when we were supposed to be saying our bedtime prayers in the chilly Hofburg chapel with its ornate golden statues and gloomy paintings of martyred saints, who gaze down upon us with dark, sad eyes. 'It will totally go to Christina's head if she gets her own way and I do not think that I can bear to see it.' She winced and shifted her knees as the hard white marble floor of the chapel can get very cold at this time of year.

'But it is all so romantic,' I whispered back, my eyes still tightly closed in case the Countess happened to glance over at us. 'Also, if Christina is allowed to choose her own husband then maybe that means that we will be able to as well.'

Carolina was surprised into giving a loud laugh, that echoed alarmingly in the vaulted chapel. 'You idiot. Haven't you realised by now that Christina is Mama's special favourite and that even if she is allowed to marry her boring prince, it doesn't make a jot of difference to our own prospects.' She stands up and crosses herself, feigning a coughing fit to disguise her laughter. 'Only Christina will be allowed to choose for herself while we are all sent away to marry men that we have never even seen before.'

'Mimi,' I whisper to myself. Of course.

Sunday, 27th October, after dinner.

Christina is victorious and the wedding is to be held next April at Schönbrunn.

Amalia was physically sick when she heard the news.

Saturday, 2nd November.

It is my tenth birthday. Mama has taken to calculating how long we have all been on this earth and informed me this morning that I have now been alive for five hundred and twenty two weeks which is three thousand, six hundred and fifty four days or eighty seven thousand and six hundred and ninety six hours. It does not seem like such a long time really does it?

Sunday, 1st December, first day of Advent.

Today we lit the first candle on our special *Adventkranz*, which is a wreath of holly with four tall red candles attached, each representing the four Sundays in Advent. Amalia played the harpsichord and we all sang carols while ignoring the Advent fast and munching on special gingerbread biscuits and our favourite *vanillekipferl*, heavily dusted with sugar.

Afterwards I wrote a letter to the holy *Christkindl*, telling him all of my wishes for the coming year. I asked that none of my sisters leave to be married and also for a white pony for myself.

Thursday, 5th December, late.

Such fun today when we were visited after dinner by actors dressed up as Saint Nikolaus and the *Krampus*, which are evil goblins who punish naughty children for their misdeeds during the year. Maximilian was chased around the room by the *Krampus*, who were trying to smack his behind with a birch rod, to the amusement of all the court. Mama's dogs were wildly excited by this and also joined in the chase so that the huge, candlelit reception room was filled with the sound of laughter, menacing cackles and furious barking. I could not help but think how much Papa would have enjoyed it.

Carolina and I half expected to be singled out by the *Krampus* as well, but instead we were given special biscuits and presents by Saint Nikolaus and praised for our good behaviour. Clearly, no one has yet worked out who has been playing tricks on Countess Brandeis.

Friday, 20th December, St Thomas' Eve.

It is the tradition here in Austria that if a girl wishes to know her future she

should cut an apple in half on the eve of St Thomas' day and then count the pips inside. I have always been too young to join in but tonight Amalia and Josepha decided that I should be allowed to take part in the secret ritual.

Carolina and I wrapped ourselves up in thick woolen shawls and pushed our feet into soft, fur slippers before sneaking down the cold corridors to Amalia's warm, rose scented room where her trio of little Pugs lay fast asleep and snoring on pink velvet upholstered dog beds in front of the stove. Her maid Drusilla ceremoniously placed a bowl of apples and a gold handled knife on to a table that had been pulled into the centre of the room and we took it in turns to carefully select a fruit and then slice into it.

Amalia went bravely first, cutting her apple neatly and counting the pips inside. 'Five.' She looked at her maid, who we all respected as a person of authority when it came to such arcane matters as fortune telling. 'I think I cut one as well.'

Drusilla peered at the apple. 'An odd number means you have a disappointment coming, Archduchess, and the cut seed means you will have a troubled marriage and end a widow.'

'Charming.' Amalia laughed and bit into a slice of apple. 'Well, so long as I am rich, who cares?'

'Me next.' Josepha stepped up and blushed as she selected an apple and cut into it. 'Oh, I seem to have cut across all of the pips!' She looked at Drusilla. 'Does that mean I will be very unhappy indeed?'

Drusilla took the apple and sighed as she looked at it. 'We all have a cross to bear, Archduchess.'

Josepha shrugged and tried to laugh. 'Oh well, serves me right for not being very handy with a knife.' She handed it shakily on to Carolina. 'Your turn now, little one.'

Carolina closed her eyes and picked the first apple that found its way into her fumbling hand. 'Oh look, six seeds! That means that I am going to marry soon doesn't it? They are very large seeds; does that mean that he will be handsome?'

We all burst out laughing. 'Oh, Carolina! You should be so lucky!' Amalia said, giving Carolina a hug. 'You should have realised by now that there are no handsome princes left in Europe and that the Catholic ones are always the most hideous of all.'

'If any handsome princes ever existed outside fairy stories,' Josepha chimed in with a grimace. 'Poor us.'

Carolina handed the knife to me and I copied her, closing my eyes as I put my hand into the porcelain bowl and felt amongst the cool, smooth, fragrant apples before finally closing my grasp around one of them. I opened my eyes then solemnly cut into the soft flesh and pulled the two halves apart. 'One, two, three, four and oh, I cut some of them!' I looked at Drusilla. 'What does it mean?' I held out the apple.

'Your Highness will be married soon but will face many sorrows before becoming a widow,' the other girl intoned after looking at my apple. I couldn't help but shiver at her words, even though I knew that it was all complete nonsense and silly peasant superstition.

Carolina gave me a hug. 'Do not worry, Antonia, it won't come true,' she whispered into my ear. 'Your husband will be handsome and rich and kind and you will have many children and grow fat, contented and old together.'

I hope that she is right.

Monday, 23rd December, a freezing cold night.

Three years ago today our sister Johanna died of smallpox, when she was not much older than I am now. I caught smallpox at the same time but was very fortunate and recovered with only a few small scars on my shoulders. I cannot remember very much about it now other than a dreadful headache when it first began and a terrible feeling of thirst and light headedness when it was all over. The intervening days passed in a blur of unbearable hotness, pain and restless opiated sleep.

Mama ordered that Johanna's full length portrait by Herr Mytens be brought down into the candlelit mirrored reception room with its huge mirrors and green and gold paneled walls so that we could all think about her in silence and pray for her soul. The portrait looked very unlike the jolly, plump little Johanna that I

(barely) remember and shows her looking very stiff and sombre indeed in a gown of pink silk with diamonds in her hair and around her throat. It scared me a little to see her thus and I closed my eyes and tried to remember her as she had really been rather than the little painted doll with powdered hair and far away eyes on the canvas.

My sister Josepha started to cry and admitted to me later on that she is terrified of dying of smallpox like Johanna did as she suffered a great deal.

'I can still hear her screams,' she said with a terrible look on her face.

Chapter Two

1766

Wednesday, 1st January, 1766.

The new year began half an hour ago and the sky above Vienna is filled with colourful, dazzling fireworks. Carolina is standing at my window in her nightdress, watching the explosions and clapping with joy. She is fortunate indeed that Mama cannot see her now. There was a grand state ball at the Hofburg tonight and we can see the guests with their glittering, shimmering clothes swathed beneath furs, standing in the courtyard below, snipping *schnapps* and staring up at the night sky as it explodes into colour and light.

The carnival season is in full swing in Vienna and every night the sound of music, laughter and fun floats up to our windows at the Hofburg. Amalia goes out every night in her pretty silk dresses, with only a black velvet fur lined cape and black felt mask for disguise and we hear her coming back in the early hours, stumbling slightly and humming the latest songs under her breath. We are consumed with envy and can hardly wait for the day when we can be a part of it all as well.

Wednesday, 15th January, late.

It was I who put spiders in Christina's bed. I am not the slightest bit sorry.

Wednesday, 12th February, Ash Wednesday.

Carnival is over and the Easter fast began today, which is always very dreary but naturally Mama insists that we all comply. Forty days. How shall we bear it?

We all went to church this morning to hear mass and then kneel before the altar to be marked on the forehead with a cross of black ashes. We are not supposed to wash the cross off before sundown and I wear mine still, stark and dark against my pale skin.

Wednesday, 26th February.

Amalia is twenty today, which seems incredibly old to me. She is still not betrothed and Carolina whispered to me at breakfast that she is in love with the

Duke of Zweibrücken's eldest son, Karl who is very handsome indeed with a shock of sandy hair, freckles across his nose and bright hazel eyes. He is everything that we think a young man should be – clever, kind hearted, fond of a joke, an energetic dancer and fearless with horses. He is not rich enough or important enough to please Mama though and so Amalia hardly dares even to look at him when there are other people present. Karl is less careful however and the look on his face whenever he looks at her makes me tremble. I do not think that anyone will ever look at me in such a way and I both fear and long for it with all of my being.

Albert of Saxony isn't rich or important either and isn't nearly so handsome as Karl and yet Mama gave her permission to Christina's marriage, reasoning that if she marries Albert then she will always stay near to her in Vienna instead of going far away to marry a foreign prince like all the rest of us.

I think I begin to see why Amalia looks so mutinous all of the time nowadays.

Friday, 14th March, I can't sleep.

Carolina told me at dinner (very plain and dull and involving a lot of fish, which I detest, as we are still fasting) that Christina is to receive a huge dowry ('To compensate for marrying a pauper younger son,' she said with an arch look) and that Albert has not only been made Duke of Teschen but also been granted the Governorship of Pressburg in Hungary, which has a huge castle attached to it. They have also been given a pretty little house near to our Summer palace at Laxenburg, which is a huge honour.

I looked down the candlelit table at Christina and saw that she almost seemed to glow with triumph as she laughed and chattered with Marianna and Elizabeth. She had never been the prettiest of Mama's daughters but now she is certainly the most impressive of us all, not least because she will be the very first to marry and discover what the Countess coily refers to as 'the mysteries of the boudoir'. I can't imagine anything worse than discovering the mysteries of the boudoir with her fiancé, Albert who only ever wants to talk about art and horses and who always hastily shovels food into his mouth as though he has just been told that there is about to be a famine in the land. I looked further down the table to Amalia, who looked pale and heavy eyed and was pushing her dinner around her plate with an air of miserable disinterest. As I watched I saw Joseph lean across with a look of irritation and whisper something into her ear that made her colour up and then pretend to smile and join in the conversation.

'It is said that Mama is determined that one of us will marry the King of Naples, one will marry the Duke of Parma and one will marry the French King's heir,' Carolina whispered urgently beside me. Where does she hear these things? 'I heard Mama tell Joseph about it,' she said, as if reading my thoughts. 'He is very enthusiastic about the idea.' I bet he is.

'Three husbands,' I whispered, thinking this over and trying to imagine these hazy, faceless foreign princes. 'I wonder who they have in mind for them?'

Carolina shrugged and took a sip of water. 'Elizabeth for one, Amalia for the other and Josepha for the third,' she guessed. 'Which means that we are safe for a bit longer.' She sighed. 'Although I must admit that it would be nice to be in demand for once.'

I nodded, heartily agreeing with this statement.

Sunday, 30th March, Easter Day.

The fast is at an end. We went to hear Mass and then came home to gorge ourselves on delicious thick hot chocolate, gingerbread biscuits and soft, fragrant sweet bread studded with currants and cherries. I feel rather sick now but, oh, it was worth it.

Friday, 27th June, Laxenburg.

It seems like such a long time since I last wrote in this book and so much has happened. Where to begin?

Christina is married now to her prince and is installed in her vast white castle at Pressburg. The wedding was rather splendid and Christina looked radiant in a gown of cloth of silver embroidered all over with pearls and silver ribbons. The court is still in mourning for Papa and so she really stood out amongst the shimmering black, grey and violet silks, brocades and taffetas worn by everyone else at the wedding. I think she really loves her Prince, even if he is a dead bore and has bushy eyebrows. I can't imagine anyone falling in love with him but I am not Christina and perhaps he is more interesting when one gets to know him better. I really doubt it though.

Mama had planned the most wonderful gala for after the ceremony, which included a huge banquet followed by dancing in the great mirror lined gallery,

which was lit up with thousands of candles for the occasion, and then fireworks in the grounds of the palace. Carolina and I had new dresses, which were black of course but still very pretty with ruffles and a multitude of diamonds on the stomachers. We are so used to wearing mourning now that it is hard to remember a time when we wore anything other than black. Luckily it suits us both a great deal and makes us look even more pale and fair, which is apparently very becoming. I should not like to wear black all the time though.

Mama cried a great deal to be losing her precious 'Mimi' and insisted upon embracing her several times over the course of the day, becoming progressively more lachrymose as the evening went on, much to Joseph's obvious annoyance. The only thing that annoyed him more than Mama's tears was the sight of Amalia dancing with Karl of Zweibrücken with the most blissful expression on her face as she looked deeply into his eyes across the candlelit gallery.

'I wonder if I will ever love someone as much as Amalia loves Karl?' Carolina asked me, as we enviously watched our sister and her suitor dancing together, spinning in intricate circles on the highly polished parquet. We are too young to dance with anyone other than our brothers and this is just too dull for words now. We are quickly becoming young ladies, it would seem, yawning behind our fans at how tedious it is to be led out by Ferdinand and Max yet again.

'I hope not,' I replied. Falling in love only ever seems to lead to unhappiness. We are not all as fortunate as Christina after all.

'You never know, Antonia, we might fall in love with our husbands.' Carolina gave a little sigh and I could tell from her expression that she was thinking about a handsome prince sweeping her off her feet and showering her with diamonds. 'It happened to Mama and Papa and to Joseph and Isabella.'

'I think that they were all very lucky,' I said, unfurling my fan, which was also new and painted with a design of Chinese dragons and birds. 'Just think of Josephina.' We both looked at our sister in law, who was sitting alone on the dais, watching the dancing with a sad expression on her face. Her maid is still pulling her hair back too tightly and black really isn't her colour as it makes her look sallow and unhealthy. She looked like she would rather be anywhere else in the world than there in that chair, watching everyone else have fun. I wonder if she has any friends here in Vienna? I have never heard of any. I think that anything is bearable so long as one has good company to share it with.

Carolina shuddered. 'Imagine being married to Joseph. It is a fate worse than death.'

We came to Laxenburg shortly after the wedding, which is a great treat as it is my absolute favourite of all of Mama's palaces. It isn't really a palace at all though, but used to be a hunting lodge and is now more of a large mansion set in the midst of thickly planted woods and parkland. Papa loved it here and insisted that the entire court wear crimson and gold as a sort of uniform whenever they came here, which always looked absolutely splendid; even Carolina and I were allowed to have special scarlet velvet dresses with gold buttons for the occasion.

Mama was crying as her carriage pulled up outside, no doubt thinking that she will never come here again with him at her side. It could be worse though. Amalia told me last night about one of our Spanish ancestresses, who was called Johanna the Mad. Apparently she was so distraught about the death of her handsome husband, the Duke of Burgundy that she went quite insane, refused to have him buried and insisted upon taking his corpse with her wherever she went. How very strange. 'And just thank your lucky stars that Mama isn't doing the same thing,' Amalia whispered with a wink. 'I am sure that she has thought about it quite often.' I found it very difficult to sleep after that.

'Everything must be endured anew,' Mama remarked to Elizabeth and Marianna as she swept into the wood paneled entrance hall with her pugs and spaniels all tumbling and wriggling excitedly at her heels, meaning I suppose that she must get on with life and that each thing she does without Papa is its own little milestone. I think again of Johanna the Mad and shudder. It could always be worse.

I am glad though as I was scared that we would never come to Laxenburg again and that would have been a shame as it is so lovely here. Our rooms are high up in the building and my bedroom here has a pretty *trompe l'oeil* fresco of lattice work, trees, flowers and birds painted all around the walls so that I can lie in bed at night and imagine that I am in the most wonderful garden. My room was decorated as a special treat when I was much younger and recovering from the smallpox. Mama has since offered to have it redecorated in a more 'grown up' style but I refuse to allow it because I still love my garden room and have beautiful dreams whenever I sleep in it.

I wish that Papa were here though. I remember him teaching me how to ride in the park here at Laxenburg. He himself led me by the bridle until I was proficient enough to be allowed to ride alone at his side on my little white pony. How I loved those crisp, sweetly scented Summer mornings spent trotting slowly underneath the trees of the Laxenburg forest beside my dearest Papa.

Tuesday, 5th August, I am supposed to be working on my French.

Leopold's wife is already expecting a baby! I am going to be an aunt again, which is rather thrilling.

Joseph was rather less impressed by the news and looked like he was going to be sick. In the end he went for a very long walk in the rain instead and came back looking very grumpy and with a ruined hat.

I feel sorry for Josephina, who looks even more pale and unhappy now, if such a thing is possible.

Wednesday, 13th August.

Carolina's birthday. We were all extremely jealous of the exquisitely dressed doll that arrived all the way from her godfather in France. A tiny note in her pink silk reticule informed us that she is dressed exactly like one of the Queen's ladies in waiting at Versailles. Carolina considers herself to be too old for dolls now but even she was rendered speechless as she stared at the doll's magnificence and it now has pride of place in her bedroom.

I came upon Mama and Josephina walking together in one of the arbours in the gardens and immediately sprang back and pressed myself against the hedge so that I would not be seen by either of them. It is not my practice to eavesdrop on my family – I leave that sort of thing to Carolina, who seems to be more adept at it than I and never seems to get caught.

'I try and try but nothing happens,' Josephina was saying. It sounded like she had been crying. 'He does not wish to be near me. I have given up all hope.'

'Try harder,' came Mama's voice, sounding colder than I had ever heard her before. 'Joseph must have a son. Austria must have an heir. The *empire* must have a heir.'

'It is not my fault!' Poor Josephina sounded quite distraught. 'I am trying my

best so it *cannot* be my fault.'

'There is the Archduchess Theresia,' Mama pointed out, and I heard her black silk skirts swish angrily as she spoke. 'It cannot be Joseph's fault as he has already fathered one child and we have no such problems in *our* family. Therefore the blame must lie with you.'

Josephina began to noisily cry and I could not bear to hear any more, so I silently tiptoed back the way that I had come.

Monday, 15th September, a rainy evening.

It was I who put salt in the Countess Brandeis' hot chocolate. I am very sorry.

Sunday, 2nd November, the Hofburg.

Happy birthday to me. I am now eleven years old which amounts to four thousand and eighteen days or five hundred and forty two weeks. Imagine that. Five hundred and forty two weeks of being me. How very dull.

No beautiful dolls for me from my godfather, the King of Portugal, only an illustrated book of psalms. I wish that Carolina and I could swap. Not that she would rather have a book of psalms, you understand.

Sunday, 30th November, St Andrew's night and the first Sunday of Advent.

Christmas has come so quickly this year, I can hardly believe that it is here again.

Tonight, after dinner, Josepha lit the first candle on the *Adventkrantz* and we all sang carols again as outside the snow swirled through the air and settled on the stone windowsills. Joseph was in a very good mood and made us all a special spiced punch, which made me feel very warm inside and rather jolly. I danced with Ferdinand and Maximilian and also with one of the Swiss guards while Joseph took Josepha's hands and spun her, laughing madly, around the room while the footmen and ladies in waiting all laughed and clapped their hands.

I asked the *Christkindl* for a puppy and also that Amalia be allowed to marry Karl.

One of Carolina's maids, Klara offered to share some of the special fortune

telling rituals from her village with us. I was wary at first, remembering what a disaster St Thomas' Eve was but Amalia was enthusiastic about the idea and promised that if it was as horrible as last time she would put a stop to it.

'Although, you do know that it is all just harmless fun don't you, Antonia?' she asked, looking unusually serious just for a moment. 'It doesn't mean anything at all.'

I tried to shrug nonchalantly. 'Oh, I know that. Yes.'

In the end it wasn't so bad although Josepha decided not to take part. Klara had told Carolina to write as many male names as she could think of on pieces of paper and then place them carefully around the edges of a bowl of water, which had a candle stump floating in it. 'The first name to start to burn will be the name of your future husband,' she said with a wide grin. 'It never fails.'

Amalia went first and we all watched with bated breath as the candle bobbed around the bowl, looking at one moment as though it would burn a piece of paper before suddenly floating away again until finally it singed the very edge of one of them.

Amalia fished it out. 'Urgh, Ferdinand! I hope he isn't as annoying as our brother, Ferdinand!'

Carolina was next: 'Oh drat, Ferdinand again! Maybe it is the same one and we will end up sharing him?' she joked to Amalia, who burst out laughing.

'I do not think that Catholic princes are in such short supply as all that!' she said. 'Mama would be quite undone if that was the case.'

I went up to the bowl and watched as the candle floated this way and that, illuminating the names on the pieces of paper: Henry, Rupert, Fritz, Karl, George, Ludwig, Maximilian, Wolfgang, Augustus, Joseph. 'Oh, please let me not get Wolfgang,' I silently prayed as I watched the candle come perilously close. I did not think I could bear any more teasing about poor Wolferl Mozart and his alleged fancy for me.

'Aha!' One of the pieces of paper began to slowly burn and Amalia swiftly plucked it out of the water and held it between her fingertips so that she could read it. 'Ludwig!' she announced with a flourish. 'Oh dear. I was hoping for

Wolfgang.' She winked. 'Poor Wolferl will be quite heartbroken when he hears that you are not his little *fiancée* after all.'

Saturday, 20th December, I hate learning Italian verbs.

Snow! Amalia, Carolina and I all went sledging yesterday evening at Schönbrunn, which was just the most delightful thing imaginable. The gardens were lit up with hundreds of torches and the whole scene was quite magical as the light flickered across the yellow brick of the palace, the glittering, snow covered gardens and the icicle covered statues, which seemed to shiver and tremble in the torchlight. I wore my new fur lined blue velvet coat with matching gloves and big fur hat. One of Joseph's friends said that I looked just like a snow princess out of a fairy tale, which made me feel even more warm inside. Finally, some compliments!

Karl of Zweibrücken was there as well. He and Amalia skated together on the pond, while Joseph watched them with the most ferocious scowl on his face. He and Amalia had a row later on and are still not on speaking terms. She called him a 'bullying prig' and he went very red and looked like he wanted to slap her.

Poor Amalia. Her rooms are next to mine and I can hear her weeping. Perhaps I should go to her.

Chapter Three

1767

Thursday, 1st January, 1767, early in the morning, there is snow falling against the window.

I hope that this year will be better than the last.

Monday, 16th February, more snow.

There was a huge row between Joseph and Amalia after dinner tonight as we all sat together, sewing in the blue and white drawing room as Marianna read aloud to us. It exploded out of nowhere and she called him despotic and threatened to run away with Karl, to which he merely laughed as though her threats were just so much hot air and of no importance at all. I hate it when Joseph does that. It makes one feel so very stupid.

It did not help matters that Christina was present and very obviously with child. She already looks enormous, even though the baby is not due until May. Mama fussed over her a great deal, which was annoying. It is as if no one on earth has ever had a baby before. Honestly. One would think that Mama of all people would know better.

Carolina and I sang together after all of this, while Marianna accompanied us on the harpsichord and we were much applauded. They can say what they like about my grammar and spelling (and believe me they do) but Herr Gluck has taught me well and my singing is faultless. Perhaps I should run away as well and become an opera singer.

Saturday, 21st February.

Herr Gluck looked rather alarmed when I asked him if he thought I could become a professional opera singer.

Monday, 16th March, Schönbrunn, this is much better than reading some boring book.

The King of Spain's ambassador has made a formal offer for the hand of Josepha! She is to marry the King's son Ferdinand, who is the King of Naples. Mama is beside herself with happiness at this great coup and can hardly stop

smiling and rubbing her plump, white hands together with glee.

Josepha is less happy and has been crying ever since being informed of her 'great good fortune' as Mama calls it. 'Naples is far away and I do not think I will ever see home again,' she said sadly as we sat together in the grass by Papa's menagerie, she was hugging her knees with her arms and hiding her wet face in the folds of her pink velvet skirt, while her little dog sat beside her with his head to one side, not understanding why his mistress was so sad. 'I do not want to marry someone that I have never even seen.'

'But you will be a Queen,' I pointed out, not really knowing what to say for the best. 'And you will be able to do whatever you like! Just think of that!' I could not help but be a little envious.

'There is no such thing as a free meal,' Josepha said miserably, wiping her cheeks with a lace edged kerchief. 'The King of Naples is said to be ugly and stupid and I am going to have to let him touch me and do whatever he likes in exchange for my freedom.'

'That doesn't sound very much like freedom to me.' I awkwardly hugged her and we fell silent, listening to the cawing of the huge, brightly coloured parrots as they flew around the trees in their enclosure. They too have the illusion but not the reality of liberty.

Monday, 23rd March.

While we were at our prayers just now, Carolina told me that Mama had originally offered Amalia to the King of Spain for his son but that the offer had been rejected because he considered Amalia to be too old. Ferdinand of Naples is six years her junior.

'Amalia will be furious if she finds out,' Carolina whispered as she crossed herself and then gracefully stood up, sighing as she rubbed the chill of the cold chapel stones from her knees. 'She is still talking about running away if they don't let her marry Karl.'

Wednesday, 15th April, pretending to work on my Italian again.

Mama called us all into the darkly gloomy black and crimson lacquer cabinet next to her bedchamber, which is always a terrible ordeal as she claims not to feel the slightest bit of cold and so likes to have all of her windows wide open

with the red and gold silk curtains blowing wildly inwards, no matter what the season or weather. Amalia, Carolina and I all feel the cold terribly and so we always snatch up our fur lined cloaks and wrap ourselves up warmly when we are called into Mama's presence. We stood in a shivering huddle and listened in silence as Mama proudly announced that Josepha will be departing for Naples on the fifteenth of October. So soon. We can hardly believe that we have only a few months left before she leaves us, possibly forever. Princess brides never seem to go home again.

Josepha almost fainted and Joseph had to carry her to the drawing room next door, sit her down next to the huge white stove in the corner and fan her until she revived again.

Carolina and I looked in one of Joseph's huge leather bound map books to see where Naples is. It must be hundreds of thousands of miles away. Josepha will have to travel south through Austria and most of Italy to get there. She will be able to visit Leopold in Florence; he has taken up residence there with his ugly wife now that he has inherited Papa's title of Grand Duke of Tuscany.

'Poor Josepha,' Carolina whispered with a stricken look.

Thursday, 23rd April, after dinner.

Herr Van Meytens has started painting a new portrait of me, which is very tiresome indeed as it means having to sit still and look solemn, neither of which are activities that I much enjoy. Mama likes to fill her palaces with portraits of her children although Joseph says that there is hardly any point as we all look much the same, a remark that never fails to make Elizabeth slap him with her painted fan as of course she believes she is a cut above the rest of us. I privately agree with Joseph though – we all have the same big blue eyes, pink cheeks, pouting lips and high foreheads and really there isn't much difference between us.

Mama requested that I wear my very best dress for the painting and so I duly sit for hours at a time bedecked in heavy blue brocade and lace, with a pearl and lace choker around my throat and some rather pretty diamonds in my stiffly powdered and pomaded hair. There is an ermine cape as well, which I lean one stiff and aching arm on while relishing the luxurious softness of the fur.

When my sitting has finished, I slip from my pink velvet upholstered chair and

go to have a look at the painting, which smells heavily and revoltingly of oil paints. Oddly, I look simultaneously awkward and coquettish, with a half smile on impossibly red lips and rather too much rouge. Only my hands show my age and are pink and chubby with extreme youth.

'You look charming, Antonia,' Carolina said with a squeeze of my arm. Meytens has just finished his portrait of her and she looks exactly the same as I do – pale and pouting in heavy blue brocade and lace. Carolina adores her portrait because, unlike me, she actually wants to look older than she really is.

'I do not look like myself at all,' I replied, frowning. 'I do not look like a child any more.' You would not guess from this portrait that I still like to play with dolls. I imagine that Mama will absolutely love it.

Sunday, 17th May, late.

A messenger arrived with the news that Christina's pains have begun! Mama was beside herself and immediately ordered that a carriage be prepared so that she can rush off to Pressburg to be at our sister's side.

Elizabeth is to go with her, which is she not happy about as she is not fond of sick beds and babies. I would happily have accompanied her, as I love babies, but I was not asked. I am too young probably.

Saturday, 23rd May.

Mama and Elizabeth have returned, both dressed in black and looking exhausted and so very sad. Christina's baby girl died after just one day and then Christina herself became very feverish and they thought that she would die as well. Mama sat at her bedside with Prince Albert for two whole days before finally Christina recognised them both and showed signs of recovery.

'It was truly terrible.' Elizabeth was still in shock, and barely touched the cup of reviving hot chocolate that Joseph brought to her with his own hands. 'I have never seen anyone look so very ill. We really thought that we were going to lose her.'

I reach out and take her hand, which is icy cold. 'I am sorry about the little baby,' I say. How horrible it must have been for Christina to lose her little girl so soon after birth. I cannot stop crying when I think of it.

Mama has gone to her freezing cold rooms and shut herself in again with the curtains drawn, just as she did after father's death. Everyone tiptoes around the palace with frightened expressions on their faces. It is as though they fear to wake an ogre.

Monday, 25th May.

Josephina complained of a terrible headache and then fainted while she was walking in the gardens. She had to be carried in to her rooms by one of the Swiss guards. Everyone hopes that it is just a migraine and nothing serious like measles or, worse, smallpox.

'Women sometimes have headaches and faint when they are in an interesting situation,' Carolina whispered to me during evening prayers. 'Perhaps Joseph is going to have another baby.'

I closed my eyes and prayed very hard that it could be so.

Tuesday, 26th May.

Smallpox! We are all to leave for Laxenburg immediately!

Later, 26th May, Laxenburg.

Josephina is apparently terribly ill and the court physicians do not expect her to survive. Mama packed us all off to Laxenburg straight away and only she, Joseph and Elizabeth remain in Vienna to watch over Josephina's sick bed. Elizabeth is resigned to this, although she must have had enough of sick beds by now.

Josepha is very much affected by all of this as she is terrified of smallpox. She keeps saying that it is just like the week when Johanna died, but of course I do not remember.

Friday, 29th May.

Josephina died last night on Ascension day. No one but me seems very sad about this. I have been to the cold, empty chapel to pray for her soul and to ask forgiveness for not having been more kind to her while she was alive.

Poor Joseph is a widower for the second time and once again we are having to get out our mourning clothes. It is not so long ago that we put them aside after Papa's death. They smell of the spicy rosemary and lavender sachets that the

maids put between the folds of cloth to deter moths. The scent of mourning.

Monday, 1st June.

Joseph has sent word that Elizabeth has fallen ill as well. We have all been to the chapel to pray for her. I knelt on the cool marble floor and remembered how pale and tired she had looked in her black silk dress upon her return from Christina's childbed. Is she well enough to pull through this?

Carolina says that she heard two of the maids talking about Elizabeth's illness and how she screamed: 'Not my face! Please not my face! Anything but that!' and had to be restrained and given opium when the physicians told her that she had caught smallpox.

I don't think that I believe her. It can't be true. Can it?

Wednesday, 3rd June.

Mama too.

Josepha is distraught with fear. I must go to her.

Sunday, 14th June.

It is all over. Both Mama and Elizabeth have come through the worst and are almost recovered. The whole country is celebrating the news and I can hear the constant, joyous ringing of church bells in the distance as I write this.

Mama became so ill that at one point she was despaired of and they administered the Last Sacrament to prepare her for death. It hardly seems possible. We have always regarded Mama as entirely invincible, immortal even and yet she was brought so low that we almost lost her.

Elizabeth was also believed to be on the brink of certain death but soon rallied and recovered. Joseph has written to tell us that she is terribly scarred though and that her face is quite destroyed by the smallpox. Lovely Elizabeth, the most beautiful of us all. It is so unfair.

Yesterday was my name day but no one remembered except Carolina.

Thursday, 25th June, Schönbrunn.

Poor Elizabeth. She was always so proud of her looks. We all assembled in the yellow drawing room, which is dominated by a huge portrait of Mama dressed in gold and silver brocade and waited for her to make her first appearance since her illness. She finally arrived, looking much smaller and thinner than I remembered and leaning very heavily on Joseph's arm. She had covered her face with a thick black veil, and we all held our breath as she put her hands to it and then slowly raised it up over her head.

Joseph had prepared us for the very worst and told Carolina and me that on no account were we to stare, recoil or appear to be the slightest bit revolted by our sister's appearance on pain of being sent immediately to our rooms and soundly punished. I am glad to be able to say, however, that Elizabeth is not so hideously changed as I had been anticipating but still, she is very badly scarred and all of her beauty is quite gone.

There was a long silence as none of us knew what to say. What *can* one say at such a time? Elizabeth began to tremble and one solitary tear snaked down her ravaged cheek. 'I know that I look repulsive,' she whispered, picking up her little spaniel and hugging it to her breast, hiding her face in its black and white fur as the animal whimpered and licked her red, scarred cheeks.

'No, no,' Amalia was the first to come forward and embrace her. 'You are not at all hideous, Lottie. Yes, your face is different now but it is not nearly so bad as it could have been.' She lifted her hands to her lips and kissed them. 'You are still our beautiful Lottie.'

'I will never be married now,' Elizabeth said with a rueful smile. 'I wonder what will become of me?'

Joseph coughed. 'Let that be my concern,' he said with a reassuring smile. It is true though; Elizabeth's marital prospects are in ruins now and it would almost certainly be impossible to find her a husband. No one expects the bride in a diplomatic marriage to be stunningly beautiful but at the same time, a badly pockmarked one would be seen as a very bad bargain indeed.

'That leaves only Josepha, Amalia, me and you now,' Carolina whispered in my ear. 'Marianna doesn't count of course.' Our eldest sister Marianna is lame and often sickly and it has always been understood that she will never be married but will instead remain in Vienna with Mama. She is almost thirty now and the

cleverest of us all and both Carolina and I are rather afraid of her, although she is much kinder than Christina and likes to spoil us both with gingerbread cakes and marzipan sweets whenever we see her.

Josepha is promised to Naples, which means that they want to send one of us to Parma and another to France. I am too young to be sent anywhere yet of course but the King of France is Carolina's godfather so perhaps she will be the one to go?

France. Imagine that.

Tuesday, 14th July, I am supposed to be working on my French.

Josepha is so lucky. The preparations are now well under way for her departure to Naples and she has spent the whole morning with the most fashionable dressmakers in Vienna, who are working on her trousseau. Carolina and I crept in to her drawing room, which was full of chattering, splendidly outfitted dressmakers and hairdressers all fussing around her and asking her to turn this way and that as she was being fitted into the most beautiful pink and gold thread ball gown with lace at the bosom and elbows and several flounces at the hem. I would have been thrilled to wear such a lovely dress but Josepha looked like she was going to burst into tears.

'I wish that it was me,' Carolina muttered under her breath, staring at all the dozens of beautiful silk, brocade and velvet gowns in delicious pastel shades of pink, blue, yellow and green draped about the room in a state of the most luxurious disorder.

Thursday, 6th August, late at night.

More sharp words tonight after we returned from the theatre in Vienna. Amalia called Joseph an imbecile and told him that she hated him and envied his wives the good fortune to have died and thus been able to escape his endless nagging.

Joseph said nothing but merely shrugged and left the room. He was heard calling and whistling for his dogs and has probably gone for another one of his long walks in the palace grounds. He likes to go and look at the giraffes that live in an enclosure in Papa's menagerie as he claims to find them 'restful'. At least it isn't raining tonight.

'You must learn to hold your tongue, Amalia,' Elizabeth hissed from behind her veil, which she is still wearing, saying that she can't bear to catch a glimpse of herself in the dozens of mirrors that hang in the palace. 'Antagonising Joseph is hardly the way to make him look with favour on your match with Karl.' She helped herself to a violet chocolate from a Sèvres china bowl on the table next to her. 'You are fortunate that Mama was not here to hear your outburst.'

'Why should I care?' Amalia said with a shrug, pretending to look unconcerned when actually she was trembling with emotion. 'It is no more than he deserved.'

Wednesday, 12th August, evening.

It was I who put a grasshopper down the back of Countess Brandeis' dress during the concert. I am not sorry.

Friday, 14th August, afternoon.

Disaster! Mama came to our classroom just now, without any warning whatsoever. If she had only come in half an hour earlier then everything would have been fine and we would have seemed like the best behaved girls in the entire empire but unfortunately she chose to make her entrance at the precise moment that Carolina stuck her tongue out at Countess Brandeis, while I giggled encouragingly.

'Oh no!' Carolina's involuntary cry rang out in the sudden and awful hush that fell upon the room.

'Oh no indeed.' Mama swept inside, carrying her favourite pug in the crook of her arm and looking at us both with that particular mixture of disapproval and exasperation that we know so well as she sat down heavily behind the Countess' wooden, book strewn desk. 'I am ashamed of you both and of you in particular Carolina for not only behaving so monstrously towards the Countess but also for setting such a dismal example for your little sister.'

'I am very sorry, Mama.' Carolina hung her head low. 'I will try harder in future.'

Mama sighed and spread out her white, soft hands, which had once gleamed with diamonds and richly coloured jewels but which now bore only her plain gold wedding ring and heavy ruby coronation ring. 'I am not so sure that there will be a future.' We both stared at her open mouthed, not knowing what she

meant. 'I am considering separating you both so that you will live and have your lessons apart.'

'No, Mama! Oh no!' Carolina took my hand and squeezed it tightly as I gulped back my tears. 'You cannot separate us! It would be very unkind indeed!' I stared at my sister, torn between admiration for her great courage and also horror that she should speak to Mama in such a way. 'Please, we will try harder to be good in future, only please do not make us live apart!'

'I do not know if that will be possible, Carolina,' Mama replied. To my great surprise, she did not seem at all angry with Carolina but instead addressed her calmly as she might have done Josepha or Amalia. 'I do not at all approve of your wayward behaviour both in the school room or within the court. I do not like the way that you make fun of the ladies of the court and am especially displeased to learn that you have fallen into the habit of hiding behind doors in order to eavesdrop on private conversations that are no concern of yours.' Carolina blushed bright red at this. 'The archduchesses of Austria must be above idle gossip,' Mama continued with a very severe look at us both. 'The archduchesses of Austria must never, ever forget that they exist on a public stage at all times and that all eyes are upon them.'

'Yes, Mama,' we both chorused. We had heard it many times before. Archduchesses of Austria must not run like hoydens at state ceremonies. Archduchesses of Austria must not slurp their soup. Archduchesses of Austria must always be happy, gracious, kind and wise. Archduchesses of Austria must never be seen to fail.

'You are obliged to obey me in all things and you will obey me now,' Mama said, still looking at us both unsmilingly. 'Never, ever forget that your destiny is to further the interests of the Hapsburg dynasty and of our country. You may not find your lessons interesting or realise why it is important to behave properly and with decorum at all times but one day you will find yourself on an even greater stage than Vienna, acting as ambassadress for our family at foreign courts which may be hostile to us and where such matters will be judged.' She leaned forward then. 'Never forget that if you are judged and found to be wanting, then Austria also is found wanting. It is a great and awful responsibility that you bear.'

Carolina looked thoroughly crushed. 'I am sorry, Mama,' she whispered. 'I

really will try harder from now on.'

Mama smiled then. 'I sincerely hope so.' She rose from the chair and nodded in a friendly way at the Countess. 'I have great hopes for both of you.' Frustratingly, she did not tell us what those hopes were but there was just one thought in both our minds at that moment: France.

'And are we to be separated?' Carolina asked in a shaking voice as Mama prepared to leave us again. I was leaning against the wall, feeling weak and shaky as I always do after an interview with our energetic and formidable mother.

'We shall see but for now you may remain as you are.'

Friday, 28th August, the Hofburg.

Amalia and Joseph have reached an understanding of sorts. Carolina and I were playing hide and seek in the yellow and white drawing room that lies next to Mama's bedchamber when Amalia and Joseph came in, rowing as usual about Karl. Carolina and I opened our eyes very wide at each other and swiftly slipped behind a large painted Chinese screen providentially placed in the corner of the room. There was a silence broken by the sound of soft weeping and then we heard Joseph telling Amalia that he would give anything to spare her the same sorrow that he himself has suffered as a result of being forced into a marriage that he did not want.

'Then why can you not arrange for me to be married to Karl?' Amalia asked him.

'You know that it is not so simple as all that.'

'Of course it is simple!' Amalia pursued and I could just imagine her expression as she said this; her eyes wide and bright and the colour rich and high upon her cheekbones just as she always looked when she was arguing with someone. 'Simply tell Mama that you order it and then it will be done.'

'Amalia, Amalia.' We could hear Joseph's steps as he paced the room and I sensed that he was shaking his head. 'You know that it is not as easy as all that.'

'For God's sake, Joseph!' Amalia was crying again now. 'You are the Emperor

here now! Is there no way that you can make Mama see reason? Christina was allowed to marry whoever she pleased so why cannot I?

'Ah, Christina.' Joseph's voice was flat and he stopped pacing. 'I wondered how long it would be before we came to her.'

'You must admit that it is entirely unfair,' Amalia said. I peeped around the screen and saw that she had her back to us and was leaning against the cream marble mantelpiece, staring at herself in the large mirror placed above it. Joseph went to her and placed his hands gently on her shoulders.

'I wish you would believe me when I say that I wish it was in my power to help you,' he said sadly.

Wednesday, 23rd September, late at night, it is cold and my teeth are chattering.

Mama has decided that Josepha is too frivolous and worldly and has ordered her to spend the night with her in prayer at the tomb of poor, dead Josephina in the *Kapuzinergruft* before she is married and leaves for Naples. Apparently she thinks this will make her think more about her immortal soul and less about the lovely dresses and dozens of pairs of shoes that she has acquired lately.

Joseph is furious (we all suspect that Josepha is his favourite) but can do nothing to change Mama's mind. Even Christina has asked her to reconsider her decision but she remains adamant.

Josepha hasn't stopped crying since she was told and is beside herself with fear. 'I can't bear it,' she keeps saying over and over. 'I can't go there. I will die if they make me do it.'

'I am glad it isn't me,' Carolina whispered under cover of Herr Gluck playing the harpsichord to us all after dinner. 'I would go mad if I had to stay in that spooky crypt with Mama talking to father all night.'

'Do you think she will make us all do it before we leave?' I said, casting a furtive, frightened glance at Mama, who was sitting at the front, nodding her head appreciatively to the music.

Carolina gave a shudder. 'I hope not.' She looks at me with wide open eyes.

'Imagine the horror.'

I don't want to. Poor Josepha.

Wednesday, 7th October, a cold night.

Mama and Josepha left after dinner, which was a very sad, silent meal. Mama seemed not at all perturbed by the prospect of a night spent praying amongst the gloomy remains of our ancestors and ate her dumpling soup and roast chicken and *apfelstrudel* with relish but Josepha was unable to eat a single morsel and cried silently until we all got up and went into the Yellow drawing room.

'Come now, child, it is not so bad as all that,' Mama said impatiently when she noticed Josepha's pale face and sore, red rimmed eyes. 'I am disappointed in you. This is not how an archduchess of Austria behaves.'

Mama's disappointment is a terrible thing (worse than her wrath even) and so accordingly Josepha wiped her wet cheeks, straightened her shoulders and pretended to smile as she handed her pug dog to Amalia then donned her black velvet cloak, hugged each one of us in turn and said goodbye.

'I wish to God that I could prevent this,' Joseph murmured into her fair hair as they embraced. 'I shall not rest until I have you here with me again in the morning.' He sighed deeply and looked like he was blinking back tears. 'I am so sorry, little one.'

'Dearest brother,' Josepha smiled up at him with a bravery that would surely have impressed Mama had she only noticed it. 'I do not blame you at all.'

She turned to me next and I clung to her, trying hard not to cry as she gently stroked my hair and kissed my forehead. 'Oh, Josepha, I wish that I could go with you!' I really did wish it as well, I am not very brave but my sister looked so frightened that I think I would have done anything to make her feel better.

She smiled through her tears and gave me another kiss. 'Pretty little Antonia, I am afraid that I am leaving you forever.' She looked so sad that I really did start to cry then, thinking how horrible it would be if Josepha really didn't come back.

Amalia gave a snort of laughter. 'Oh, Josepha, if the King of Naples decides that he doesn't want you after all then I am sure you could have a wonderful

career on the stage instead.'

Thursday, 8th October, morning.

They are back. Carolina and I were looking out for them from my bedchamber window which overlooks the street when Mama's black and gold carriage rattled across the cobbles and came to a shuddering halt in front of the palace. A footman came forward and released the steps with a clatter and Mama descended first, standing still for a moment to breathe deeply and look about her (we hid behind my heavy pink brocade curtains at this point) before stepping aside so that the footman could help Josepha down.

'There she is!' Carolina cried, relieved to see our sister again. 'I knew it would be alright really!' But as we watched, Josepha crumpled to the ground in a dead faint, her long black cloak fanning out and covering the ground.

'No, oh no.' Carolina was aghast. We watched in silence as our brother Joseph picked her up in his arms as if she weighed no more than a sparrow and then carried her into the palace with Mama hurrying behind him, her face pale and anxious.

'Maybe she is just tired?' I said hopefully, but not really believing it. 'She will be better when she has had some sleep.'

'Come on.' Carolina, always the brave one, took my hand and we crept down the dark corridor to Josepha's apartment. Her cosy little lilac painted drawing room with its mess of books, sheets of music and unfinished sketches was totally deserted and so we tiptoed to her bedroom door, which was slightly ajar and peered inside. Josepha was lying on top of the pink embroidered silk coverlet on her bed. She looked frighteningly pale, except for a deep and hectic red flush on her cheeks and was turning her head restlessly from one side to the other on the pillow. A court physician dressed from head to toe in rusty black was bending over her while Mama and Joseph sat on either side of the canopied bed. Mama looked very old and tired and was wiping Josepha's forehead and cheeks with a cloth soaked in lavender water while Joseph sat with his head in his hands, his shoulders shaking with silent sobs.

'Is it...?' I started to whisper, but Carolina immediately put her hand over my mouth and shushed me.

'Don't say it,' she hissed, her blue eyes filling with tears. 'If you don't say it then it won't come true.'

Friday, 9th October, the coach to Laxenburg.

It is smallpox. Again. One would think that it had had enough of our family by now, but apparently not. We have all been banished to Laxenburg until all is over. I asked Joseph if I could stay, reminding him that I have already had smallpox and am therefore immune from infection but he would not listen and so here I am, uncomfortably sandwiched in between Amalia and Carolina (who are both asleep and snoring softly), with little Theresia asleep on my lap and a warm, snoozing pile of pugs and spaniels at my feet, watching mud flying against the closed window and longing to be back in Vienna again.

Bump. Bump. Bump. I cannot write any more.

Thursday, 15th October.

Josepha has gone forever.

Saturday, 17th October, a wet afternoon.

I can't stop thinking about Josepha. She should have been married and on her way to Naples by now but instead she is lying dead in the crypt of the *Kapuzinergruft*. It is so unfair. They expected her to survive the infection and so some of the wedding celebrations carried on anyway but then on the very morning that she should have been getting into her new grey and gold coach and driving off to her husband she had become terribly hot and feverish and then quickly died soon afterwards.

'There was no struggle and no distress,' Joseph told us when he came to Laxenburg to break the terrible news. He was dressed in heavy black and his eyes red and raw from weeping. 'She slipped away from us peacefully.' I think that he is lying.

So much death. I lie awake in bed at night wondering who will be snatched away from us next.

'If Mama had not forced that poor child down into that ghastly crypt then none of this would have happened,' Amalia observed earlier today as we all sat together in our plain black silk mourning dresses, embroidering tiny shirts for Leopold's baby (he and his ugly wife had a daughter in January and now they are expecting another child, much to Mama's delight) in her yellow paneled

bedchamber, which is deliciously cosy and smells of lilies and vanilla. 'It is entirely her fault.'

Carolina and I exchanged looks but said nothing. Amalia has become very outspoken since Christina got married and went away from court. We pretend to be shocked of course but secretly we love it as no one else in the family dares to say the things that Amalia does.

'And now I suppose they will be deciding which one of us to send to Naples instead,' Amalia continued, ignoring her little gold handled scissors and angrily biting the end off her white silken thread.

Carolina and I stopped sewing and exchanged another look, this time of pure horror. Of course. Of *course*. We had been so upset about Josepha's death that it had not occurred to us that Mama and Joseph would have to send another one of us to Naples in our sister's place. Maria Amalia has already been dismissed as too old for his son by the King of Spain, which leaves only Carolina and me to make the long, long journey south. I feel sick just thinking about it.

'It is too soon,' Carolina stammered, wide eyed with dread. 'Josepha has only just died. They can't possibly be thinking of another marriage already.'

Amalia laughed and picked up her embroidery again. 'Do not be fooled, Carlotta,' she said, not unkindly. 'Mama, Joseph and the King of Spain will already have sorted it all out between them. Mark my words.'

Monday, 19th October, afternoon.

We have returned from Josepha's funeral. It was really horrible to walk into the church and see her small coffin lying just in front of us, underneath its pall of heavy purple velvet while all around us the voices of the choristers swirled and moaned in the chill, incense scented air. It was awful and yet strangely beautiful at the same time.

Mama walked ahead of us, head bowed, swathed in heavy black velvets and furs and leaning heavily on Joseph's arm. Behind her came Marianna, Amalia and Elizabeth, her face covered with black veils and probably counting her blessings as she surveyed Josepha's coffin in the centre of the church. Last of all there was Carolina, Theresia and me in matching black silk dresses with our eyes fixed demurely on the floor.

The courtiers watch us all closely. Waiting to see who is next. Next to die and next to wed. I blush beneath their scrutiny.

Thursday, 29th October, a bright morning.

I was woken up last night by Carolina climbing into my bed with me. Her feet were freezing and I instinctively jerked mine away.

'Are you awake, Antonia?' She whispered, her face very close to mine so that I could smell the cinnamon sweetness of her breath. 'Antonia?'

'Ssh! Yes!' I turned towards her and reluctantly opened my eyes. The heavy blue curtains were drawn and it was gloomy in the bedroom but I could make out her face and her expression, which was unusually sombre. 'What is wrong?'

I felt her shrug. 'I just wanted to come and give you a hug. Do you mind if I sleep here with you tonight?'

'No, of course not.' I reached out and gathered her to me, kissing her cheeks and rubbing her feet with my own, in an attempt to warm them. 'Are you sure that there isn't anything wrong?'

'I hope that they do not break us up,' my sister whispered, her voice muffled by my shoulder. 'What if one of us is really sent to Naples? I do not think that I could bear it if we were never to see each other again.'

'That won't happen,' I replied, giving her another kiss. 'We could visit each other and there are always letters.'

'Letters aren't the same,' Carolina said. 'And I can't count on getting any from you anyway.' I felt her grin in the darkness. She doesn't know about this book. Sometimes I think about telling her but then decide that it is too risky as she would instantly demand to see what I had written about her. Besides it is private and I like being able to say exactly what I like within these pages. It would all feel different if Carolina knew about it.

Monday, 2nd November, late, I should be in bed.

It is my birthday and I am now twelve years old. There was a small family party (we are still in mourning) and I had too much chocolate cake. Joseph

danced with me twice and said that I am the prettiest of all of his sisters. I hope that Elizabeth did not hear him.

Tuesday, 10th November, I am so angry.

Mama has decided that Countess Brandeis is too lenient with Carolina and me and now she is no longer our governess! Instead we have to put up with horrible Countess Lerchenfeld, who hates us and actually thinks that we should learn things. I was made to learn French verbs all afternoon until my head hurt and I started to cry. It was torture.

Carolina thinks that Mama must have found out that the Countess wrote my letters and essays in pencil and let me write over the top in ink in an attempt to deceive Mama. 'And you know how much Mama hates to be deceived,' she whispered as we sat together sewing beside the big white painted stove in our schoolroom. 'I think that the Countess is lucky not to have been sent away from court altogether as she must surely be in disgrace now.'

Oh poor Brandeis, I shall miss you so much.

Wednesday, 25th November, the Countess thinks I am working on my French while Amalia reads aloud.

A footman just came to ask for Carolina while we were sitting in the drawing room with Amalia, Theresia and Max. We are still in mourning clothes and the Countess Lerchenfeld watches us all closely to make sure that there is no suggestion of frivolity about our behaviour, thus Amalia reads from an improving book of sermons, while I work on my hated French and Carolina labours at embroidering a suitably dour passage from the Bible on her sampler. There was a small buzz of excitement when the footman entered to tell us that Joseph is here at Laxenburg and asking to see Carolina. I wonder what is happening. Could it be that she is to go to Naples after all? I hope not but then I do not want to go myself. It is all very unfair.

Amalia stopped reading and gave me a knowing look as our sister left the room but did not say anything. Max, however, is less discreet and asks us every few minutes if 'Carlotta is going away to be married'. I cannot bear it.

25th November, much later.

It was not long before Carolina returned to the drawing room. She looked very pale but there was something halting and stately about her walk and the tilt of

her chin that told us everything. 'My dearest girl!' Amalia put her book down and half rose from the sofa.

'I am to be Queen of Naples,' Carolina announced, pausing dramatically in the doorway. 'It is a great honour apparently.' She tried to smile but then her fragile facade shattered and she burst into tears. 'I do not want to leave home and never see Antonia again!' she sobbed as we all ran forward to hug her. 'I do not want to get married at all!'

Amalia sighed and kissed Carolina's forehead. 'Did Joseph say when you are to go?'

'Early next year. King of Spain is apparently impatient to see his son married as soon as possible.' She looked at me. 'Josepha's trousseau is to be adapted for me. Do you remember all of those dresses?' I nodded, remembering them very well and recalling also Carolina's jealous expression when we had come upon Josepha being measured up all those months ago. 'They will be mine now.'

'And the crypt?' I shivered, remembering Josepha's tears as she left us that night to go to the *Kapuzinergruft*. I have heard the servants telling each other that poor Josepha's coffin wasn't sealed properly and so the poisonous smallpox gasses had escaped and infected our sister as she innocently knelt beside the tomb and prayed. 'Will you have to go as well?'

Carolina shook her head. 'Joseph promised that I would not be made to do anything of the sort.' She gave a grim smile. 'You can be sure that it was the first thing that I asked about when he told me.'

Amalia laughed. 'Really? Before the dresses? I don't believe you!'

Sunday, 29th November, the first Sunday of Advent.

It is already that time of year again, but how sad we must seem in comparison to previous years. Amalia played the harpsichord while we sang the usual carols and Carolina lit the first candle of the *Adventkranz*, while we could not help but remember that it was Josepha who performed the same happy duty last year and then giggled and blushed rosily as Joseph danced her around the room.

Seeing my sad face, Amalia gave me a hug. 'It is all over now,' she whispered, kissing my cheek. 'We will never, ever forget her but she wouldn't want us to be

unhappy either.'

Later on Carolina and I crept downstairs to look at a portrait of Josepha and me together, which hangs in one of the many white and gold paneled drawing rooms. It was painted about four years ago and depicts Josepha as Diana and myself as Minerva, which is rather ironic when one thinks about it. I reached out and traced her face with my finger as Carolina held the candle stick close and sobbed into her red cashmere shawl.

Saturday, 12nd December, dusk, back at the Hofburg again.

It was I who hid a frog amongst the books on Countess Lerchenfeld's desk. I do not think that I have ever heard anyone scream so loudly or for so long. Was it worth it? I like to think so, yes.

Sunday, 27th December, the day is almost over.

Carolina is being made to work even harder at her Italian and a special tutor has been hired to give her extra lessons. She is furious about this but can do nothing but obey. The wedding is to be in April and Mama says that she must be fluent by the time she leaves for Naples.

Mama has also decreed that Carolina should now always wear her fair hair powdered and up all the time instead of loose about her shoulders or pulled back with a plain ribbon hair band like mine. She looks like a grown up young lady now and I feel all the more childish and left behind.

We looked Naples up in Joseph's map books again and Carolina burst into tears when she saw how far away it is from Vienna.

'I wish that you could come with me,' she whispered as I hugged her close.

'I will visit as often as I can,' I promised, meaning every word but knowing that it might never be permitted.

Chapter Four
1768

Friday, 1st January 1768, early in the morning.

I promise that I will be better behaved this year. Please, God, if you care for me at all, don't take any more of my family away from me.

Thursday, 14th January, so cold.

We all went sledging from the Hofburg to Schönbrunn today, which was enormous fun. Amalia, Carolina and I were dressed in matching white fur cloaks and hats and sat together in our horse drawn sledge with Theresia sitting in between us, our cheeks may have been chilled and reddened by the frost but we still grinning widely as we waved and blew kisses to the Viennese citizens who came out to see us pass and cheered in greeting. Most of the shouts and cheers were for Amalia as she is much loved in the capital, thanks to her regular appearances at the Viennese carnival balls.

Mama came out on to one of the Hofburg's stone balconies in order to watch us as we sped past in the snow and we saw that she had Monsieur de Dufort, the French ambassador with her. He looked very cold and uncomfortable and gave an embarrassed wave as we whizzed by. Poor man, Mama is forever parading us before him in the hopes that he will be overcome by our collective beauty. I know that he likes Amalia, because I have seen him staring at her across the table at court banquets and he always goes faintly red whenever she stops to talk to him. I am certain though that he disregards Carolina and me as mere children and does not admire us at all.

Friday, 15th January, I am late for a harp lesson but I have to write this down before I forget.

It is all around the court that when Amalia, Carolina and I went past in our sledge yesterday, Mama nudged Monsieur de Dufort and said: 'There goes the little wife'. Meaning ME.

Dufort did not reply but who cares? Mama intends that I shall be the one to go to Versailles and Mama's word is law throughout Europe. Yes, even in France.

Carolina looked very sour indeed when I told her about this. Even though she

is now promised to Naples, I think that secretly she hopes that King Louis will intercede and demand that she be sent to Versailles instead.

'After all, I *am* his goddaughter!' she reminded Amalia and me with a pout. 'I think it is very odd that he did not ask for me first.'

'Let us not forget that he has not asked for *either* of you,' Amalia replied with a laugh, pinching Carolina's rosy cheek.

Friday, 22nd January, late.

It snowed heavily today and I spent most of the afternoon sitting by my bedroom window, pretending to read but all of the time watching the fat white flakes spiraling lazily through the air and then settling on to the paved courtyard below.

Carolina has a cold, probably caught while we were ice skating at Schönbrunn last week, and so spent the day huddled beside the blazing fire in my bedroom, snuffling and coughing with a soft red blanket around her shoulders, a woolen cap on her head and thick socks on her feet. She looked ridiculous but I had not the heart to mock her even if she did annoy me by asking me to come away from the window every few minutes for fear that I would catch a cold as well. Such nonsense!

Thursday, 28th January.

I have a cold. It is not pleasant. Carolina has given me her wool hat and thick socks.

Sunday, 7th February, I do not like learning French, it makes my head hurt.

Two months now until Carolina goes away to Naples. She tells me daily that she will not go and that they can't make her and that she will run away and never be seen again but in front of Mama and Joseph she is meekness and compliancy personified with her downcast eyes, her pretty blushes and her 'yes Mama, no Mama'. I wish that she could tell them what is truly in her heart and have them listen. It will never happen of course; they need this alliance with Naples and Italy and so Carolina must obey them without question.

Obedience is not something that comes easily to my sister though.

The only consolation is that Carolina has not yet had time to fall in love with someone else, unlike Amalia.

Wednesday, 17th February, Ash Wednesday.

The Easter fast has begun again and everyone at court went to Mass this morning to be marked on the forehead with dark ash crosses, even Monsieur de Durfort who looks very embarrassed as usual and like he wishes he could rub it off with the back of his cloth of silver sleeve.

'Anyone would think he comes from a Protestant country and not France,' Carolina whispered to me as we watched the French ambassador examining himself nervously in one of the huge, gilded mirrors in the drawing room and delicately touching the dark cross on his forehead. 'I have heard that they are not as God fearing as they could be and are virtually atheists thanks to all of their wicked philosophers.' She grinned and nudged me. 'Mama will expect you to change all of that when you are their Queen.'

Thursday, 3rd March, evening. I am waiting to be called to dinner.

There was enormous excitement today in the schoolroom when Monsieur de Durfort himself came to pay us a visit. I had no idea that he was expected until I heard Countess Lerchenfeld's page announce him and looked up from my French translation to see him standing in the doorway, looking very red faced and ill at ease in a crimson velvet suit with silver lacings. It was not an appealing sight.

'Monsieur le Marquis!' The Countess was all smiles as she stepped forward to greet him but I could tell from the flush on her normally pale cheeks that all was not well. Could it have been that the Marquis was not expected at all? No, that was impossible. Ah wait, I looked down at my ink stained French book with all of its dozens of crossings out and corrections. Of course. He was too early. They could not possibly have wanted him to see for himself how terrible I am at French; it was likely that he was actually supposed to arrive twenty minutes later while I was safely ensconced in a harp lesson and could be counted upon to show off my talents, as I really am very good at playing the harp. Imagine the horror if he were to report back to Versailles just how much of a dunce I actually am. No, that would never do.

'Am I too early?' Monsieur de Durfort was pulling at his high muslin cravat, which was embroidered with tiny silver stars and moons and looking around for an escape route. 'I can always come back some other time.' He glanced briefly at

my book and his eyebrows rose a little. 'Is the Archduchess in the middle of a lesson?'

The Countess hesitated for a moment then gave a titter, which sounded false even to my ears and clearly deceived no one as Durfort was still staring at her with one raised eyebrow. 'Not at all, Monsieur le Marquis! Madame l'Archiduchesse is occupying her time before her harp lesson by correcting the work of her younger brother, Monsieur l'Archduc Maximilian. He is a very clumsy writer, as you can see.' Quick as a flash, she whisked the offending book away, while I hid my tell tale ink stained fingers beneath the table.

After he had gone, she sank down into her chair and began to fan herself with an Italian work book. 'You and your marriage will be the death of me,' she said with a glare.

Saturday, 12th March, late.

Monsieur de Durfort told Mama that I am very pretty but 'not pretty enough for Versailles'. My forehead is too high, my hair is too untidy, my teeth are too crooked, my dresses are not elegant enough and my French is too bad. Mama is reportedly furious with him, with my tutors and with me, or so Carolina said when she came to my room earlier to report all of this.

'She called Joseph to her rooms for a meeting about what is to be done,' Carolina whispered, her huge, blue eyes sparkling with excitement. I was already in bed and she climbed in beside me for warmth as I instinctively moved my toasty warm feet away from her freezing ones. 'Do you remember Wolferl Mozart telling us how ugly all of the French princesses are? Maybe that wasn't true after all?'

I considered this beneath my dignity and ignored it. 'Maybe they will get rid of the Countess Lerchenfeld!' I suggested hopefully, sitting up and hugging my knees underneath the heavy blue coverlet. I was hurt, of course, by Monsieur de Durfort's harsh words but my first concerns were more immediate.

Carolina shook her head. 'Oh, I heard Mama say that it was all the Countess Brandeis' fault for being so lenient with you in the past and that she should have put Lerchenfeld in charge long ago.'

'What then?' I felt cold and scared. 'Will the match with France be called off?'

Again, Carolina shook her head. 'No, never. Mama would rather die than lose the Dauphin as a son in law so calling off the match is just not an option.' She slipped from the bed and went to the door. 'At the very least you should get some new dresses out of this.'

And at the very worst?

Sunday, 3 April, Easter Day, Schönbrunn.

The Easter fast is finally over. We all went to church this morning to hear Mass and then returned to a special luncheon buffet of delicious treats, including all of the things that we have been missing the most. The first cake after the fast is over is always the most exquisite and Amalia and I grinned at each other as we drank delicious hot chocolate and filled our plates with spiced cinnamon biscuits, *vanillekipferl* and lovely little cakes.

'We will soon be as fat as grandmama was,' she whispered to me and I laughed. In her youth, our grandmother, the Empress Elisabeth, had been a famous beauty with chestnut hair and bright blue eyes but in later life, a reported over fondness for cakes, rich cheese sauces and marzipan chocolates had made her quite fat to the unconcealed dismay of her husband. I wished that I might have known her but she died before I was even born.

Tonight there is to be a grand banquet to mark the end of the fast and the beginning of Carolina's wedding festivities. The palace has been filled with frantic activity all day long, while the most mouthwatering aromas float up from the kitchens. Max is a great favourite with the royal cooks and crept down there earlier on with Ferdinand to steal some almond tarts and have a snoop around. They reported back that there are to be mountains of cakes and sweets and biscuits and ices in all sorts of flavours.

'I can hardly wait!' he cried, dancing around Amalia's cosy sitting room, where we were all sitting together after luncheon. 'I wonder when it will be my turn to get married and go away?' He fell against a table and knocked a beautiful blue porcelain vase to the floor, where it rolled underneath one of her black lacquered cabinets.

Amalia rolled her eyes. 'Soon, I hope.'

Monday, 4th April, early morning, I have just returned.

I feel fat and rather sick. The banquet was wonderful and I do not think that I have ever eaten so much in all of my life. Joseph gave me champagne. I do not think I like it very much but it made me feel happy and light headed in quite a pleasant way.

Carolina sat at the centre of the most important table, splendidly dressed in gold spangled pink silk and looking very small and pale and unhappy throughout. Amalia and I tried to make her laugh by flicking hard little bread pellets at her but to no avail. Even Joseph failed to make her laugh. Mama simply pretended not to notice and busied herself instead with the food, which was delicious and richly spiced, just as she likes it.

Ooh la la! The desserts! There was an immense cake decorated with gold marzipan cherubs, orange blossom flowers and the painted arms of Austria and Naples. Carolina looked as though she was about to burst into tears when a group of six tall page boys carried it out and placed it on a special table in the centre of the room before Joseph led her out in front of everyone and offered her his own ceremonial sword to cut it with.

'Just like a real bride,' I heard Elizabeth whisper with a titter behind her glittering fan to Amalia, who immediately shushed her.

Afterwards, Amalia and I went to the nursery to take our niece Theresia, who is too small to go to the state banquets, a plate of cakes and marzipan chocolates. I still fondly remember Amalia and Josepha doing the same for Carolina and me, when we were too young to be included in anything fun and it makes me feel very grown up to be the one who dispenses treats now.

'And one day you must do the same for a daughter of mine,' I made Theresia promise before giving her a kiss and a hug.

I had better go to bed as there is to be a ball tonight and I want to look my very best.

Monday, 4th April, later on.

I have had some sleep and feel considerably refreshed. My maid is just filling a bath tub that has been drawn close to the fire for my comfort, there is rose oil and rose petals to make the steaming water fragrant and also a special lily

scented soap all the way from Paris to wash with. My beautiful new blue silk gown is laid out on the bed in readiness, I have lovely new shoes with real diamonds on the buckles and Amalia's own hairdresser will be along later to put my hair up. I am so excited! It seems like so long since we had a proper ball here at Schönbrunn.

Everyone is in a fever of anticipation and the corridors, staircases and reception rooms are filled with swarms of liveried servants carrying orange trees from room to room, moving chairs, hanging floral garlands from the ceilings and preparing the thousands of candles that are required to light the long white, gold and crystal ball great gallery.

Tuesday, 5th April, late, I am so tired.

It was exactly as a ball should be. Amalia came to my rooms beforehand and together we went down the grand staircase, which was lined with dozens of fragrant orange trees, all standing proudly in their own glimmering, polished silver tubs. Amalia looked very beautiful in violet silk, heavily embroidered with gold and sprinkled with diamonds and I think that I looked my very best as well. Even Monsieur de Durfort looked appreciative as he bent over my proffered hand. It would be very easy for me to hate him for his unflattering remarks but even I can see that it would be most unwise to alienate a man upon whom my marriage depends. There will be time enough later on to resent him. Not pretty enough for Versailles indeed! I will show you, Durfort.

'You look quite delicious tonight, little Antonia,' Joseph whispered to me as Amalia and I walked, arm in arm, into the gallery. He took me by the hand and turned me so that I could see myself reflected in one of the huge, precious mirrors that line the room. I saw a very small, pretty girl in a pale blue silk dress with powdered hair, shining blue eyes and a rosy flush on her otherwise pale cheeks. 'You are adorable!' He fondly tweaked the ruffled blue silk ribbon around my neck, which matched my dress and dropped a kiss upon my hand.

'Our little sister is going to surpass us all soon,' Amalia agreed with him, smiling at me fondly. 'I should be quite chagrined at the prospect of losing all of my suitors to her.' She took my hand and unfurled her enormous ostrich feather fan, which had been dyed to match her dress. 'Come, let us go and slay hearts.'

Joseph reached out and placed a warning hand on Amalia's arm. 'Sister...'

A look passed between them and after a moment Amalia unwillingly nodded her head. 'Do not worry; I won't do anything to embarrass you.' We swept away into the gallery, passing through the great crowd of people that had gathered there in gorgeous new clothes and their finest diamonds. The air was heavy with the rich, voluptuous scents of hair powder, musky perfumes and the violet pastilles that almost everyone chews in order to sweeten their breath. I knew these people well, had seen them almost every day of my life and yet they all looked quite alien to me at that moment as their kohl rimmed eyes stared at Amalia and myself and they moved back and curtsied to let us through, their brightly coloured silk and brocade skirts rustling and their high heels tip tapping on the polished wooden parquet floor, which still smelt faintly of beeswax and lavender.

'It is the youngest girl,' I heard them whisper to each other behind their painted and gilded fans, as I pretended not to hear. 'The one who is to be Dauphine. How pretty she is.'

Amalia turned her head and gave me a slight smile. 'Awful isn't it?' she mouthed with an understanding wink. 'Oh la la, how they all like to stare.' She led me up to the carpeted dais at the far end where Mama, dressed in her customary heavy black taffeta sat with Marianna, Elizabeth, Christina and Carolina, all of whom were dressed in thickly embroidered cloth of gold and silver and blazing with Imperial diamonds. 'You both look very fine,' Mama said with an approving nod after she had looked us both up and down. 'I am pleased.' She looked directly at me. 'Maria Antonia, you will dance the second cotillion with Monsieur du Durfort. Please be on your best behaviour.'

I curtsied and looked past her to Carolina, who looked very stiff, unhappy and young in her gorgeous white and gold dress, which had an enormous panniered skirt and a diamond and pearl encrusted stomacher. It was odd to be looking up at her in her seat of honour in between Mama and Christina on the dais, when once she would have been standing right next to me, giggling, skipping from foot to foot and wondering aloud where all the young men were.

'Carolina does not look very happy,' I whispered to Amalia as we made our way back down the gallery, bowing and curtsying to all of the dozens of courtiers as once again they parted to let us through. In the distance I could see Karl standing beside the door and watching us over the heads of the crowd, his eyes fixed on the lovely face of my sister.

Amalia sighed and shrugged. 'Marriage does seem to be a rather depressing business,' she said, fanning herself and curtsying to an elderly Duchess. 'I expect that she will perk up once the deed is done.'

'Do you really think so, Amalia?' I asked, accepting a glass of punch from a passing footman.

'No.'

Thursday, 7th April, Carolina's wedding day.

I can hardly believe that it is all over.

My maid woke me up early so that I could be quickly helped into my very lovely pink and silver brocade dress (the stomacher is sewn all over with diamonds from one of Mama's old dresses, not that you would ever know it for they gleam and dazzle so much in the sunlight) before running down the corridor to Carolina's room, where she was already dressed in her magnificent cloth of gold wedding gown and sitting sullenly silent in front of the mirror on her dressing table as her maids and the Viennese hairdressers hired at great expense fussed and cajoled and whispered as they smoothed cherry red rouge on to her cheeks, sprayed her with violet scent and pinned her powdered hair on top of her head with diamond stars. She looked up as I entered the room, but barely seemed to see me.

'Carolina?' I went to her and took her hand in mine, shocked by icily cold it was. 'Did you sleep well?' I did not know what else to say.

'No.' She sighed. 'I didn't.' A careless hairdresser tugged at one of her long blonde ringlets and she immediately slapped their hand away. 'Don't touch me, you imbecile!' she hissed, turning on them. 'Leave me alone!'

The door opened and Christina swept in, dressed to impress in deep blue satin and a gorgeous sapphire necklace. 'More tantrums, Carolina?' she enquired, with one elegantly plucked eyebrow raised. 'Come now, it is not so bad as all that.'

'Easy for you to say!' Carolina instantly replied, clenching her fists in her lap. 'Because of course Mama's precious favourite couldn't possibly be sent away to marry a complete stranger!' She glared at Christina for a moment before very

deliberately turning her back.

'Really, Carlotta.' Christina gestured for the servants and hairdressers to leave, which they did in great haste, although I suspect that they all tried their best to listen outside the door. 'I do wish that you would stop making these absurd and really quite disgraceful scenes.' Her eye fell upon me. 'Really, I do not know where you and Antonia have picked up such dreadful manners.'

I stared at her open mouthed. 'But I haven't even done anything!' I protested.

'Don't be so childish, Maria Antonia!' Christina snapped, unfurling her painted fan. 'And shut your mouth please. There is no need for you to stand gawping like a maidservant!'

'For God's sake, Christina, leave Antonia alone!' Carolina snatched up a bottle of scent and seemed about to throw it when the door opened again and Amalia walked in, taking in the scene with one quick glance and immediately bursting into laughter. 'Oh, Christina, you never do learn do you?' she murmured, taking our elder sister by the elbow and swiftly steering her out of the door before she had quite realised what was happening. 'Why don't you go and bully some maids or something instead?' She closed the door and turned the key in the lock before turning back to Carolina with an enquiring smile curving her rosy red lips.

'Thank you,' Carolina muttered, putting the scent back on her table and then stretching her shaking hands in front of her. 'She makes me so furious. You can have no idea.'

Amalia smiled and went to kiss Carolina's forehead. 'Oh, I think that I can entirely understand. Remember that I have had to endure her for rather more years than you.' she said with a laugh before lifting up Carolina's chin with her fingers and frowning a little. 'Oh dear, you really do look quite the tragic heroine, my dear. Why so pale?'

'It is all so totally insupportable,' Carolina said, picking up a pair of precious diamond bracelets and clumsily clasping them on to her wrists. 'I don't want to be married and leave Vienna forever and yet, somehow, I find myself unable to resist. I want to kick and scream and bellow and make a fuss and yet somehow here I am after all, sitting here, waiting to be married to a boy that I have never even met.'

'But of course,' Amalia replied, calmly picking up a ivory backed hair brush and some discarded pearl headed pins and setting to work on Carolina's half finished hair. 'Mama isn't lying when she says that she raised us to be obedient to her in all things. I expect that I too will be unable to resist when the time comes.' She brushed out a long flaxen tress and then pinned it into place. 'Even though I have more to lose than you.' She paused then and placed her hands on Carolina's shoulders, meeting her gaze in the mirror.

'Why can't you just run away with Karl?' Carolina asked as I caught my breath in shock. 'Or have a baby? That is what the maids do when they want to marry someone and their parents won't allow it.'

Amalia stopped brushing and burst out laughing. 'Carlotta! You really *must* stop eavesdropping on the servants!' She looked at me, as I sat in the corner hoping that they would forget my presence and not order me away. 'Do not pay any attention, Antonia!' she admonished, waving the brush at me.

'Well, why not do it?' Carolina asked, more boldly now. Clearly her status as an almost married lady was going to her head. 'I am sure that Karl would be only too happy to oblige you.'

'Really, Carolina, you have been quite preposterous ever since Mama told you all about what goes on between men and women,' Amalia said, neatly evading the issue at hand. 'I do hope that you haven't imparted your new found wisdom to Antonia.'

'She would not tell me,' I interposed, unable to hide the note of disappointment in my voice.

They both started laughing at this and the rest of the preparations went on very happily indeed and just as they should, even if the groom was far away in Naples and we all knew that our brother Joseph would have to say his vows for him in the ceremony itself. It seems very odd, I know, but that is how things are done here and so, giggling, we went along with it with even Joseph laughing a little at the silliness of the situation as he knelt beside his sister in front of the archbishop, took her plump, white hand in his and promised her all of his worldly goods.

'Do you *really*, Joseph?' I heard Carolina whisper with a soft laugh.

And then it was all over and Carolina was married and Queen of Naples and oh, it is very odd. I can hardly bring myself to look at her now as she already seems so different and not at all the sister that I have known and loved for all of my life.

Friday, 8th April.

Carolina came to my room late last night and climbed into bed with me. I rolled over and hugged her close as she cried in my arms. She leaves tomorrow.

We have always been together. How will I cope without her?

Saturday, 9th April, late, it is so quiet.

Carolina set out on her long, long journey to Naples early this morning. The cavalcade was quite superb and Mama had provided a new green painted carriage for Carolina's entrance into her new country, although Amalia says that it will hardly look as splendid at the end of the journey as it does at the very beginning.

All of her new clothes and shoes and gloves and stockings and jewels were packed up in enormous red leather covered trunks, with sprigs of rosemary and lavender and rose petals between the soft folds and then they were piled inside and on top of dozens of carriages and carts, which will follow my sister to her new home.

I went to her room early and after I had helped her maids dress her in her new pink velvet traveling dress with its matching, very jaunty little hat we sat for a long time on the edge of her bed and hugged before Joseph softly knocked on the door to let her know that they were ready to set off.

'Do not cry,' Carolina said gaily, wiping away my tears with one gloved finger. 'I will write as often as I can and you must promise to come and visit me as soon as you are able.' She embraced me again and we wept together for a moment. 'Oh, Antonia, I do not think that I can bear it!' she cried. 'I am afraid that my heart is going to break. We have never had to be apart before and now I am very much afraid that I will never see you again.'

Joseph sighed. 'They are waiting for you, Carlotta' he said as gently as he

could and even I could see that he was greatly moved by our tears. She is the first sister that he has had to send far away to be married and will most likely not be the last. Our family is breaking up and we all feel it deeply.

Carolina gave me another kiss and then pulled away. She wiped her tears away with the back of her hand and pinned a bright smile on to her face, well aware that the eyes of all the court would be upon her as she stepped into her green carriage and drove away to her new life. 'I am quite ready now, brother.' She linked arms with me and together we walked down the corridor for the last time, pausing for a brief moment in front of a portrait of Josepha, who should have gone to Naples instead and then down the splendid staircase, which was still lined with orange trees in their bright silver tubs.

'Promise that you will write all the time?' she whispered as we stepped out into the bright Spring sunshine and faced our family and the entire court, which had assembled in the courtyard to see her off. 'I shall depend entirely upon hearing from you.' She turned to me and gave my fingers one last squeeze. 'Promise?'

I nodded, blinking back my tears. 'I promise.'

I stepped aside then as Mama and all of our brothers and sisters came forward to hug Carolina for what might well be the last time and kiss her on each pale cheek. She clung to Amalia for as long as she could and was sobbing again when Joseph took her by the hand and led her down to her carriage. 'Oh no, oh no,' I heard her whisper despairingly. 'Joseph, please don't make me go. I do not think that I will ever come home again.'

'Naples is to be your home now,' he reminded her as he handed her up into the carriage. 'God speed, sister.' He lightly kissed her hand and turned away with tears in his eyes, but before the carriage could pull away she impetuously threw the door open, jumped down and then ran past him, back up the marble steps and into my arms.

'Antonia!' We clung to each other, sobbing and kissing each other's wet cheeks. 'Don't forget me!' she whispered. 'Please.'

'Come now, Carlotta.' Mama stepped up and very firmly took Carolina's arm. 'It is time for you to go.' Her smile was kindly and Carolina turned and threw her arms around her. 'I know that this is hard for you, my dearest girl, but it is your

duty to do leave us.' She kissed Carolina's cheek. 'You may be far away but never forget that our thoughts and prayers are always with you.'

'Yes, Mama.' Carolina allowed Joseph to lead her down the steps again, only this time she looked over her shoulder with every step and smiled at me, even though tears still poured down her cheeks. 'Goodbye! Goodbye!' Joseph helped her up into the carriage again and slammed the door shut, shouting: 'Go!' to the driver, who immediately cracked his whip over the heads of his team of fine chestnut horses.

We heard her cry out in distress as her carriage pulled away and then cantered out of the courtyard. I stood on the steps with Amalia and watched her for as long as I could, before finally I had to concede that there was nothing more to be seen and that she was really gone.

'One down, two to go,' Amalia said with a rueful smile as arm in arm we walked back into the palace.

Monday, 11th April.

How am I expected to endure a lifetime of this?

I keep thinking of things that I would like to say to her, only to realise a second later that I will probably never see her again.

The Countess says that I should write her a long letter but that just isn't the *same*!

Tuesday, 12th April.

I did not want to get out of bed but Amalia came to my room and coaxed me out from underneath the heavy embroidered blue woolen quilt that has been my nocturnal comforter since I was a very little girl.

'Come now, dearest one,' she whispered, hugging me close. She smelt deliciously of violets and lilacs. 'If you stay under there for any longer they will send Christina in to get you.'

'They wouldn't dare.' I sat up and stared sulkily at her from my sore, red eyes. 'Oh, Amalia, I feel so weak. I do not think that I am very well.'

Amalia sighed and placed one cool hand on my forehead. 'You do feel a little warm, dear heart,' she said with a concerned look. 'Did you sleep at all last night?' She gently stroked my hair away from my face and underneath her gaze and the softness of her touch, I found myself sobbing again.

'I am sorry,' I said, struggling for breath. 'I could not stop crying.' It was true. I had lain awake for most of the night, thinking about Carolina and wondering where she was and who she was with and if she was frightened or excited about her new life.

Amalia nodded. 'It must be very hard for you, as you have been together for so long,' she said while dabbing my face with a fine lavender scented muslin kerchief that she pulled from her bosom. 'I was very fond of Johanna and remember feeling much as you must do now when she died. You do not remember of course but we were very close. I loved Josepha as well, of course.' She sighed and gave my face another wipe with her kerchief before saying quietly: 'I think though that if I had the choice between never seeing a sister again because she had died or never seeing her again because she had gone away to be married, well, I know which one I would choose.'

I felt very ashamed and this only served to make me cry even more. 'You are right, Amalia, but still it is very hard.' I thought of Josepha as she had been on that last day, when Joseph had carried her in his arms and Carolina and I had crept down the corridor to her room. 'I have never forgotten her,' I whispered.

'No, I don't suppose that any of us ever will,' Amalia replied with a smile. 'She was loved by us all which is, you know, a rare thing indeed in a family such as ours.' She leaned forward and kissed my cheek. 'I know that it is hard, my darling, but I promise that it will all become easier with time.'

Thursday, 14th April, I am late for a harp lesson.

I have had a letter from Carolina. It is very short but she does not sound unhappy. I wept over it, of course, but it makes me feel so much better to know that she is alive and well and relatively cheerful.

I also had a lovely surprise this morning when my maids came to get me dressed for the day. Instead of the plain blue silk dress that I had asked for, they brought me a lovely new yellow silk dress with pink ribbons tied in big bows all down the bodice and at the elbows. A present from Amalia. Isn't that sweet?

'There, that is much better,' she cried when she saw me walk into the sunny yellow breakfast room, where she was breakfasting alone on hot chocolate and delicious, flaky pastries. 'I thought that a pretty new dress would bring some of the roses back to your cheeks.' She put down her cup of hot chocolate and ran around the table to give me a quick hug, enveloping me in her familiar, sweet scent of lilacs and violets. 'I have been so worried about you, darling.'

I smiled and embraced her. 'Thank you,' I said, lowering my voice as one of the footmen came forward to pour some of the deliciously thick hot chocolate into my cup. 'I feel like there is only us left now.'

Amalia gave a wry smile and went back to her chair, which was opposite mine. 'You are right of course.' She gave a sigh and then shrugged her shoulders and laughed. 'Ordinary people must think that being a princess is very wonderful indeed. Tragic isn't it?'

Sunday, 17th April, after Mass.

I am supposed to be having some time to myself for what the Countess calls 'quiet reflection'. I do believe that she expects me to sit here and dwell on all of the bad things that I have done this week before whipping myself up into a hysterical frenzy of remorse and begging for forgiveness. Instead, I shall sit here and eat an apple while writing in my journal.

The Countess also says that in Versailles, it is considered completely unacceptable and positively uncouth to show one's feelings at any time. 'Even the death of one's husband should be treated as a minor inconvenience and no more. Any display of grief or other sentimentality is regarded as most unbecoming.'

'If that is true, then I do not think that I should like to live there,' I retorted, feeling rather annoyed by their ridiculous affectations. 'I think that it sounds immensely disagreeable.'

The Countess gave a small, icy smile. 'I rather thought that you would feel that way, your Highness,' she replied. 'I myself have always thought that there is a lack of decorum and an unpleasant tendency to gross sentimentality at the Imperial court.' She always says 'sentimentality' as though it is something very

disgusting indeed. 'Modern manners are so very lax.'

I lifted my chin a little. 'I do not agree,' I replied. 'I think that it is utterly charming when people talk about how they really feel and behave as naturally as possible. I think that I myself shall always do so, whether others like it or not.'

'All I think is that it would be better if you were to hide your precious feelings a bit better in front of the French ambassador,' she snapped with a look of sheer exasperation. 'He already thinks that you are too immature to be sent to France, don't make him think that you are an ill bred hoyden as well.'

Monday, 25th April.

I am sitting for yet another portrait, which is very tiresome. Mama is seemingly addicted to commissioning portraits of myself and my sisters; either because she is proud of her own fecundity or because she wants to show off about how good looking we all are. Each one of us has been painted, sketched or engraved several dozen times over and our portraits, all looking almost exactly the same and all looking equally pretty and simpering with bright blue eyes, rosy cheeks and flaxen, powdered curls are proudly displayed in each of the Imperial palaces.

In this latest portrait I am wearing a blue velvet dress trimmed with lovely lace, sable and pearls. I posed with the spinet in the porcelain room, which is one of Mama's favourite rooms in the Schönbrunn as it was designed by poor dead Isabella and is decorated with hundreds of lovely pale blue drawings, all done by myself (Countess Brandeis drew mine in pencil and then allowed me to paint over it in ink, which I think almost counts as my own work) and my sisters and brothers. It hurt my arms to sit for so long with one hand poised in the act of turning the sheet of music and the other fluttering just above the keys but in the end I complained so much that Herr Wagenschoen, the artist, sighed and decided to use one of his models instead for the hands.

Thursday, 12th May, late.

An eventful day. The court dentist has always come to visit my sisters and me every Thursday to check our teeth and do any cleaning that needs to be done (Carolina hated this as she was always too lazy to clean her teeth herself and so the dentist would insist on scrubbing her teeth himself with a rough brush and powder, tutting as he did so) and, not very often thankfully, remove any teeth that were causing discomfort. I do not like his visits but am accustomed to them

now, so they do not trouble me as much now as they did when I was younger and more nervous.

Today, however, Joseph was waiting for me there with a new French dentist who bowed very low and then politely requested to be allowed to see 'Madame l'Archiduchesse's' teeth. He had a silly wig and smelled strongly of roses and cloves, which was pleasant at first but then began to give me a headache as he stood behind me and poked and prodded inside my mouth for about ten minutes before announcing that my teeth were of acceptable quality but lamentably crooked.

'What is to be done?' Joseph asked with a frown. Who would have thought that my teeth would be cause of so much fuss? 'Can they be straightened?'

The dentist grinned and bowed. 'But of course! I trained with the great dentist, Pierre Fauchard himself and so am entirely proficient with the employment of a brace on the teeth.' He opened a small wooden box and produced a strange contraption made of metal and silk threads. 'It looks entirely insignificant, does it not, but this device, invented by Monsieur Fauchard himself, will straighten Madame l'Archiduchesse's teeth in a matter of months.'

I stared in horror at the ugly brace as he excitedly waved it around. 'You expect me to put that *thing* in my mouth?' I asked, casting an imploring look at Joseph. 'Will I have to wear it all the time? Won't I look very ugly?'

'Better now than later on when you are seen more in public,' Joseph said with a shrug. 'Just try not to smile at Monsieur de Durfort.'

Saturday, 14th May.

I do not like Monsieur Fauchard's brace, it is cold and uncomfortable and tastes horribly metallic, like blood.

'Oh dear!' Amalia laughed when I visited her after my consultation with the dentist. 'You had better just smile at me and get it over and done with!' She smiled down at Max, who was sitting beside her on her pink silk sofa and sleepily pulling the silken ears of her spaniel, Coco, while at their feet Ferdinand sat, engrossed in a book. 'We are not afraid are we, little brother?'

'No,' Max shook himself awake, yawned widely and grinned at me. 'Show us,

Antonia! Is it very horrible? Does it make you look like a monster? Will the French prince refuse to marry you now?

'What a very strange boy you are,' Amalia said to him fondly, ruffling his untidy ash blonde hair and then tutting as she encountered a stray tangle. 'Oh, Max, I do wish you would let someone cut your hair.'

Max pulled a face. 'No, shan't.' He then gave the matter some consideration. 'Not unless Antonia shows us her brace.'

I felt like crying as they both turned their merry faces towards me. 'Oh no, please don't make me smile. It is too hideous.' I pinched my lips closer together. 'You have no idea.'

'Oh come now,' my sister coaxed, jumping up with a rustle of her yellow silk skirts and putting an arm around me. 'It cannot be so bad as all that.'

'It is every bit as bad,' I muttered, trying not to cry. 'No one will ever want to marry me if I have to wear this horrible thing on my teeth for months and months.' I imagined myself growing old in Vienna, watching enviously as each of my sisters and then my nieces made brilliant matches while I was left at home, alone and unloved until finally they packed me off to a convent somewhere to die without ever having been so much as kissed. Oh, the angst.

Amalia laughed then, probably accurately guessing the melancholy turn that my thoughts had taken. 'Oh dear, what a dreadful fate! How fortunate therefore that no one other than the King of France cares about the teeth of princesses!' She fell back on to the sofa again and hugged Max. 'I wonder what sort of man he is,' she mused with a sparkle in her bright blue eyes. 'To be so obsessed with hairstyles, dresses and teeth. What do you think, Max?'

Max wrinkled his nose. 'I think that he must be very silly,' he pronounced. 'Princesses are never as pretty as they are in stories.' He lifted up the spaniel and kissed its damp nose. 'Isn't that right, Coco?'

Amalia tapped him on the arm with her fan. 'Ungallant, Max!' she exclaimed with a laugh. 'And what about your own sisters?'

Ferdinand looked up then from his book and fixed us both with a stern look.

'You don't count,' he muttered ungraciously while Amalia and I exchanged a look and burst out laughing.

Monday, 6th June, I am late for dinner.

I had a delightful surprise today when I went to the schoolroom for my usual lessons. Mama has hired two French actors to teach me French. How delightful is that? Their names are Monsieur Aufresne and Monsieur Sainville and they are both utterly charming. They are handsome of course, smell of crushed rose petals, violet and cinnamon, have beautiful powdered and curled snowy white wigs and wear gorgeous silk suits in green and pink and purple with silver stripes. They are so polite and pay me lots of compliments, even when I get things wrong, which they both profess to find even prettier than when I manage to say something perfectly.

'This is no way to teach the Archduchess,' the Countess sniffed disapprovingly from behind her desk, when Monsieur Aufresne clapped his hands and exclaimed that my mispronunciation of '*aujourd'hui*' was quite the most exquisite thing that he had ever heard. 'She will never learn anything if you insist on praising her mistakes.'

Monsieur Sainville winked at me and I had to pretend to cough in order to hide my giggles.

Monday, 13th June, St Anthony's day, my name day.

I am so tired but am determined to stay awake for long enough to write all of this down before I fall asleep. Today was my name day, and I think that it was my best yet. My maids dressed me in a lovely new dress of light white silk printed all over with a pink, blue and yellow floral pattern and I had breakfast in Papa's airy, green painted pavilion in the middle of the menagerie, with Mama, Joseph and Amalia which was delightful as always, especially as Joseph took me to feed apples to the elephants and giraffes afterwards. I always giggle when the elephants use their grey, wrinkled trunks to snort the fruit from the palm of my hand and then toss it into their huge mouths.

Afterwards, we returned to the palace and Mama made me sit beside her in the gold and blue drawing room while I opened my presents: a glorious diamond necklace from Mama, a triple string of pearls with an opal clasp from Joseph, opal earrings from Christina, a pearl bracelet fastened with a ruby clasp from

Amalia, an emerald ring from Marianna, a set of diamond hair combs from Elizabeth and a beautiful doll from my brothers and Theresia. Carolina sent a pair of diamond bracelets and a long letter, which I saved until I was alone in my room.

Monsieur de Durfort arrived later to pay his respects and was followed by a small page who struggled beneath an enormous basket of fruit and another who proudly carried a small inlaid and highly polished box on a pink velvet cushion. 'My master, the King of France would like to present these tokens of his admiration and esteem,' Durfort announced with a great deal of flourish.

I glanced quickly at Mama and saw that she was looking extremely pleased. 'Pray tell your master that I thank him very much,' I said in what I knew to be very faltering French. 'And I hope that I prove myself worthy of his esteem.' I saw Mama give a slight nod of approval and then eagerly reached out for the box. It opened to reveal a gorgeous diamond bracelet with a lovely cameo clasp, nestled on a soft bed of green velvet.

'Oooh.' I lifted the bracelet out and immediately fastened it on my wrist. 'It is beautiful!' I smiled at Durfort, not caring if he saw my horrible brace or not. '*C'est très belle. Merci beaucoup!*' Everyone smiled and clapped as though I had said something very clever indeed, even Durfort who must have been very pained indeed by the combination of ugly brace and bad French.

After this the entire court went in a grand procession to the Riding School by the Hofburg in Vienna, which is a huge building which looks incredibly grand inside, almost like a cathedral with huge, bright windows, white classical pillars and chandeliers hanging over the main arena, where the horses parade. Today, the ladies of the court rode around the arena in my honour, all wearing their finest dresses and jewels and smiling bravely as their beautiful horses delicately raised their hooves and cantered in unison. After this the professional riders entered and there was a display of the celebrated white Lippizan horses who did *pas de deux*, and performed various tricks to great applause from all of the court. My favourite tricks involve the rider not using stirrups and performing complicated *caprioles*, *courbettes* and *levades* before finally there is a *Grand Quadrille* when twelve riders bring their horses out and they ride them in a formation. How I would love to ride alongside them one day.

'Thank you so much,' I whispered to Mama when it was all over and I even felt

bold enough to slip my hand into hers. She looked down at me and smiled, giving my hand a squeeze.

'Coming to see the horses perform was always my favourite treat when I was a little girl,' she said, still smiling as she remembered those happy times. 'I will always remember sitting beside my father and watching the horses do their tricks. He adored it here.' She gave my cheek a little pinch. 'I am sure you remember coming here as a little girl as well. How your father used to laugh to see you and Carolina bouncing on your seats, pretending to ride imaginary horses.'

'I remember that as well!' I exclaimed, for once quite forgetting to be afraid of her. 'We used to daydream about the day when we would be allowed to ride our horses in the arena in front of all the court.' Mama said nothing but pulled me close and hugged me.

Back at Schönnbrunn, my maids were waiting to help me out of my dress and into another, far more elaborate blue and silver brocade one, which had been specially made for that occasion. The new diamonds from Mama and the King of France's bracelet had been placed on my dressing table in readiness. I gingerly picked the bracelet up and then thoughtfully trickled it between my fingers as the maids tightened my blue silk corset and then laced the new dress over the top. I had never owned anything quite so lovely in all of my life and now suddenly I had been presented with what seemed to be a King's ransom of jewels. Or a trousseau. I stopped playing with the bracelet and stared at myself in the lace and ribbon bedecked dressing table mirror. Could it be that I am so close to being married?

Thursday, 14th July, I am supposed to be in bed but am too excited to sleep.

Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul's sister, the Duchesse de Gramont (what names these people have! They sound like cream puffs or delicious cakes) sent her own hairdresser all the way from Paris to Vienna to do my hair in a more becoming, more *French* way. He arrived today, Monsieur Larsenneur, a small man with a monkey face, pink taffeta coat and ingratiating manner. I did not like him at first and was unwilling to allow him to touch my hair but had to relent in the end and let him have his way, while Amalia and Elizabeth stood by and gossiped with their ladies in waiting. He started by staring at me for a while, with his little head on one side and a gleam in his eye. 'Ah, but *la petite* is careless of her beauty,' he

whispered to me at last, in a very flirtatious manner that I did not really like and which made me feel hot and embarrassed. 'Do not look so nervous, *belle chérie*, I shall transform you from a gauche girl into a beautiful young woman.'

'Just by doing my hair?' I could not help but laugh at him.

Larsenneur looked hurt. 'But of course. A beautiful *coiffure* is everything nowadays! Did you not know that?' He lifted up one of my reddish blonde curls. 'Ah, but Mademoiselle has the most lovely strawberry blonde hair, *comme une fraise*. I had expected a blonde Viennese *fräulein*, not this.' He tutted as he looked through my hair. 'Do you not have maids to brush your hair? Why so many tangles?'

I jerked my head away. 'I do not like to have my hair brushed,' I muttered. 'It is boring and hurts my head.'

'Tsk, this will never do. A *princesse* does not have tangled hair like a... like a *fille de ferme*. It is not right!' He waved his silver handled comb in my face and looked really quite upset. 'From now on you must submit gracefully to having your hair brushed through no less than twice a day. A hundred strokes each time!' I must have looked appalled as he pinched my chin consolingly. 'Ah, but after only a very few days Mademoiselle will be rewarded with the most beautiful hair and be the envy of all who see her.' He raised his voice. 'Now, I must have gossip while I work! Someone tell me something scandalous! Do you have scandals in Vienna? I want to hear them all!'

'Cover your ears, Antonia,' Amalia said with a laugh.

It took a very long time and I was very weary and short tempered by the time Larsenneur had finished his work, but oh, it was so worth it. I stared at myself in the mirror for a very long time, unable to believe that the sophisticated little lady with powdered, carefully arranged hair staring back was me. 'Mademoiselle entered this room as a gauche, untidy schoolgirl and now, *voilà!*' the little hairdresser crowed triumphantly as he tucked a final delicately blooming pink rose behind my ear. 'Mademoiselle, you are a beautiful *princesse* at last.'

Amalia came forward and kissed my cheek. 'You look beautiful, Antonia,' she murmured with a smile. 'Quite exquisite and so grown up.'

I gazed at myself, totally unable to speak. I had always seen myself as the youngest, least pretty and most insignificant of Mama's girls but now suddenly I believed that I too could be beautiful and important. I hope I never forget how I felt just at that moment: powerful.

Wednesday, 20th July, I am supposed to be working on my Italian.

Today it was the turn of the dressmakers. I spent several hours this morning being measured for what is to be a splendid collection of clothes. 'Mama is determined that you should look as exquisite as any of the French princesses,' Amalia said with a smile as she sat in a chair and watched while the dressmakers showed me swatch after swatch of silk, cotton, taffeta, brocade and velvet in all the colours imaginable, some striped, some spotted and some patterned with tiny stars, hearts, flowers and fruits.

There was a milliner as well with the most gorgeous designs for bonnets and hats, a stocking maker who showed me delicious striped and plain silk stockings, several shoe makers who measured my feet and then made me try on beautiful shoes, the colour of delicate Spring flowers with diamond buckles and ribbons at the heel.

'I am sure that Monsieur de Durfort will appreciate all of the effort that has been made to attract his approbation,' Amalia commented wryly as she picked up a sample of very fine Brussels lace and examined it against the light. 'Let us hope that he is suitably bedazzled by your transformation.'

I smiled, lifting up my green silk skirts to admire a very lovely peach silk shoe, decorated with green velvet ribbons. 'I do not see how he could fail to be impressed.' I turned my ankle this way and that, thinking how pretty it all was and how lovely I would look from now on. What could the French possibly find to complain about now?

Friday, 29th July, I should be in bed.

Another letter has arrived from Carolina. She is not the best correspondent but then neither am I and I fear that we both wait a very long time to hear from the other. If I was being charitable, I would say that she sounds not entirely unhappy.

'My husband, the King, is not at all what I had imagined. He is not handsome, clever, witty, polite or charming. In fact I would go so far as to say that he is

absolutely stupid in every way imaginable and some that had not previously occurred to me. Fortunately he seems as disinclined to seek out my company as I am to spend my time with him. He is seventeen and ends all of his time with his stupid friends playing stupid card games or daring each other to do ridiculous pranks. I sometimes think that I hate him.

It is not all bad though. The weather here is very clement indeed and we barely have any rain. Also, the views from our palace are quite spectacular. I have sent you an engraving of the Caserta Palace, which is my home now, so that you can imagine where I live now that we are so far apart. It is really quite huge and, I am told, looks almost exactly like Versailles. Just fancy, there are over one thousand rooms already and it is not even quite finished! It is not as rough as one would expect, considering that it has such a master, and is really quite exquisitely decorated throughout with an excess of marble, gilt and splendour that I think would not put even Mama to shame.

I have my own apartment, which is really quite beautiful and filled with the most lovely objects imaginable. Here, I can be quite myself. I have my books, my musical instruments and my paints. I want for nothing but you.

I am not completely happy but I find that I can be content with my lot in life. And what woman of our rank can ask for more than that?

Oh, Carlotta, Carlotta...

Wednesday, 10th August, late.

It is unbearably hot and I cannot sleep. My maids left my windows wide open tonight but there is not even the lightest breeze and the still night air is heavy, warm and richly scented with the lilacs and roses that grow beneath my windows. In the distance I can hear the faint sounds of the animals in the menagerie as they roam around their enclosures in the darkness and bellow mournfully at the moon.

Oh, I am so tired and yet I feel like I will never sleep again as I just can't get comfortable in my bed. My embroidered linen sheets and pillows are fresh and newly laundered and still they feel itchy and uncomfortable. I tossed and turned for what seemed like hours before giving up and coming to my desk. I could write a letter to Carolina or maybe read a book, as I am sure that is what Mama and the Countess would advise me to do if I am unable to sleep.

I can hear the maids shuffling about and whispering to each other in their little room, which lies beyond the green painted panelling. Clearly sleep is eluding them as well, poor things. Maybe I should ring my bell and ask for a carafe of water and some cake and then we can all sit and chat together until we feel sleepy? That would be very pleasant.

Saturday, 13th August.

Happy birthday Carolina. I wish that you were still at home. God bless you, wherever you are.

Monday, 15th August, late. I can't sleep again.

A very dismal evening. Amalia and I were reading together in her lovely little pink and white sitting room when one of the many liveried palace footmen knocked on the door and announced that we were both wanted downstairs in the Mirror Room. We exchanged concerned glances (I immediately thought of Carolina and my heart began to thud most uncomfortably in my breast) but hastened to follow the footman, who was very young and had bright red hair peeping out from beneath his snowy white wig.

'What do you suppose it is?' I whispered to Amalia, linking my arm with hers as we walked slowly down the long corridors and then the beautiful marble staircases, our high heels clattering loudly against the cold stone. 'Do you think that there is bad news?'

She shook her head but I saw that she looked paler than usual beneath her bright red rouge. 'I do not know, *petite*. Let us hope that it is good news.' She smiled down at me. 'I am sure that it is nothing bad.'

We paused for a moment outside the room to check our appearance in the huge mirror that hung opposite the door and then entered as the footman held the door open for us. To my surprise several dozen courtiers were already gathered and they all stared at us curiously as they bowed and moved out of the way to let us through.

I suddenly thought that maybe the summons had arrived from France and felt quite sick as, still arm in arm with Amalia, I crossed the long green and gold room and went to stand beside my sisters and brothers. I looked about myself with satisfaction, thinking as always that we made a very good looking family

and that Mama's pride in us was entirely justified.

'Is someone going to be married?' Little Max was asking in a highly audible whisper as he danced impatiently on the spot. 'I hope that it is not Amalia or Antonia!'

'Silence!' Elizabeth hissed impatiently from behind her black veil. 'I hope that it is *you* that is to be married, impertinent little whelp!'

Max stuck his tongue out at her then ducked as she tried to slap him on the head with her richly painted fan.

There was a buzz of excitement in the room as the door swung open again and Mama entered, dressed in black brocade and leaning heavily on Joseph's blue silk arm. We all watched them closely for clues as to what this was all about but they were giving nothing away.

'I wonder what it could be?' I heard Elizabeth whisper to Marianna. 'Mama looks very happy but Joseph looks more serious than I have ever seen him.'

Mama reached the ornate gilt chair that had been brought in for her and sat down, fixing each one of us with her bright blue gaze as she did so. 'I am pleased to see you all together,' she remarked with a smile. Did I imagine it or did her eyes linger on Amalia as she spoke?

Joseph stepped forward, clearing his throat as he did so. 'I... we have gathered you all together today to hear some good news.' He looked at Mama and she gave a tiny little nod. 'Our prayers have been answered and on this day, the envoys of his Royal Highness the Duke of Parma have asked for the hand of our dearest sister, Maria Amalia.'

I heard Amalia give a gasp beside me and immediately took hold of her hand, which trembled pathetically within mine. How could Joseph and Mama have thought it a good idea to surprise her with such an announcement? How could they? It seemed and still seems so unkind and cruel, especially as it is common knowledge that she is in love with someone else. I looked for Karl amongst the gathered courtiers but thankfully he was not there to witness this. I saw that all eyes were upon my sister and that some smiled mockingly as she struggled to hide her misery.

Joseph turned to Amalia and held out his hand. He was smiling but I could see that his eyes were pleading with her to play along and not to hate him for what was about to happen. 'Come, my sister,' he said when she did not move from the spot. 'Come.'

I looked up at Amalia to see that she had tears in her eyes and was staring at our brother almost pleadingly. 'I... I *can't*,' she whispered as a ripple of whispers and laughter ran through the room. 'Joseph, *please*.'

'Count your blessings and do as you are told,' Elizabeth hissed, poking her with her fan.

'My daughters are raised to be maidenly and innocent,' Mama said loudly, beckoning to Amalia with fingers that were heavy with diamonds and rubies. 'Come, daughter, don't be shy.' She smiled and spoke in the most caressing tones but there was a subtle edge to her voice that made me tremble. I would not have dared to disobey her if she had spoken to me in such a way.

As if in some terrible dream, I watched as Amalia released my hand with a final reassuring squeeze then slowly took Joseph's and allowed him to lead her to our mother. 'I am truly thankful for the honour that has been shown to me,' she whispered as with a swish of her green silk skirts she curtsied to Mama, who raised her to her feet and kissed her on both cheeks before slipping a diamond ring on to her finger.

I blinked away my tears before the cynical, all seeing eyes of the court but as soon as we were free to leave, I ran up the stairs to my room, told the hovering, curious maids to leave me alone and then threw myself across my bed and cried.

It is all too unfair and so unjust.

Friday, 19th August, after dinner.

We still know next to nothing about the Duke of Parma. His splendidly dressed, swarthy envoys are still in Vienna but they speak only Italian and keep to themselves, smiling charmingly and lisping '*si, si, si*' to everything that one might say to them. They whisper together as I walk past.

'They think that you are very pretty,' Elizabeth told me with a smile. 'They

wish that you were going to be their Duchess instead of Amalia. They think that she is grumpy and ungrateful.'

And with good reason. We have learned that the Duke is only seventeen years old, the same age as Carolina's bridegroom in Naples and in fact the two princes were born within weeks of each other. He is also said to be immature and to have childish tastes, but then he is not much older than myself and I still like to play with dolls if no one is about to see it.

What else? He is an orphan, the grandson of King Louis of France and the younger brother of the still much missed Isabella, who was married to my brother Joseph. I remember her as quiet, artistic and melancholy and wonder if the Duke is the same. She was very pretty as well with a heart shaped face and wide blue eyes, so maybe Ferdinand of Parma will not be ill looking. That is something at least.

'Parma was entirely governed by the late Duchess before her death,' I overheard Joseph telling Amalia. 'She introduced French manners and customs to the duchy and I believe that you will be very happy there.' He took her hand. 'Isabella...' He paused and I knew that he was thinking of his dead wife, the mother of his only child. 'Isabella always spoke very fondly of her brother and I believe that he will make you a good husband.'

'Do you really think so, Joseph, or are you just trying to appease your conscience?' Amalia said, pulling her hand away.

Sunday, 21st August.

I have been spending a lot of time with the Princesses Friederike and Charlotte of Hesse-Darmstadt, a pair of pretty and utterly charming German princesses that I have known for virtually my entire life. We have always been friendly but now that Carolina is no longer here, I have found myself becoming increasingly close to them both, not that they could ever be substitutes for my sister.

Friederike is romantic and loves to read books and day dream about romantic heroes sweeping her off her feet. I have seen her watching Karl of Zweibrücken from beneath her eyelashes and blushing whenever he happens to glance in her direction. I do not entirely blame her for this, despite my loyalty to Amalia, for he is exceedingly dashing.

Charlotte, however, is my special friend as she is just three days younger than myself and shares all of the same interests and dislikes. We are in agreement that there is nothing in the World that is worse than Italian lessons and that really we should be left alone to do as we please.

'You are all very silly,' Amalia said with a laugh and a fond look as we all ran indoors earlier on after an exhausting afternoon spent chasing Mama's spaniels about the park. Charlotte was quite red from the exertion and Friederike's long flaxen hair had fallen down in a tumble about her shoulders while I had grass stains down my flounced pink cotton skirt. 'Hoydens!' Amalia reproved with a chuckle. 'Friederike, please remember to pin your hair back up before you are seen and Antonia please change your dress.'

'You are not really cross are you, Amalia?' I coaxed with what was supposed to be my most winsome smile.

My sister tried to look solemn but had to give up when she couldn't help but laugh. 'No dearest, not cross at all,' she said, kissing my forehead and smoothing my hair back, 'just sincerely pleased to see you looking so happy again.'

Wednesday, 24th August, afternoon.

My lovely, amusing French tutors have been sent away. I went as usual to my classroom only to find that only the Countess was waiting for me.

'Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul has sent word that it is considered entirely unsuitable for an Archduchess of Austria and future Princess of France to be taught by what are fundamentally a pair of strolling players,' she said with cold look. I always knew that she hated poor Aufresne and Sainville and I suspect her of having engineered their dismissal in some way.

'They were real actors!' I protested, stung by her description of them as 'strolling players'. 'Why must you always be so unkind, Countess?'

Countess Lerchenfeld raised one finely plucked eyebrow. 'I beg your pardon, your Highness?' She sounded shocked.

I raised my chin. 'I liked them and I do not wish to hear them spoken of in such a way.' I sat down at my desk and picked up my rough book and pen. 'Now, if you please, Countess.' I tried to appear entirely composed but I had to lay my

pen down on the wooden desk as my fingers were shaking so much.

The Countess clicked her tongue against her teeth angrily. 'Such behaviour will avail you nothing, your Highness,' she remarked. 'Your mother ordered me to inform you that another teacher has already been chosen from you and is even now on their way from the French court.'

I did not reply but my mind was working quickly. Another teacher was being sent directly from the French court? Mama must be beside herself with joy as French interference in the matter of my education must surely be a confirmation that the French King also wishes for a match between myself and the Dauphin Louis. I must ask Amalia.

Friday, 26th August, late, I cannot sleep.

Amalia agrees that it must be so. If the French did not want their Dauphin to marry me then they would not care who taught me French.

I do not know what I think about all of this. On one hand, of course I wish to be married but on the other, well, France is so far away and so strange.

'Papa considered himself to be French,' Amalia reminded me with a smile. 'He was born there and his Mama was a French princess and niece of their Sun King, Louis.'

I sighed. 'So in a way I am a part French too? I always forget that.' A portrait of our Grandmama, the Princesse Élisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans hangs in what used to be Papa's room in the Hofburg and I have often admired her pretty, heart shaped face and large brown eyes which she had inherited from her wicked papa, Philippe d'Orléans.

Monday, 5th September, late.

I was walking in the gardens earlier when I came upon Amalia and Karl sitting on a bench and kissing passionately. I backed immediately away and hid behind a hedge so I do not think that they saw me. How fortunate though that no one else was with me as I had asked my maids and footmen to fall behind so that I could be alone.

My heart troubles me and there is nothing that I can do to help my sister.

Oh, Amalia.

Tuesday, 6th September.

Amalia and I were sitting together in her sitting room, both quietly stitching baby shirts for yet another one of Leopold's babies, while outside the rain lashed against the windows. He and his ugly Spanish wife have two children now and yet another one on the way which Mama is in transports about. 'It must be very boring in Florence,' Joseph remarked with a grimace when he was told the happy news.

'I know that you saw us,' Amalia whispered so quietly that at first I wasn't sure that I had not imagined things. 'Yesterday in the gardens.'

I stopped sewing and looked at her, completely startled. 'I did not mean to... I won't tell anyone!' I could not help blushing, as though I had been caught out in some terrible misdemeanor. 'I was not spying on you, Amalia!'

She laughed. 'Oh, I know, silly girl! Spying was always Carolina's special talent wasn't it?' She put in a final stitch and then laid the little white linen baby shirt aside. 'I did not know if it was wise to talk to you about such a matter but it occurred to me that you might have been troubled in some way by what you saw.'

'N-no,' I stammered, thinking immediately of this book and wondering if she had discovered it and read my entry from yesterday. 'I am worried about you but there is really no need for us to discuss what happened.' I felt quite panicky at the prospect of being taken into Amalia's confidence as it all felt so grown up and beyond my comprehension.

Amalia looked at me then for a moment and then nodded, as though she had read my thoughts. 'You are quite welcome to ask me anything that you like,' she said. 'I do not want to keep any secrets from you, Antonia.'

I looked away, feeling quite uncomfortable and unable to meet her eye. 'I am sorry for your situation,' I murmured, not knowing what else to say. 'I would not wish to pry.' I stole a look at my sister and saw that she was not watching me at all but instead gazing calmly out of the rain splattered window and across the park. 'I wish that you were at liberty to marry the man of your choice.'

'I know.' She looked at me then and I saw that her blue eyes were wet with unshed tears. 'I wish that too. It is so hard to see him and know that we will never be permitted to be together and that now it is too late to do anything about it.' She smiled ruefully and raised one white hand to her eyes. I remembered that Amalia had never liked to be seen crying.

'Was there ever a time when something might have been done about it?' I asked, curious despite myself.

She smiled again, this time sadly. 'Perhaps.' She sighed then and shook her head. 'No, no I am deceiving myself. There was never any chance for Karl and I and we must resign ourselves to being separated forever, however much it hurts to accept this. I have loved him ever since I first set eyes on him and I could not stop myself, even though I knew all along that we would never be permitted to marry.' She leaned forward and took my hand in an urgent grip, which forced me to raise my eyes to her face. I had not really noticed before how pale she looked. 'Antonia, promise me that you will not fall in love before you are married.'

I stared at her. 'What do you mean?' I think that some of the young men at court are very handsome but it has never once occurred to me that I could fall in love with one of them as my elder sisters have done.

Amalia gripped my hand. 'Promise me, Antonia. I never ever want you to feel the torment of being wrenched away from the man you love as I have been.'

'I promise.' What else could I do?

Wednesday, 21st September, after dinner, Laxenburg.

Today I met my new tutor and it was not nearly so bad as I had feared. Mama herself brought him to the schoolroom and I looked up from my German exercise to see a small, neatly dressed little priest standing before me, smiling rather awkwardly as Mama prodded him forward and said her piece.

'Child, this is the Abbé Vermond, who has been sent from Versailles in order to overlook your education.' Mama could hardly conceal the note of intense satisfaction in her voice. 'Be sure to pay attention to him at all times.'

'Your Highness.' The little man gave an elegant bow. These French! Even their

priests are perfect courtiers. Not that our priests here in Vienna are peasants, but not one has half the elegance of little Abbé Vermond with his flashing dark eyes, his faint tang of Lavender water and his habit of clicking his polished heels together whenever he bows.

Mama and the Countess left us alone together and for a moment we looked warily at each other before the Abbé gave a sigh, cracked his knuckles in a businesslike manner and then pulled forward one of the chairs that stood against the wall. I had watched the knuckle cracking with some misgiving but was thrown by the chair.

'Do you not wish to sit behind the desk, Monsieur?' I asked in French. 'That is where Madame la Comtesse likes to sit.'

The Abbé smiled and shook his head. 'No, no, Your Highness, I will be quite comfortable here, I thank you.' He placed the chair on the other side of my desk and settled himself in it. 'I find desks so very off putting, don't you?'

'Yes, but you are here to be my teacher,' I pointed out, rather primly. 'And teachers sit behind desks.'

'Not always.' The Abbé looked at me for a moment, with his head to one side and then picked up my shamefully blotched piece of work as I instinctively stiffened, waiting for the inevitable criticisms. 'You are not fond of writing at length, I see,' was all that he had to say however.

I shook my head and brought out my ink stained hands for his inspection, as I had previously been doing my best to hide them under the desk. 'I start off well but then my arm begins to ache and then I get so very bored.'

'You prefer to talk then?' he enquired, after a solemn inspection of my poor stained fingers.

I nodded. 'Oh yes, infinitely.' I lowered my voice, well aware that some of the maids like to listen through keyholes. 'The Countess does not like to talk to me and I find it very dull to always be reading and copying things out. I do not feel like I ever actually *learn* anything.'

'But of course,' said the Abbé, while nodding as though he really understood.

'And then of course I feel so stupid,' I rushed on, instinctively knowing that I should and could trust this man. 'The Countess is so very strict and Mama expects excellence at all times and I am afraid that I am a disappointment to her.'

He smiled. 'I doubt that very much, Your Highness. I would even go so far as to say that I believe your Mama is as proud and doting as any Mother could be.' He stood up then and took a wander about the room, picking up books and looking out of windows. 'May I be frank with you, Your Highness?'

I smiled and nodded, pleased that someone was contemplating being honest with me for once. 'But, of course, Monsieur.'

'Thank you.' He sat down again and pressed his finger tips together. 'It is my belief that you are not at all stupid, Your Highness. In fact, it is my belief that you are actually a very intelligent girl with a quickness and understand that does you credit.'

I blushed. No one had ever called me intelligent before. Is that very sad? 'I... I thank you.'

The Abbé smiled and inclined his head. 'However, I do not think that you are at all academic and there is no point in us pretending otherwise.'

'No indeed!' I laughed then, pleased to have it finally in words and delighted that finally someone had understood me. 'I do like to know things, you know, but I am just not very good at learning. It makes my head hurt and is always so tiresome and there are always a dozen things that I would much rather be doing.'

'Then we must find a way to make it easier for you,' he replied with another smile and at that moment I decided that we were friends indeed.

We spent the rest of the afternoon talking together about Versailles and the great families who live there. Choiseul, Noailles, Stainville, Grimaldi, Rochefoucauld, Montmorency. Their names are elegant and intricate and weighty with history and tradition. The Abbé told me about each one and after a while they ceased to be mere names but instead began to be actual people that I will one day meet and live beside. To outsiders our conversation would have sounded like mere gossip but I know that it was all valuable information, if I am

to live with these people and safely navigate their feuds and ambitions.

'Tomorrow we shall start to learn about the French kings!' the Abbé said as I prepared to leave him at the end of the day. I paused and pouted at him. 'Now, do not look so downcast. I promise that it will not be very dreadful.'

I think that I like him.

Thursday, 22nd September, late.

No more brace! It has gone forever and instead I have perfectly straight, white teeth. I can't stop smiling at myself in mirrors, the Abbé and any passersby who make the mistake of meeting my eyes.

The brace itself has been consigned to the stove in my bedroom. Hideous thing!

Wednesday, 28th September, after dinner.

Vermond has been here for a week now and already I feel like I know so much more. I think that he is pleased with my progress as well, although he has not said so and I do not know what he says to Mama about me. She does not seem displeased though.

It feels like I spend less time at my lessons now but really we spend hours just talking together about France and its people, the court at Versailles and also French art, literature and history. He makes it possible for me to remember facts without even realising that I am in fact learning something.

I am ashamed of how ignorant I was before he came to me. I dreamt of going to France and being their Queen one day, but I had no idea what that meant. I still don't really know but I am getting an idea and I find myself becoming fascinated by this far away land that will one day, hopefully, be my own.

Vermond also teaches me French, which is more formally done although he believes that conversation is the key to my learning it properly and so I do my exercises in my books and then we sit and chat together, with me trying out my new vocabulary and the Abbé gently correcting my mistakes.

'It would really be better if Your Highness were to only ever hear French spoken,' he mused this afternoon as we sat together in the schoolroom. 'I shall

Speak to your mother about it.'

I stared at him, aghast. 'You mean that everyone should speak French to me and nothing else?' The windows were open as it was a bright, sunny day and I could hear my brothers Ferdinand and Max playing a noisy game outside on the lawns. I longed to be running around with them.

'Yes, that is precisely what I mean,' he said with a smile. 'It will be hard at first but I am confident that in only a very little time, Your Highness will be conversing in French as confidently as any native born speaker.'

I felt like crying. 'Oh, it is too hard! I thought I was doing well at our lessons? I am definitely getting better!' I jumped up and closed the windows, slamming them shut so that I couldn't hear my brothers any more. 'Please, Monsieur.'

Vermond sighed. 'No, no, it will not be so bad as all that, my child,' he murmured gently. 'Your French is improving all the time but it would be infinitely better if we could only make this small extra effort.'

I stamped my foot. 'You call it a small effort but it is a huge one for me!'

'As you wish,' he replied mildly before turning away and picking up a book. An awkward silence fell between us and I began to feel a little ashamed of my outburst. I had vowed to impress him with my elegant behaviour and here I was, stamping my feet like a servant girl. 'Shall we read together, Your Highness?' He turned back to me and smiled as though nothing had just happened, which made me feel even more guilty.

I took a deep breath. 'You are right, Monsieur,' I said penitently. 'My French is indeed far from perfect and this would indeed help me to improve it.'

The Abbé raised an eyebrow. 'So I should speak to your mother?' he asked. 'I should not like to act without Your Highness' permission.'

I nodded, blinking back tears. 'Yes, you should ask her and tell her that it is my particular wish that I should only hear French spoken in my presence from now on.'

If he felt any triumph, he was clever enough to hide it as he bowed over my

outstretched hand. 'I will do as you wish.'

Monday, 3rd October, I am supposed to be writing to Carolina.

Monsieur l'Abbé takes his duties very seriously indeed. This afternoon he took Friederike, Charlotte and me for a long walk around the gardens here at Laxenburg and talked to us about Versailles and how the entire court there is passionate about gardening.

'I love flowers,' I confided, as I gently touched the delicate pink petals of a full blown rose. 'I like to have fresh vases of flowers in my rooms all the time.'

'There are flowers everywhere in Versailles,' the Abbé replied with a reminiscent smile. 'The gardens are enormous and filled with every sort of tree, flower and plant imaginable including rare specimens sent from overseas. Inside the palace there are hundreds of orange trees in silver pots and beautiful vases full of colourful, fragrant flowers on every possible surface and even standing on the floor. The King is passionate about flowers and loves to have them around him.' He gave me a quick look. 'He himself is very knowledgeable about the different species and likes to talk of them with his intimates. He has even created a wonderful botanic garden at Versailles, which has enormous greenhouses filled with several thousand species of plants.'

I nodded, understanding perfectly. 'My knowledge is not great but I am keen to learn more.'

The Abbé smiled and picked a splendid yellow rose, which he presented to me with a courtly bow while Friederike and Charlotte giggled behind us. 'I shall make a Frenchwoman of you yet,' he said.

Wednesday, 26th October, back at the Hofburg.

I have started to attend Mama's weekly card parties in her rooms at the palace. I was always considered too young before for such activities but last week Amalia and Joseph came together to my sitting room to tell me that in future I will be involved as much as possible in the life of the court.

'The intention is to prepare you for your life in France and get you used to appearing in public and mingling with the court,' Joseph said with a grin as he carelessly pinched my cheek. 'Amalia will accompany you for the first time and advise you on what to wear and how to behave. Follow her lead and we shall not

be disappointed.'

Amalia smiled at me. 'The first thing we need to do is teach you how to play cards, otherwise you will be like a lamb to the slaughter.' She produced a well thumbed pack of cards from her green silk reticule and fanned them out on the table beside her. 'Care to join us, Joseph?'

The card party was fun, I suppose although I am not very good at playing and much preferred to walk about the room with one of my sisters or my friends, the princesses of Hesse-Darmstadt and make conversation with the courtiers, who stared at me curiously as they bowed and then addressed me politely in French. I caught many admiring looks as well and thought them well deserved as I did look very well that evening and was wearing a dress of pink taffeta, embroidered all over with gold and with rich lace at the hem and sleeves.

'I do not think that they like me very much,' I whispered to Amalia as we walked slowly around the card tables. A multitude of candles had been lit in the green and gold reception room and the soft, light flickered across the card players as they played. The air was filled with the sound of muted laughter, the roll of the dice and the chink of coins.

Amalia looked at me in some surprise. 'Now, why do you think that?' she asked, tapping me on the sleeve with her gold embroidered fan. She looked wonderful that evening in a gown of rich green and gold silk with diamonds hanging from her ears and a long string of pearls wound several times around her white throat.

I shrugged. 'They stare at me so,' I replied, not a little petulantly. 'They never really talk to me.' I could see the Abbé walking about with a friend at the other side of the room and for a brief instant he met my eyes and smiled. Mama treated the Abbé like a favoured guest rather than a tutor and he was included in all court occasions, which I could tell pleased him very much.

Amalia laughed. 'They stare because they do not know you and because everyone knows that you will soon be going to France.' She smiled. 'They will never get to know you as well as they know myself or Elizabeth or Christina and so lazily they, do not take the trouble to even try.'

I gasped. 'I had not thought of that like that,' I said, rather shocked. 'So they do

not really consider me to be one of them?' I looked around at the courtiers, most of whom were intently staring down at their cards, throwing dice down upon the table or helping themselves to wine from one of the several footmen circling about the room.

My sister linked her arm in mine. 'Never fear, Antonia, once you are Queen of France, they will all be tumbling over themselves in their haste to claim you as one of their own.'

Wednesday, 2nd November, my birthday.

I am thirteen today. So old.

The day started with breakfast with Mama in her private breakfast parlour, which is very cosy and has walls lined with pastel portraits of my sisters and brothers. I am there too, looking cheeky and slightly mutinous in a beautiful pink taffeta gown and somewhat improbably holding a tatting shuttle in my hand. I look at this during my breakfast of pastries and hot chocolate and avoid glancing at the companion picture of Carolina, in which she holds a rose to her flat bosom and gazes into the distance with a look of amusement on her pretty face.

'Thirteen years old,' Mama says with a reminiscent smile as she helped me to another pastry and then poured herself some more hot chocolate. 'And how does it feel, Antonia?'

I smiled. 'It does not feel any different yet, Mama.' I bit into the pastry and savoured the warm sweetness. 'I do not feel very old at all.' I was enjoying our private breakfast together which was a special treat just for my birthday. We spend so little time alone and there is always a crowd of family and courtiers around us, jostling for favours and attention so this was truly a special time.

'Enjoy it while it lasts,' Mama said, stirring some sugar into her hot chocolate and then lifting the delicate porcelain cup to her lips. 'Youth is so fleeting.' She heaved a heavy sigh and I knew that she was thinking about poor, dear Papa.

After breakfast we went to Mama's blue and gold paneled sitting room, where the windows were wide open as always and everyone shivered and rubbed their hands together as I opened my presents. I tried to do so as quickly as I could as it was so cold in the room and I could see that Elizabeth and Amalia were starting to go quite pale even though they had swathed themselves in thick white furs for

the occasion.

My presents this year included a pearl choker and matching bracelets from Mama and Joseph, a watercolour of Mama from Christina which I think she must have painted herself and the usual books and games from my brothers and sisters. Amalia gave me a new dress of pale yellow ruffled taffeta and Carolina sent a lovely sapphire brooch and a long letter which I am saving until later.

Monsieur de Durfort was shown into the room and brought me a huge basket of fruit from his master, the King of France and also a gold and porcelain box, which contained a miniature of the King himself, surrounded with diamonds. I blushed and immediately pinned the miniature to my dress, where it remains still. He is very handsome, even if he must be extremely old now.

'I am very honoured,' I murmured, thinking that it was very odd that the King had sent his own portrait and not that of his grandson, my prospective groom. I could see that Amalia was thinking the same thing as she bit her rosy lip a little as she looked at it and looked as though she was about to burst out laughing.

There was a knock on the door and then a grinning footman entered holding a small basket, which seemed to shake and wobble as he carried it. 'Your final present,' Joseph said with a smile and a flourish as the footman placed the basket on to my knees. 'I hope that you will like it.'

I looked up at him with wide, excited eyes. 'What could it be?' The basket gave a snuffle and wobbled on my lap.

'Why don't you open it and find out?' Joseph urged, laughing.

I pulled apart the broad silver ribbon which held the basket closed and immediately the top fell open to reveal the most adorable little Pug dog that I have ever beheld. 'Ooooooh!' I snatched him out of the basket and held him close to my face, loving the smell of his milky puppy breath. 'Oh, thank you! Thank you!' I had never had my own dog before and had always been so envious of my elder sisters' pets which they always carried about with them.

'How adorable,' Amalia touched the little dog's soft nose with her finger. 'What will you call him, Antonia?'

I thought for a moment and looked at the little dog for a moment. 'Mops,' I said at last. 'I think that it suits him, do not you?'

Amalia laughed. 'It is certainly unique.'

Thursday, 3rd November, early morning.

I am so exhausted. Last night involved a most sumptuous family dinner (chocolate cake *and apfelstrudel!*) followed by a merry hour spent playing at cards and a lottery in my brother Ferdinand's rooms. After this I went to my bedchamber and tapped my fingers impatiently on the top of my lace and ribbon festooned dressing table as my maids laced me into my new yellow taffeta gown, pushed beautiful purple silk shoes on to my feet and fastened Mama's pearls around my neck and the French King's miniature to my bosom.

'How do I look?' I twirled before them and patted my hair anxiously in front of the mirror.

'Beautiful,' the girls all chorused, grinning at my excitement and delicately shaking out my skirts and putting my curls into place. 'Happy birthday, Archduchess!'

What a wonderful party we had. I entered on Joseph's arm and blushed to find myself the cynosure of all eyes. Yes, cynosure. The Abbé teaches me such lovely words doesn't he? The music stopped and everyone turned and stared as we walked in and then slowly made our way through them all down the great mirrored gallery, which gleamed softly in the candlelight.

'How pretty she is!' I heard someone exclaim. 'Like an angel.'

I smiled graciously in the direction of the compliment, then looked up at my handsome brother who returned my look fondly and gently patted my hand which was resting on his purple velvet arm. 'I think that you are set to become all the rage in Vienna,' he murmured. 'Does that please you, little Antonia?'

We reached the scarlet carpeted dais at the end of the hall and Joseph helped me into a blue and gold upholstered seat of honour, in between himself and Mama, who smiled at me graciously and kissed my rosily blushing cheeks as she raised me from my curtsy. 'I am extremely proud,' she said before beckoning my Abbé forward with a crook of her little finger. 'Monsieur Abbé, I must

compliment you on your pupil.' Mama's tone was gently teasing and Vermond smiled and flushed a little with pleasure.

'All compliments are due to Her Highness herself,' he said tactfully with a limpid smile in my direction. 'You have raised a most delightful daughter, Your Majesty.'

I could see that his answer pleased Mama very much and she kept him beside her for a long time while I went off to dance first with Joseph and then with Ferdinand and then Max, followed by other carefully selected young gentlemen of the court who were chosen for their excellent manners, impeccable lineage and well bred good looks. I covertly watched the Abbé from beneath my lashes as Joseph spun me through the intricate steps of a cotillion and laughed inwardly at his politely bored expression as he leaned over Mama and listened to her hold forth. He looked up once and met my eye and we exchanged a smile of understanding that was quickly concealed.

I had hoped for some flirtation but the young court gentlemen were rather too well chosen and instead would only speak to me about art, the weather and music, mainly Gluck but there was also talk of poor Wolferl Mozart. It was all very proper and very dull and I longed for the sort of exciting chatter that Amalia seemed to be enjoying with her partners. I kept seeing her twirling past with her head thrown back in laughter and her blue eyes bright with glee, while her little feet in their diamond studded shoes pirouetted busily beneath her spangled pink silk skirts.

'Your sister is always having such a lot of fun,' one of my partners remarked, rather wistfully.

I glanced up at him quickly, ready to be offended but then deciding to be amused as he was really quite handsome if a bit too blond and blue eyed for my as yet unexplored tastes. 'Yes, she is. I envy her very much.'

'Do you?' The young man, although he was more of a boy really, looked down his aristocratic aquiline nose at me in some surprise.

I shrugged my violet scented shoulders in what I hoped was a coquettish manner before lowering my voice to a confidential whisper. 'It is not always fun to be a princess, you know.'

He laughed then. 'But you are not just any princess,' my partner said with aplomb and a gratifyingly admiring spark in his blue eyes, 'you are *the* princess.'

What do you think of that?

Tuesday, 22nd November, late.

I have just returned from a very pleasant evening at the opera, where we went to see Gluck's '*Alceste*' which I have seen several times now but still absolutely love. I am so proud to be taught by such a talented man and hope that he is pleased with me.

I went with Amalia and Joseph, who were both in very high spirits indeed and spent much of their time waving at members of the audience or blowing kisses to their friends. Joseph very kindly invited Abbé Vermond to accompany us and sit in the royal box, which is a great honour. It is the first time he has been to the opera with me and I was pleased to be able to show him how much I love the music and how intently I listen and pay attention.

At the end of the first act there was the usual mad scramble to leave boxes and meet up with friends for some chat. Joseph and Amalia were immediately besieged by several people who all crowded into the box and laughed and chattered very loudly about all of the latest Viennese gossip while helping themselves to the sweet cakes and champagne that the footmen were serving. I could see Amalia anxiously peering over her shoulder into the pits every so often but there was no sign of Karl.

'I hope that you are suitably impressed by how long I managed to sit still!' I remarked to the Abbé with a laugh.

He gave an appreciative grin and waved away a hovering footman who was standing over him with a plate of cakes. 'I am indeed, Your Highness.'

'And how did you like the opera?' I enquired, waving my peach silk and lace fan slowly in front of my face and sipping from a glass of lemonade.

The Abbé considered this question for a moment. 'I am enjoying it very much,' he said at last. 'Unlike Your Highness, I am no great judge of music but I think it very beautiful indeed.' He smiled. 'I am pleased to find that Herr Gluck is as

good a composer as he is a teacher.'

I allowed myself a grin, delighted with his answer as Herr Gluck is a great favourite of mine. 'I am very fond of him.' I leaned out of the box and espied a familiar face in another box in a lower tier. 'Oh, Monsieur, there is someone here that I would very much like you to meet! Would you care to come with me?' I impulsively stood up and stretched out a hand to him.

The Abbé smiled and lightly touched my hand. 'I would be honoured.'

We left the box preceded by a royal footman who shouted and pushed his way ahead of us down the crowded corridors and staircase to the next level. He smartly rapped on the door of the box for us and then pulled the door open for us.

'Antonia!' It was my dearest old wet nurse, Frau Weber, looking as magnificently plump and beautiful as ever. She immediately jumped to her feet and ran to embrace me, surrounding me with her familiar scent of roses and lavender. 'My own dear little foster daughter!' We both laughed at this and she kissed both of my cheeks. My mother did not nurse me herself and so I was turned over to the care of Frau Constance Weber, the lovely wife of a Viennese magistrate almost from the very hour of my birth and with her I remained until I was weaned.

'May I present to you my tutor, Abbé de Vermond?' I said with a smile, keen for them to like each other. 'This is his first ever Gluck opera! Fancy that!' The Abbé smiled and bowed.

'I think that the Abbé must be new to Vienna then,' my nurse said with a laugh. 'I have not seen you since your birthday and you look even prettier than ever!' She turned and beckoned. 'And here is Joseph as well! Come now boy and say hello to your foster sister!' Mama has always encouraged me to show proper gratitude and regard Frau Weber as my foster mother and her numerous children, but especially Joseph, who is only three months older than myself and was therefore raised beside me, as my foster brothers and sisters.

I clapped my hands together in delight. 'Brother Joseph!' The awkward, grinning boy came forward and enclosed me in a very welcome and very affectionate hug. 'Oh, Joseph, how tall you are!' I stood on tiptoe and kissed his

cheek.

'You look very pretty tonight, Antonia,' he said, exchanging bows with the Abbé. 'These new French fashions suit you.'

I laughed and twirled for him. 'Do you really think so, Joseph?' When we were very little, Joseph and I had vowed to marry when we were all grown up. I wondered if he remembered this now as I danced about in front of him with the King of France's miniature pinned to my peach silk sleeve. 'I hope that I have not turned out so badly after all.'

He blushed then and looked thoroughly embarrassed, which made his fond mother tsk and roll her eyes in amusement. 'No, I think that you have turned out very well.'

Sunday, 27th November, first Sunday of Advent.

Tonight my family and some favoured courtiers all gathered together in the blue and gold drawing room to light the first candle on the large holly and red ribbon swathed *Adventkranz*. This year it was my turn to skip forward with a long wax taper and light the candle as everyone applauded and cheered. I looked at Amalia and we smiled at each other, remembering that last year it was Carolina who lit the first candle and the year before that it was Josepha, both of whom are gone from us now.

After this, we all sang carols while Amalia and Marianna took it in turns to play the harpsichord and Elizabeth accompanied them with her harp. Then I played on the harpsichord while Herr Gluck himself turned my sheets of music over for me and Ferdinand and Maximilian sang together. It was all very lovely. I felt shy at first to be playing before everyone but then after a while I was able to look up from the keys and observe my family. Mama was sitting with the French ambassador, Durfort and my dear Abbé on either side of her and was talking to them both with great animation and amusement. Joseph and Amalia stood a small distance away and were whispering together; Joseph looked irritated and Amalia had a sad expression on her face so I guessed that they were talking about Karl, who was standing on the other side of room and pretending to ignore everyone. Elizabeth was wearing a cream lace veil and sat a little apart, feeding her little spaniel chocolates and broken pieces of gingerbread while Marianne stood by a window with one of the ladies in waiting and was happily tapping her feet to the music as they chatted. Christina and her husband were

there as well, sitting cosily beside the stove with their fingers interlaced and their heads bent together fondly.

'You play beautifully,' Herr Gluck said with a smile when I finally stood up from the harpsichord and curtsied to everyone as they applauded. 'I am very proud.'

The court musicians entered after this and struck up a merry tune while we all prepared to dance and the footmen carried Mama's chair next to the stove, so that she could watch us in some comfort. I was partnered by Ferdinand, who is a very fine dancer although he finds it impossible to keep a straight face and likes to make fun of the other dancers. 'Only look at Amalia and Karl mooning over each other!' he whispered to me with a grin. 'How embarrassing.'

I did not reply for my attention had been caught by a conversation that Durfort and Vermond were having behind me. I had my back to them and so could not see their expressions but I immediately recognised Durfort's aristocratic whine.

'It is really quite undignified and lacking in any decorum or finesse,' Durfort was complaining as usual and I could imagine his disdainful expression as his little piggy eyes swept over the dancers. 'One cannot imagine such a thing happening at Versailles!'

'No, indeed,' the Abbé agreed in bland tones.

'I hope that the Archduchess leaves her Viennese manners behind if she comes to France,' Durfort continued. 'I shudder to imagine such indecorous capering in the marble halls of Versailles and frankly, Abbé, the prospect of their revolting *knoedels*, *strudels* and *bratwurst* being served at dinner there makes my stomach recoil. Can you imagine such an outrage? How can you *bear* it, my dear Abbé?'

I heard the Abbé give a cough. 'On the contrary, Monsieur, I believe that the Archduchess' informal manner will provide a breath of fresh air to those hallowed marble halls. Do not you? Versailles is so stuffy, so obsessed with etiquette and precedence that I find myself quite impatient to see what Her Highness makes of it and what changes she will make.'

'Changes? Perish the thought! I dread the day that that...' I heard no more, however, for Ferdinand seized my hands and danced me away.

How I dislike Durfort. What a mean, poor spirited little excuse for a man he is. I hope that not all the French are like him.

Saturday, 31st December, New Year's Eve.

It is the last night of the year. How strange this year has been, not just because my dearest and most beloved sister Carolina went away but also because of the changes it has wrought in myself, thanks in part to my dear Abbé Vermond. I started the year 1768 as a little girl but now I feel like I am almost at the very brink of womanhood.

I am going now to the state ball in my brother Joseph's rooms, where we are all going to dance and make merry and wait together for the palace clocks to strike midnight.

Happy new year, Carolina, wherever you are.

Sunday, 1st January 1769, late.

We had such fun last night. Joseph's footmen served champagne, schnapps and cakes all night long and we danced so much that I actually began to feel quite exhausted. Karl was there, which I thought was kind of Joseph, and he and Amalia danced together for most of the night. I think that Mama would have liked to have said something about it but it was such a happy occasion that she remained silent and looked the other way.

This morning we all went by carriage to Schönnbrunn where as a special treat Mama had arranged for snow to be brought down on carts from the mountains so that we could be pulled by horse drawn sleighs in the park. It was absolutely delightful and so much fun, until Ferdinand and Max decided to pelt everyone with snowballs, at which point everyone, even Amalia started to have a big snow fight, leaping from their sledges and plunging their hands into the snow and then flinging it at each other with whoops of glee. I discarded my thick fur lined gloves because they made it difficult for me to properly grasp and shape the snow into balls and after a short while my hands were red and sore from the cold, my big fur hat was lying abandoned and soggy on the ground, my hair was hanging in damp tendrils about my shoulders and my cheeks were bright crimson from laughter and exertion.

'Oh, my head hurts!' I complained to Friederike and Charlotte, who had shared my sledge with me and were joining in the fight with as much spirit and enjoyment as everyone else. 'I do not think that I have ever laughed so much in all my life!'

After this we went off to have hot chocolate, coffee and soft, sugary cakes in the palace and warmed ourselves before the big white stoves. It was altogether perfect.

Tuesday, 24th January, a snowy afternoon.

Last night was so thrilling! There was a knock on my door while I was sitting in front of my dressing table in my long white nightgown, watching sleepily in the mirror as one of my maids brushed out my hair, another pressed the brass warming pan in between the cool, cotton sheets of my bed and another stoked up the fire in the little white stove that stands in the corner of the room. Outside, the

snow was falling heavily across Vienna and it was a fiercely cold night.

'Who could it be at such an hour?' Clara, the youngest of my maids said as she got up from her station in front of the stove, wiped her grimy hands on her apron and went to open the door. 'Your Highness!' I looked up with some surprise and saw my sister Amalia standing on the threshold, with a hooded red velvet cloak drawn up over her head and a mischievous smile on her lips.

'What is it?' I started up from the dressing table and drew her into the room. 'Is something wrong?' I nodded to my maids to dismiss them and they all bobbed curtseys and filed silently from the room.

'No, nothing is wrong!' Amalia said airily. 'Quite the reverse in fact! How would you like to come out to a ball?' She pulled aside her cloak and I saw that underneath she was wearing a fabulous, spangled gown of blue and silver embroidered brocade. 'Carnival season is in full swing in Vienna, don't you even feel the slightest curiosity to see it for yourself?'

I stared at her. 'Of course, but I never thought...' I had never expected to be allowed to go to any of the masked parties, balls and concerts that marked the thrilling Viennese Carnival. Mama was not entirely approving of the traditional revelries and had banned the masked Carnival goers from the city's streets, expecting them instead to celebrate in their own homes, which they did with spectacular nightly balls and parties. 'Will Mama mind?' I asked, wrapping a shawl around myself over my thin nightgown and sitting down cross legged on my bed.

Amalia laughed. 'No, you goose! Mama must never get to hear of this!' She lowered her voice thrillingly. 'We are to go in secret!'

'In secret?' I gasped, feeling both terrified at going against Mama's wishes and also excited to be doing something for myself and, for once, behaving like an ordinary girl. 'Truly?' Excitement overcame and banished fear and I jumped from the bed and ran to give Amalia a hug. 'Oh truly?'

'Yes, truly!' She kissed my cheek. 'Now, which of your maids do you trust the most? Ring for her and get her to fetch your prettiest dress and a heavy cloak as it is freezing outside. Do you have a mask?'

I was already pulling the bell cord to summon Clara. 'Yes, Joseph gave me one for Christmas. It is gold and very pretty.' I clapped my hands with delight. 'I can hardly believe it! Oh, Amalia, thank you so much!'

Clara was quick to understand what was happening and very readily agreed to keep it a secret from absolutely everyone. Without any fuss, she dressed my hair simply with a long, silken ringlet hanging over my shoulder and then laced me into a blue silk corset and into a lovely pink and gold dress that I had not yet had a chance to wear. Amalia added a touch of rouge to my already rosy cheeks and lips, dabbed some violet scent behind my ears and then fastened a simple diamond necklace around my neck and slipped some pearl bracelets on to my wrists. 'You look utterly delightful,' she said, kissing my cheek. 'Now, let me see you with your mask on! Ah, perfect!'

Clara fastened my blue velvet, fur lined cloak and pulled the hood up cosily over my head. 'I hope that you have a wonderful time, Your Highness,' she said with a grin.

Out we stepped into the gloomy corridor, before slipping down the dark back stairs and out through a series of courtyards until we found ourselves on the outside of the Hofburg. I stood on the street and stared up through the falling snow at the dark walls and tall windows of my home. How different and strange it looked.

'Come on!' Amalia grasped my hand and pulled me around the corner to where a plain black carriage was waiting for us. The coachman jumped down and pulled the door open for us and although he was swathed in a heavy black cloak and mufflers and had a hat pulled down low on his brow, I thought I recognised the sandy hair that fell about his collar.

'Thank you!' I smiled at him as he held my hand and helped me up into the vehicle. 'I had no idea that it was so cold outside.' I spoke in German, determined to be someone else for the night.

He laughed. 'It is indeed, Your Highness! Keep yourself wrapped up warmly!' He closed the door with a slam and then jumped up to the front. Within a few moments the carriage was moving through the deserted, white streets. Amalia smiled and took my hand as I stared with a hungry curiosity from the window at my mother's capital city, which I had never before seen at night. Because of the

cold there were few people out and about but on the street corners, there were large cheerful fires in braziers, around which a few brave souls stood and warmed their chilled hands as they laughed and chatted together.

'Where are we going?' I asked at last.

Amalia smiled. 'I told you,' she replied, 'we are going to a party.' She patted my hand and began to hum a tune to herself. 'There will be dancing and young men and all sorts of lovely things. I do hope that you will enjoy it.'

Shortly afterwards the carriage came to a shuddering halt and a moment later the door was wrenched open and the coachman was helping me down on to the icy street. Amalia jumped down after me then nodded to the coachman, took my hand and led me through a large door that led into a pretty courtyard and then on to the main house, whose tall windows spilled light and colour and music on to the snow. I stared around me in wonderment as my sister led me into a large, marble floored entrance hall, which was crammed with splendidly dressed, masked revelers and bustling liveried footmen carrying silver trays laden with dozens of glasses of champagne and small tumblers of *schnapps*. There were candles everywhere, on every possible surface and the air was thick and heady with the scent of hair powder, pomade and the gorgeous musky perfumes favoured by the women of Vienna.

Amalia dropped back her hood, then undid her cloak with a flourish and handed it to a waiting footman, before signaling that I should do the same. 'Come on, let us go and find some fun!' she said, taking my hand and leading me through the surging, noisy crowd and up a wide marble staircase to an enormous, white and gold candlelit gallery that stretched the length of the house, its windows looking down over a snow covered garden at the back of the mansion. There everything was a swirl of noise and colour as a hidden orchestra played a popular tune and a vast crowd of people danced and cavorted joyously. I shrank behind Amalia a little as I watched a group of laughing young men do their best to snatch the black velvet mask from a lady's face as she pretended to slap them away and gave small, excited shrieks of fear. I began to think that perhaps this was not a good place for me to be.

'Do not be afraid,' Amalia whispered, squeezing my hand tightly and then leading me into the very heart of the crowd. We pushed our way past the boisterous, laughing dancers who clapped and twirled wildly in their brightly

coloured clothes and made our way to one of the windows, which was not so densely populated. Amalia relieved a passing footman of two glasses of champagne and handed one to me with a smile. 'Here, drink this! It will give you courage!'

I did as she recommended and almost immediately the fear began to drain away and instead I felt quite exhilarated and began to look about myself quite confidently, even daring to meet the curious stares of some of the young men. 'Does anyone know who we are?' I asked in an undertone.

Amalia grinned. 'I am sure that some do but no one will ever admit to it! That is the beauty of the masked balls!' She brought out her silver spangled fan and began to ply it vigorously. 'It is so unbearably hot in here is it not? Amazing to think that outside it is so cold!' She smiled over my shoulder. 'Ah, here you are at last!'

I turned to see that a tall young man in a splendid blue velvet suit had silently joined us. The upper half of his face was obscured by a plain black velvet mask but I had no difficulty in recognising him to be Karl von Zweibrücken, who had also presumably acted as our coachman for the evening. He smiled down at me. 'And how are you enjoying your first masked ball, Your Highness?'

I returned his smile. 'Oh, very much.' My feet were tapping along to the music and I found myself watching the dancers and longing with all my heart to be able to join them.

Amalia tapped Karl on the arm with her glittering fan. 'We must find some partners for this girl,' she said with a laugh. 'Or she will not enjoy it for very long.'

Karl laughed. 'Leave it to me. I know just the fellow.' He gave a low bow then disappeared off into the crowd, leaving Amalia to sigh and stare after him.

'He is very handsome,' I said, rather lamely.

Amalia nodded. 'Yes, yes he is. Very handsome indeed.' She spread out her fan and examined it for a moment in silence before closing it and giving her usual bright, hard smile. 'I do hope he finds you someone equally as handsome to flirt with!'

'To flirt?' I shrank a little and my heart began to pound uncomfortably behind my stays. 'Oh, no, I don't think that I can do that!'

Amalia laughed at me. 'Now, why ever not? Do not suppose that I did not see you looking all forlorn and left out at your birthday ball with all of those very proper young gentlemen that Joseph and Mama had so obligingly picked out for you! No, I am persuaded that what you need is to flirt with young men and be just like every other girl, even if it is just this once.'

I smiled then. 'I must admit that it would be a lot of fun. I thought the young men at the ball so dreadfully dull.' I shrugged my shoulders and laughed a little. 'I was beginning to wonder what all the fuss is about.'

Amalia gave me a quick hug. 'Well, we can't have that, can we?'

Karl returned shortly afterwards with a very tall and extremely handsome young man with a mop of dark hair and dark blue eyes that twinkled admiringly from behind his silver mask. He led me out to dance and then proceeded to flirt with me in the most agreeable fashion imaginable, which I enjoyed excessively even if it made me blush and left me utterly tongue tied.

After this I danced some more with Karl and some other young men of his acquaintance, who were all far more amusing than the very correct young courtiers that my brother considered to be suitable partners for me. I began to think myself very grown up indeed as I swept around the ballroom, laughing and smiling at these dashing and anonymous gentlemen who were all determined to make themselves as pleasing to me as possible. For the first time I began to comprehend a little of what my own power over men might be, if I was wise enough to use it properly and the knowledge was highly intoxicating.

I could happily have stayed all night long and danced until dawn but it required me to only yawn once for Amalia to immediately turn to Karl and say that perhaps we should all go home. 'Poor Antonia is almost asleep on her feet!'

'I am not!' I protested. 'Oh, please, Amalia, may we not stay for a while longer? The jugglers and fire eaters and stilt walkers have just arrived and I am enjoying myself so much!'

Amalia laughed and shook her lovely head. 'No, I must insist that you come home before you give yourself up entirely to dissipation and become quite depraved, which would *never* do!' She kissed my glowing cheek. 'I am glad, though, that you have enjoyed yourself!'

I threw my arms about her. 'Oh, Amalia, I have enjoyed myself so much! Thank you! Thank you!'

She smiled and kissed my cheek. 'I am so glad, *petite*! It would be dreadful if you were to leave Vienna without having at least once experienced a masked ball here.' It was only then that I realised that this could well be Amalia's last carnival season in Austria for she is due to go to Parma in the Summer and will probably never return again and then after that it will be my turn.

Wednesday, 22nd February, late.

I have had another letter from Carolina. She doesn't sound unhappy but is clearly bored and dissatisfied with her life in Naples. Her letter ended with: '*I know that I should not speak to you of this but I have never been so disappointed in all my life as when the Countess' Secrets of the Bouoir were finally revealed to me. I sincerely hope that you will have a happier experience than me.*'

I blushed crimson as I read this, suddenly fearful that my mail had been intercepted and read before it came into my hands and that now everyone knew that I was interested in such things. I read the letter through one more time to commit it to memory and then immediately opened up my stove, thrust it inside and then watched it curl up in the fire and then disintegrate into powdery ashes.

I wish though that she had written more on the subject. I would like to know just a little bit of what to expect before it happens. I wonder if anyone will ever tell me?

Sunday, 26th February, after dinner.

Amalia turned twenty three today. She does not look very happy about this. Her fiancé, the Duke of Parma sent her a beautiful diamond bracelet but she barely looked at it before tossing it aside.

Wednesday, 8th March.

Amalia came to my sitting room this afternoon with a small parcel, carefully wrapped in blue silk and tied with a pink velvet ribbon. She waved away my

maids and smiled mysteriously as she handed it to me. 'A present,' she said.

'What can it be?' I pulled the silk away to reveal a wooden box with a metal clasp. 'More jewels?'

Amalia laughed and shook her head. 'No. Look inside.'

I opened the box to reveal a small gold medal lying on a bed of pale green velvet. For a moment I was confused as I gazed at it but then I picked up and looked closer and realised that on one side there was a portrait of myself in profile and on the other there was one of a young man that I did not recognise but who the inscription identified as the Dauphin Louis of France.

'Do you see?' Amalia whispered. 'It came from France.'

I looked up at her and nodded, feeling suddenly afraid. 'Yes, I do.'

It is all starting to happen now.

Monday, 20th March, evening.

Mama has started descending on my French history lessons with Abbé Vermond. She enters with a great deal of drama and fuss and then ostentatiously seats herself in a corner, telling us both in a whisper not to mind her and to pretend that she isn't there. The Abbé and I always look at each other in amusement, well aware that in only a few moments she will interrupt and then impatiently take over the conversation, steering it irresistibly towards her own thoughts and opinions, which are rarely flattering to the French, who she clearly believes to be both untrustworthy and frivolous and 'not like us'.

Sometimes I think that it would be better if she went to France instead of me. Perhaps King Louis would like to marry her? His own wife died last year so perhaps he is looking for a replacement?

Tuesday, 11th April, Schönnbrunn.

An artist called Monsieur Ducreux has arrived from Paris to take my likeness in pastels for the French court. I haven't met him yet but Joseph himself came to my sitting room to inform me of his arrival.

'It is imperative that you are in your best looks and are as charming as

possible,' my brother ordered while tugging gently at Mops' silky ears while she, absurd animal, almost swooned with happiness. 'Everything depends upon it.' He scratched under Mops' chin. 'This portrait will be sent to Versailles, where it will be inspected by King Louis himself.'

'I will do my best,' I murmured meekly. After all, how hard can it be?

Friday, 14th April, after dinner.

Monsieur Ducreux hates me. I can tell. He seemed so pleased when I first skipped into the small, cold salon where our sittings are to take place and fussed over me politely as I settled myself in my pink upholstered chair and arranged my blue and yellow silk skirts in the most becoming manner.

'It is always a pleasure to have such a delightful subject,' he remarked with a smile as he tilted my head to one side, just so and then placed one of my hands beneath my chin. 'You will win all hearts in France, Your Highness.'

His pleasure in me did not last for long and after only a short time it was becoming clear that he was not finding me at all delightful to work with as he kept jumping up and repositioning first my hands then my head, then my hands again, then telling me to hide them altogether, then asking me to smile more, then less and so on. It was dreadful watching him become increasingly irate and when I started to get a cramp in my arm, I was too scared to tell him in case he lost his temper completely and threw his pastels at my head or something.

When the hour was over and I thankfully rose to leave, he crumpled the paper in his hand and hurled it on to the floor. 'Tomorrow we will try again!' he announced with a deep sigh.

Thursday, 4th May, early.

The portrait is finished and is surprisingly pleasing, considering how much trouble it cost us. I look very young and very pretty and gaze out directly at the viewer with wide, innocent blue eyes. The entire family gathered in Mama's freezing cold, sandalwood scented sitting room to inspect it before it was wrapped in silks, sealed into a wooden box and then sent on its way to Versailles.

'King Louis will be extremely impressed,' Elizabeth said to Christina with a giggle and a significant look from beneath her thinly plucked eyebrows. 'I hear

that he is partial to pretty little blondes.'

I do not know why they both started laughing so nastily; surely it is a good thing if the King of France admires my looks and thinks me pretty enough to marry his grandson? I only wish that I had been allowed to smile with my mouth open so that he could see how wonderfully straight my teeth are now, considering all the effort that went into making them so.

Wednesday, 17th May, late. I should be in bed.

We had a delightful family concert tonight and I played the harp in front of everyone. Even Monsieur le Marquis de Durfort came up to me afterwards and complimented me on the grace and skill of my playing.

'I do believe that he is softening towards you, my dear one!' Amalia whispered to me with an arch look behind her painted fan. 'I heard him remark to your Abbé that he thought it impossible to imagine anything prettier and more charming than your expression while playing the harp.'

I blushed. 'This is praise indeed,' I murmured, not knowing what else to say. 'I was starting to think that perhaps Monsieur de Durfort was against my marriage.'

'It would appear that he has changed his mind.' Amalia laughed and passed on to talk to Marianne.

Thursday, 25th May, early morning.

I am lying in bed, waiting for my maids to silently tiptoe in to open the heavy pink damask curtains and light the little white stove in the corner of my room before bringing me my breakfast in bed. I do not know why I woke up so early but it is pleasant to lie here snugly and listen to the sounds of the palace as it wakes up from its slumber and prepares for the day ahead.

My brothers are already up and I can hear them outside, hallooing noisily to each other and whistling for their dogs as they set off on their customary early morning walk in the park. I can close my eyes and imagine them as they must look: Joseph, tall and handsome with a stern look in his bright blue eyes; Ferdinand, sulkily kicking the turf and squinting up at the sun that is just beginning to peep over the trees and Max, with his untidy fair hair escaping from its ponytail, eating the sugared pastries that he carries in his pockets and carelessly flicking the clamouring, hungry dogs away.

Elsewhere in the palace, Mama will have been up since dawn and will already be dressed in her customary black, with a plain linen cap pulled down over her powdered hair and black net mittens on her beautiful white hands. She will have had an early morning meeting with several yawning, weary advisors and will now be sitting at her black lacquer desk, signing official papers heavy with red wax seals, writing letters that will travel all over the globe and occasionally pausing to either pat one of her dogs, sip some water or gaze out through the open window at the park beyond.

I can't imagine what it will be like to live so far away from everything that I have ever known. To wake up anywhere else but here, safe in the heart of my own family.

Tuesday, 6th June.

It has finally happened.

I was walking in the garden with the Princesses Friederike and Charlotte when one of my mother's liveried footmen appeared on the path ahead of us, flushed and out of breath as he had obviously been rushing around in search of me. I suddenly felt very faint and breathless as I stood in the middle of the gravel path and waited for him to reach us. I reached back blindly to take hold of Charlotte's hand and her warm fingers twisted reassuringly around mine.

'This is it,' I whispered, shivering despite the fact that it was a clement day with barely a breeze in the sky. I could hear the birds singing in the trees overhead and for a brief moment everything seemed to have a shimmering clarity and stillness. 'This is finally it.' I will always remember where I was standing and how I felt when the footman came to tell me that my mother had sent me for me.

'Your Highness,' the boy bowed low and then straightened up, his cheeks red and pimpled beneath his slightly askew white perriwig. 'I have been ordered to take you immediately to the Empress.'

'Of course.' I looked back fearfully at my friends and they both stepped forward with reassuring smiles and began to straighten my floral printed white silk dress and the pink cashmere shawl that I had arranged about my elbows. 'Do I look pretty?' I asked anxiously, aware that this was an important moment.

'You look charming,' Friederike said with a wistful smile as she gave my silk skirts one last tweak. 'Your mother, the Empress will be very pleased.'

I leaned forward, took both of her hands and kissed her cheeks, then turned to follow the footman down the paths, along the parterre and back to the palace. We passed several tight little groups of courtiers, who looked at me curiously as they curtsied, their bright silk skirts looking like petals against the foliage of the gardens. I heard their whispers behind my back: 'The French have asked for her. King Louis was immediately smitten with her portrait. The princess will be Dauphine within the year.' News travels fast in Vienna. We have no secrets here.

The liveried palace footmen lowered their eyes and bowed deferentially as I clattered in my high heels through the succession of rose and lavender *pot pourri* scented white and gold reception rooms that led to my mother's sitting room. The rooms were crammed full of courtiers, all of whom had clearly heard the news and were keen to catch a glimpse of me as I made my way to my destiny. They broke off whispered conversations and stared at me boldly as I walked past, barely acknowledging them with the flicker of a smile and the smallest movement of my head.

Amalia was waiting for me by the door to Mama's room, splendidly dressed in a gown of yellow and pink silk with a delicate lace fichu arranged over her plump shoulders. 'Be brave little one,' she murmured into my ear as she embraced me then swiftly kissed me on both cheeks. 'Do not be afraid.'

A footman opened the double doors and I took a deep breath and stepped into the room, jumping a little when the doors closed with a sharp bang behind me. Mama was sitting behind her desk when I entered but stood up with a smile and came forward to take my hands and lead me to a small, gold upholstered sofa placed beside the stove. 'My dearest child, come here and sit beside me.'

I obediently sat down and arranged my hands neatly in my lap then looked at Mama from beneath my lashes, waiting for her to say something.

'My dearest child,' she murmured, touching my rosy cheek with her fingertips. 'I am so proud.'

I looked at her properly then. 'Oh?' I did not know what else to say. Even

though everyone else in Schönnbrunn knew the news, it seemed important that I should at least pretend to still be in maidenly ignorance of my fate.

Mama smiled and took both of my hands in hers. I could feel the cold chill of her diamond rings against my fingers. 'My dearest girl, the King of France has asked for you,' she said triumphantly. 'It is all settled at last and you, my darling, are to be married to his grandson, the Dauphin.' Tears of pride sparkled in her light blue eyes. 'You will be Queen of France, Antonia.'

'Queen of France,' I murmured, trying in vain to imagine myself with a cold, weighty crown upon my head. 'It will be very strange.'

'It is a great honour,' my mother reminded me. 'France is one of the greatest countries in the world and you are fortunate indeed to have such an opportunity.' She stood up then and went to the open window, where she stood for a moment inhaling deeply. 'You will primarily reside at Versailles, which is of course is famed throughout Europe for its magnificence and splendour and of course Paris will be close at hand.' She turned back to me with a smile. 'You will want for nothing and will live in the very lap of luxury. I must confess that I am a little jealous.'

I didn't believe her; my mother had never wanted anything other than to be in Vienna and to rule her Empire as her father had done before her. In the eyes of my mother, there was no finer destiny on Earth than to be herself.

'I know that it will be hard to go so far from home and everything that you know, but King Louis has expressed his desire to treat you as his own dearest grand daughter and I have no doubt at all that I will be placing you in the very best of hands.'

I found my voice then. 'And what of the Dauphin? What about him?'

My mother looked confused. 'The Dauphin?' she echoed with a frown. 'Well, he has nothing to say about the matter but I hear that he was very pleased indeed with your portrait.'

I shook my head. 'But what is he *like*? Is he handsome? Does he like to ride? Will we be friends?' It had been considered essential that my portrait be seen in Versailles before an offer for my hand was made but it seemed that at no point

had been considered a good idea that I should be allowed to peruse the likeness of my prospective husband. Left to my own devices, I imagined him to be much like my brothers in terms of appearance and tastes and this thought comforted me very much.

Mama looked a trifle embarrassed. 'I have really no idea,' she said. 'I have heard that he is well favoured and intelligent and that he likes to go hunting with the other young men of the court. Is that what you mean?'

I sighed. 'I suppose so. Yes, that is what I meant.'

'I do hope that this match pleases you,' Mama said then, taking my hand in hers. 'I have been working for so many years towards this alliance with France and now finally it is within our grasp.'

I looked at her in some surprise, knowing that really my opinion mattered for absolutely nothing and that it didn't matter whether I approved or not because I knew that I was going to France, even if they had to bundle me kicking and screaming into the carriage, but for some reason my mother needed reassurance that I was happy with the choice that had been made for me.

I took a deep breath and thought of Paris, Versailles and that cold, weighty crown. 'Yes, of course it pleases me.' I smiled and squeezed her hand. 'How could it not?' I thought then of my sisters, sobbing and struggling against the destinies that had been forged on their behalf. I thought of Josepha, pale faced and solemn as she went to her doom and of Carolina, crying in her bedroom on the morning of her wedding and of Amalia, who was being torn away from the man that she loved in order to marry a complete stranger. I thought of all this and felt suddenly as though I had betrayed them all by so compliantly allowing myself to be given away.

'My dear, what are you thinking of?' my mother asked with a quizzical smile. 'You look so odd.'

I turned to her then and gave a shaky laugh. 'I was just thinking that you must find my lack of resistance rather disappointing.' I remembered then the public ceremony that had marked Amalia's betrothal, which was in such a stark contrast to this private, cosy little chat. Mama had clearly decided not to chance another display of public disobedience.

She laughed then and hugged me close. She smelt of roses and lilies. 'No, not at all. If anything, I find it *refreshing*.' She sighed and kissed my forehead. 'I am used to tears and tantrums and woe and drama but really, you know, marriage is not such a very terrible thing. One man is much the same as another and they are all equally easy to control. I do not quite see what all the fuss is about.'

This from the woman who left no stone unturned in her quest to marry the man of her choice and avoid the match that had been arranged for her.

Wednesday, 7th June, waiting for dinner.

Abbé Vermond came to see me this morning, even though all of my lessons were cancelled for the day. He congratulated me and then we sat for a long time in silence, not knowing what to say now that it has finally all become real.

'What is the Dauphin like?' I asked at last, leaning forward with my hands clasped before me. 'No one seems to know.' In all our talks about the history and grandeur of France and its royal family and its nobility, we had not so much as touched upon the subject of the boy, only one year older than myself, who was to be my husband. 'Have you ever seen him?'

The Abbé looked startled. 'Why, yes, of course, frequently but...' He paused then pressed his fingertips together and raised them to his lips as he considered what to say next. 'What would you like to know?'

I shrugged. 'What are his tastes? Is he handsome? Will I like him? Is he like my brothers?' I lowered my voice, suddenly uncertain. 'Will he like me?'

Vermond smiled. 'How could he not like you?' He sighed. 'The Dauphin Louis is much the same as other young men of his age and is extremely fond of horse riding and hunting. He is not precisely handsome but he is tall and well built and has blond hair and pleasing blue eyes.' He smiled. 'I think that you will like him very well. He is not so lively as you are, Your Highness, and is much addicted to his books and lessons but he is a kind hearted boy and one that it would be easy to become fond of.'

I could not help but frown during most of his speech. 'So not handsome then?'

Vermond laughed. 'My dear, outside fairy tales there is no such thing as a

handsome prince.'

'And he likes to read?' My heart sank as I imagined myself married to the sort of boy who likes to sit indoors reading books when I would much rather be running around outside with my dogs. 'Will he think me very stupid because I do not like books very much?'

The Abbé smiled rather sadly and patted my hand. 'I am sure that he will think nothing of the sort, Your Highness.' He coughed and looked embarrassed. 'You realise of course that in a state marriage you will not be expected to spend much time in each other's company?'

'Oh.' I felt very deflated and foolish and could feel a flush of embarrassment rising about my ears. 'Oh, yes, of course.' I attempted a brave smile. 'I knew that, yes.'

Vermond looked unhappy. 'Your parents were extremely close were they not? It is not always so when the parties have been married for reasons of policy and not because of their own personal inclinations.' He patted my hand again. 'Your parents were fortunate and we must hope that you will be fortunate also.' He did not sound very optimistic.

Friday, 9th June, I am supposed to be working on my French.

Amalia and I have just spent an hour with one of the finest dressmakers in Vienna, being fitted for the magnificent gown that I am to wear to the *fete* at Laxenburg that has been planned for my name day. It is cloth of silver embroidered all over with silver and pearls and cobwebby, silvery lace. I stood very still, hardly daring to breathe while the seamstresses crawled about on the floor pinning up the voluminous skirt and allowed myself to only very lightly touch the wide panniers that stretched out from either side of my narrow, corseted waist.

'You look wonderful,' Amalia said with a smile. 'Just like a princess should.' She had already tried on her dress: an exquisite raspberry pink gown embellished with green ribbons and bows and was now comfortably ensconced in a low arm chair, watching my fitting.

'I hope so,' I frowned as I timidly touched one of the large silver ribbon bows on the stomacher with my finger. 'It is terribly heavy.' I gazed at myself in the

ribbon and lace swathed full length mirror and thought that I looked terribly small and really very sad.

Amalia laughed then. 'I am sure that it is but you will get used to it.'

The dressmaker turned to Amalia with a smile. 'Your Highness will no doubt be delighted to learn that your wedding dress is almost completed. It is the most beautiful creation imaginable and I cannot wait until you can see it for yourself.'

Amalia stopped smiling. 'Oh. Yes. I had forgotten,' she said in a toneless voice that held no enthusiasm. She is to leave Vienna to be married in less than a month and any mention of the fact is most unwelcome.

The dressmaker and her seamstresses looked at each other in confusion. 'I am sorry, Your Highness, I did not realise...' the woman's voice trailed away.

Monday, 12th June, Laxenburg, waiting for dinner.

We arrived at Laxenburg earlier this afternoon and I am exhausted and famished. The journey was very exciting as most of the court came with us for the *fete* tomorrow and Amalia and I were able to wave and smile at the young men of the court as they rode alongside us on their horses and grinned down at us in our carriage. One or two even threw nosegays of sweetly scented flowers in through the open windows, which we clasped to our bosoms in a theatrical manner and giggled over. Mama was in her own large carriage up ahead with Elizabeth and Marianna and so remained oblivious to what was happening in her wake.

Ah, here comes the footman to escort me down to dinner! Finally! I hope there are dumplings and plenty of cake.

Tuesday, 13th June, very late.

I have had the most wonderful day. I am so tired now and should really just go straight to bed but I want to write it all down before I forget.

It started with a private breakfast with Mama, Joseph and my other brothers and sisters, including Christina and Albert, who have their own charming house nearby. It was all very jolly and Mama herself helped me to a cup of hot chocolate and one of my favourite sticky almond pastries.

After this we went into Mama's sitting room and here I received my presents which included a set of magnificent pearls from Mama and Joseph, a diamond and pink velvet collar for Mops from Amalia, a very pretty set of drawings of Laxenburg and Schönbrunn from Christina and Albert and other sundry but very lovely things from everyone else. Then the footmen opened the doors and the ambassadors entered bearing gifts of flowers and baskets of fruit. Monsieur de Durfort presented me with a lovely diamond bracelet from his master the King of France and an emissary from Carolina in Naples gave me a beautiful pair of pearl earrings along with a letter from my sister.

'Well!' said Christina eyeing my splendid gifts rather sourly. 'You have been well and truly spoilt! I do hope that you won't allow your head to be turned by all of this fuss, Antonia!'

'Of course not!' I replied with my sweetest smile. 'I would be ungrateful indeed, though, if I did not enjoy the honour that everyone is kind enough to show me.' I saw Joseph hide a smile behind his hand and knew that for once I had said just the right thing.

After this I returned to my room to change out of my yellow silk dress into a pretty white silk one that was embroidered all over with wonderful pink, blue and yellow flowers which had been made for the afternoon party in the gardens. My maids laughed and chattered merrily as they tied a simple string of pearls around my throat, straightened my hair and twisted the long ringlet that fell over my shoulder with their fingers.

There was a knock at the door, which the footman waiting outside opened to admit Mama, dressed in black shimmering taffeta and accompanied by three fresh faced girls who looked to be only a few years older than myself and a young boy of about nine or ten years of age dressed in pale blue and gold livery. I gaped at her for a moment before sinking into a low curtsy. 'I am sorry, I was not expecting...'

'That is quite alright my child,' she said, raising me to my feet and kissing me on both cheeks before holding me out at arms length to survey my appearance. 'You look very lovely,' she said at last with a smile. 'I am very proud.' She gestured to the three girls to come forward. 'I bring you another surprise, my dearest one.'

'Oh?' I smiled at the girls and all three smiled back then bobbed curtseys.

'It is about time that you had some maids of honour,' Mama said. 'I have selected three of the most accomplished girls from the best families in Austria to wait upon you. They will be your constant companions from now on and will accompany you everywhere.' She led them forward one by one, first the fair one in a yellow silk dress with pink ribbons in her hair. 'This is Lucia.' Then a freckled redhead in a green taffeta gown with a wide red ribbon around her throat. 'This is Anna.' Then finally a pretty, blue eyed brunette in a pink striped dress and green velvet shoes. 'And this is Clementina.' They all smiled again shyly and curtsied.

'You are all very welcome,' I said with a smile. For as long as I could remember I had had only my maids to serve me, usually handed down from my older sisters so this was indeed progress: my own ladies in waiting! I felt quite grown up. 'I hope that we shall all be friends.'

My mother smiled then drew forward the boy, who had long strawberry curls and a mischievous smile. 'Also, from now on you will not set foot outside your rooms without a page to accompany you. Your current habit of wandering about unattended and going for walks alone must cease immediately as it will never do to have Versailles hear of it.' She smiled down at the boy, who bowed very low. 'This is Anton. He will also run all of your errands for you and accompany you on state occasions.'

I knelt down and smiled at Anton. 'Hello, I hope that we will be friends as well.' He did not look as though he needed any kindness though, as he was still smiling and looking about himself with an air of frank and confident self assurance that reminded me of my youngest brothers. I liked him immediately. Liked all of them in fact. It felt good to have more people around me.

The fete in the grounds of Laxenburg was so much fun: Mama had created a beautiful, bucolic (one of the Abbé's words), country party for me with real sheep (all scrubbed clean and wearing blue velvet bows around their necks) wandering about and very pretty, buxom milk maids pouring out glasses of milk and fresh lemonade. Almost the entire court was there to dance simple country dances on the lawns and eat cream cakes, strawberries and cream and delicious ices out of porcelain bowls. Amalia and I wandered arm in arm through the crowds and nodded and smiled at everyone while behind us skipped my new

maids of honour and pageboy, all wide eyed and agog at their first ever court occasion, even such an informal one as this. Anton was especially enjoying himself, he was carrying Mops who was wearing her new diamond collar in honour of the occasion and was happily helping himself to whatever strawberries and cakes he could get his hands on.

'Are you having a nice time, Antonia?' Joseph was standing before me with his little girl Theresia on his shoulders, dressed in a pale blue silk dress and with a pretty straw hat on top of her long blonde ringlets. She gripped his white powdered perriwig and grinned down at me. 'Hello, *tante* Antonia!'

I smiled up at her. 'Hello up there!' I picked out the largest strawberry from the bowl that I was eating from and held it out to her. 'Here, have this!' I smiled at Joseph. 'I am having a wonderful time, thank you. It was very kind of you and Mama to arrange this for me.'

He released one of Theresia's feet for a second to reach out and pat my shoulder in a kindly fashion. 'Well, we couldn't have Versailles thinking that we don't treat their future Dauphine properly could we?' Joseph looked past me at the trio of maids of honour, who all curtsied. 'Pretty girls,' he observed.

As dusk began to fall, I returned to my rooms and my maids helped me change into my wonderful silver dress and pinned diamond stars on to my *coiffure*. I stared at myself in the mirror while one of them rubbed pale pink rouge onto my cheeks and lips then brushed khol through my fair eyebrows. Finally I insisted upon wearing the diamond earrings that Carolina had sent and I touched them sadly with my fingers as I thought about her. How I wish that she could have been there to enjoy the day with me but of course she has her own parties now to preside over.

'How do I look?' I asked my maids of honour, who had all changed into their own finest silk and brocade gowns and were standing in a row behind me smiling shyly.

'Beautiful,' replied Clementina, the brunette. 'You look like the princess from a fairy story with stars in your hair and in your eyes.'

We proceeded downstairs to one of the white and gold mirrored galleries, which had been arranged as a dining room for the evening as it was the only

room big enough to accommodate so many guests. My brother Joseph, looking very splendid in watered mauve taffeta took me by the hand and led me to a place of honour beside himself and Mama at the very top table, while everyone else stood to attention and watched. I caught Amalia's eye and smiled before I removed my long white silk gloves and sat down.

The banquet went on for a very long time, with several courses succeeding each other rapidly, each one involving a dazzling and bewildering range of dozens of dishes all served on golden platters and in steaming silver tureens. I was struggling to hide my yawns behind my hand by the end of it but managed to revive myself in time for the grand finale, which was a giant marzipan and spun sugar confection that incorporated the initials of myself and Louis of France. I smiled and applauded along with everyone else to show my pleasure.

Afterwards we all filed out into the garden where an orchestra was waiting and a polished wooden dance floor had been set up beneath a giant blue and gold silk canopy. It was a beautiful evening, still, warm and fragrant with the scent of lilacs and roses.

'Shall we?' Joseph was beside me, offering me his arm. 'It is for you to open the ball, my dear.'

I smiled up at my handsome brother, blushing with pleasure and allowed him to lead me out on to the dance floor. The orchestra began to play a stately minuet and together we moved through the intricate steps that I knew so well while our family and all of the court watched. I thought about the masked ball that Amalia had taken me to and could hardly hide my smile as I compared that occasion to this.

'Why are you smiling like that?' Joseph asked with a laugh. 'You look like you are up to something.'

'I was only thinking how very, very happy I am,' I replied, squeezing his hand.

And now, I should go to bed for it is almost three in the morning!

Thursday, 22nd June, Schönnbrunn.

What happens now? I am officially betrothed and yet I feel no different. People treat me with a new deference and I am stared at wherever I go but inside

I feel just like the same, foolish old me.

Joseph has started to come to my sitting room once a week to talk to me about serious topics that he thinks I should be aware of in my new, exalted position. It is terribly, terribly dull and I would much rather sit and chat about the latest court gossip but alas, he only wants to talk to me about foreign policies and wars and all the sorts of things that most make my head hurt. I try to listen, I really do, and I think that sometimes I even nod in all the right places and yet none of it really means a thing to me and I am sure that my brother is very disappointed in my progress and thinks me very stupid indeed.

Amalia always comes to see me afterwards and we sit together and laugh over cups of hot chocolate, which makes everything seem much better. She will be leaving for Parma in a fortnight but we do not talk about that for it is all just too melancholy.

Wednesday, 28th June, very late.

Tonight there was a state ball for the occasion of Amalia's marriage. I was told several times that I looked charming in my new gown of pink and white taffeta with fresh pink roses in my hair. Amalia was wearing the most wonderful dress of green silk with diamonds sewn all over the stomacher but I did not see her smile once all evening which was much remarked upon and led to Mama shooting many angry glances in her direction, which she seemed to be entirely impervious to.

Karl was not present. 'I am glad that he is not here,' I overheard her angrily mutter to Joseph. 'I am glad with all my heart that he did not come for I could not have borne for him to see me thus.'

Thursday, 29th June.

Amalia is to be married tomorrow and will leave us the day after. Clementina and I went to Joseph's rooms and I looked up the journey between here and Parma, running my fingertips across the borders of different countries as I tried to imagine my sister traveling so very far away. And next it will be my turn. I turned the stiff, heavy pages to look at France and tried to imagine myself in a carriage, being carried far, far away from everything that I have ever known.

'It is far away,' Clementina remarked sympathetically, peering at me anxiously. 'Are you frightened at all?'

I looked at her, blinking away my tears and forcing a smile. 'No, of course not,' I lied.

We went out to the gardens after this with Anton running after us with Mops yapping and tumbling at his heels and I talked about Carolina and the silly tricks we had played on the courtiers as we walked arm in arm around the shrubberies, occasionally stopping to sniff at flowers and listen to the bird song overhead.

I heard their voices just a split second before we turned the corner and came upon Karl and Amalia in each other's arms, kissing and entirely oblivious to everything around them. I came to a sudden halt then immediately began to back away, pulling Clementina with me. 'Do not look,' I gabbled stupidly. 'Do not look, do not tell!' We lifted our silk skirts, scooped up Mops, took Anton by the hand and ran until we were entirely out of earshot and then I thankfully sank down on to a cold marble bench, my legs trembling terribly and my heart pounding painfully behind my boned corset as I hoped and prayed that Mama and Joseph would never hear of this.

'I don't understand...' Clementina started before abruptly falling silent as I raised my hand to silence her.

'Antonia?' I turned my head and there was Joseph, his face pale but concerned. He was a little out of breath and had clearly chased after us. 'I am sorry,' he said simply. 'It is all that I can do for her.'

'You knew?' I stared at him. Clementina put her arm around Anton's shoulders and slowly began to back away before very deliberately turned her back to give us as much privacy as possible.

My brother nodded and took a step towards me. 'Of course.' He sighed and gave an impatient shrug. 'Do not think me a monster, Antonia,' he whispered. 'I know better than any what it is like to be trapped in a loveless marriage when your heart belongs to another. If there was any way that I could spare *any* of my sisters that pain, then believe me I would do everything in my power to avert it.'

I could not believe my ears. 'But you are the *Emperor*, Joseph! There must be *something* that you can do?' I was standing now, ready to plead with him for Amalia's freedom. 'You could break the engagement and then allow Amalia to

marry Karl! Christina was allowed to marry the man she loved so why should not Amalia also?

Joseph laughed bitterly. 'I am Emperor in name only, my dear child. Mama has set her heart on this match with Parma and so it must come to pass.' He smiled then, rather sadly. 'My only comfort is that *you* at least, Antonia, are not unhappy about the marriage that we have made for you but then you have not been allowed time to attach yourself elsewhere have you?'

I shook my head, remembering my long ago promise to Amalia not to fall in love. 'No, I have not.'

I wish that I could though. I am so ashamed of these thoughts but I wish that I could be kissed like that and be loved in the way that Amalia is loved.

Saturday, 1st July.

Amalia has gone and it is very quiet here without the sound of her quick, tip tapping footsteps and ever ready trills of laughter in the corridors and *salons*. I will miss her so much.

The entire court braved the bright midday sun to gather in the courtyard to see her and Joseph, who is accompanying her to Parma, off. Mama was there in the very centre of the family *tableaux* as usual, with Elizabeth on one side and Christina on the other, all three looking very imposing in blazing diamonds and heavy silk dresses. I stood to the side with Marianna and the boys, who hopped about, yanked each other's powdered perriwigs and yawned ostentatiously as we waited for Amalia to emerge.

'Ah, here she comes! The bride!' I heard someone exclaim as the great doors opened and Amalia, looking very pale and unhappy in a travelling dress of shimmering rich green silk walked out with one hand on Joseph's blue velvet sleeved arm. She looked at each one of us in turn without smiling then dropped to her knees in front of Mama to receive a final blessing.

'I wish you every happiness, my child,' Mama said as she raised Amalia from the ground and kissed her on each cheek. 'God be with you.' Amalia did not reply but stepped lightly away then kissed first Elizabeth then Christina before turning to Marianna who she hugged with much more affection and with the sparkle of tears in her eyes.

'My little Antonia,' she said, leaning down to embrace me fondly and murmuring into my ear. 'I will miss you more than I can say. Don't ever let them bully you.'

'I won't.' I hugged her back and rubbed my cheek against hers, inhaling her delicious scent of roses and lilies, unwilling to ever let her go. 'Please don't forget me.'

She smiled then and kissed my cheek. 'I promise that I won't.'

Joseph coughed discreetly behind her and with a sigh she turned away to give a final hug and kiss to Max and Ferdinand before returning to her place at Joseph's side. 'I think it is time to go,' she murmured, smiling at the footman who appeared with a large pink parasol to protect her complexion from the sun during the short walk to her new pale green and gold carriage.

I watched as she walked away her head held high and her heavy silk skirts trailing behind her on the cobbles. In another minute she would be gone forever, in another hour she would be far away, never to return. There was a murmur of shock from the assembled courtiers as Karl stepped out from the crowd and stood in front of her. I held my breath, willing her to take his hand and run away from all of this, but instead they looked at each other for a moment without saying anything or even touching before he stepped aside and let her go. Joseph placed his hand on Karl's shoulder for a moment as he passed and I saw a look of pain and understanding pass between the two young men.

'Disgraceful!' I heard Christina mutter to Elizabeth. 'And shame on Joseph for encouraging such common theatrics!'

Karl stood alone for a moment, looking up at us all, with one hand shading his eyes against the sunlight. I smiled at him, hoping that he knew that one of us at least was on his side but he didn't smile back or even appear to see me. Instead he stared at Mama as she stood silent and haughty beneath the shade of a black silk parasol, her hands calmly folded in front of her and her gaze focused on her son and daughter as they climbed into their carriage. He stared at her, his face full of contempt then very deliberately turned his back and walked away.

Tuesday, 4th July, late.

I don't know what to say. What is there to say? All I can think about is the fact that one day it will be me who leaves Vienna, never to return.

Wednesday, 19th July.

A lovely sunny, Summer's day. I went outside with the Princesses of Hesse-Darmstadt and my ladies in waiting and we all lazed about on soft woolen blankets and silk cushions spread underneath a pink silk canopy erected by the footmen, reading poetry aloud to each other and feasting on sugary little cakes, apples, enormous china bowls full of strawberries and cherries and glasses of lemonade and fresh, delicious milk while Anton lay on his back and slept in the sunshine, one arm thrown across his eyes.

Joseph's little Theresia was brought down by her governess and was greeted with smiles as she prettily curtsied to us and then came to me for a cuddle. She is seven now and very pretty with blonde curls and huge, bright blue eyes. It is odd to think that she is the heiress to the empire, this small, rather fragile little girl who gazes at me with such adoration. I try to imagine her in Mama's place and find it impossible but then I can never imagine Mama as a little girl either. The very idea seems incredible.

After a while we began to feel restless and so Clementina, Anna and I went for a stroll around the terraces, leaving Lucia and the Princesses dozing beneath the canopy. We were silent as we walked, happy to simply enjoy the heavenly warmth, the delicious scent of the flowers that surrounded us and the birdsong that floated down from the trees overhead.

'What a lovely, perfect day,' Anna said at last with a smile. 'I wish that it could always be like this.'

'You would miss the snow,' Clementina pointed out with a grin. 'Imagine never being able to go sledging again and how disappointed the gentlemen of the court would be if you were never again able to flash your ankles while skating.' They both began to giggle.

'Archduchess!' I quickly turned to see Karl standing in the pathway behind us and gave a hastily muffled cry of surprise. 'I am sorry, I did not mean to startle you!' He stepped briskly forward and lifted my hand to his lips.

'*Mesdemoiselles*,' he murmured, bowing to my ladies in waiting, who were both staring at him in wide eyed astonishment.

'Karl,' I stared at him, still holding on to his hand. 'I thought that you had gone forever!'

'I am leaving today but I wanted to say goodbye to you first,' he replied with a smile. 'You are not like the rest of your family and I wanted to take my leave properly because who knows when we will meet again?'

'I thank you,' I murmured, thinking how handsome he looked with the sunlight dappling his tawny hair and his skin slightly bronzed by days spent outside. His eyes gleamed as he bent over my hand again and for a brief instant I felt a peculiar frisson that had vanished as quickly as it occurred. 'I hope that we will meet again someday.'

He smiled at me. 'I hope so too, Archduchess.' He bowed again to all three of us and then turned away, saying over his shoulder: 'Remember me when you are Queen of France!'

We all watched as he walked down the path and then vanished from view. 'How handsome he is,' Anna murmured with a rapturous sigh as she stared after him. 'He is just as a young man should be.'

Clementina nudged her. 'Hush, he isn't for us!' She stepped forward and lightly touched my arm as I stood motionless in the middle of the path, my mind full of turmoil. 'Shall we walk on, Archduchess?'

Friday, 21st July.

A letter has arrived from Amalia, which Marianna read out to the family after dinner. Mama nodded and smiled at Amalia's descriptions of Parma, which she seemed rather enamoured by. One might almost think that the whole marriage was an enormous treat designed with no other aim than to make Amalia happy.

'There is always sunshine here and I wish that you could see the way that the russet brick buildings blaze in the golden light. It is so very different to the cold, harsh light of Vienna, you can have no idea. Everything here is so bright and warm and delightful.' It had never before occurred to me that even the light

could be different somewhere else and I wondered about France and what other differences there might be between Paris and Vienna.

'I feel that I could be very happy here and long for the day when I can invite you here to see for yourselves.' There was no mention at all in the letter of her new husband, but one presumed that he was ever present and lurking in the background. I wondered what he was like, this strange half French prince who was poor Isabella's little brother.

'Your devoted and loving sister always, Amélie.' Elizabeth and Christina rolled their eyes and tutted with annoyance.

'How terribly pretentious,' Christina muttered with a superior curl of her lip. 'Amélie indeed! It sounds like an actress... or worse.'

Elizabeth giggled and wagged her painted fan in front of her face. 'I totally agree, Mimi ! How very affected it sounds! Poor Amalia, I am quite embarrassed for her.' They both continued in this vein for quite some time, while I excused myself and went to the Abbé, who had been invited to join us for the occasion and who was standing in a window regarding my elder sisters with an amused eye.

'They are jealous,' I whispered to him behind my fan. 'I don't think Elizabeth will ever forgive any of us for getting married while she has to remain here. She was always the beauty of the family, you see.'

'I do see,' the Abbé replied with a smile. 'I believe that there was even talk of a match with King Louis at one point until...'

'Until.' I said finally, with a small shrug. 'And of course Mimi has always hated we younger girls and I have never quite known why.' I looked up at him and closed my fan with a snap. 'After all, she has always been Mama's favourite and we could never have been any sort of threat to her or her position within the family.'

He nodded as though he understood, and I think that really, maybe he did. 'I believe that it is usually thus within large families,' he murmured with a sympathetic look. 'The elder children are often several years older than the youngest, sometimes even old enough to be parents themselves. It is only natural

that there should be rivalries, jealousies and disagreements. Your sister has probably always wished to be the petted baby of the family and instead she has had to endure a constant stream of small brothers and sisters.'

'I suppose so.' I felt ungracious but did not wish to make excuses for Mimi's behaviour. 'Sometimes I think that I really cannot wait until I am married and far away from them all. I will miss Vienna terribly but to remain here always would be intolerable.'

'I can well imagine.' Vermond replied kindly, before changing the subject and directing my attention to a particularly bright display of stars in the sky.

Friday, 4th August, Laxenburg, an unbearably hot day.

The court has finally moved to the countryside, just as the weather in Vienna itself grew increasingly more stifling and unpleasant. I tried to walk beside the Danube with my maids of honour but the terrible stench prevented us from getting very close and shortly afterwards Mama decreed that we were to remove to Laxenburg, where the air is at least always healthy and fresh. Max and Ferdinand are both thrilled to be here and wriggle like impatient puppies throughout breakfast in the blue and white parlour, longing for the moment when they are allowed to leave the table and are free to run wild with their dogs in the gardens and woods around.

We are all on holiday here, except for Mama who still rises at dawn to begin work and spends much of her day cloistered with her advisors, priests and ministers and me, who must continue my daily lessons with the Abbé. Here though we sit beneath a huge parasol on the lawn while he teaches me French for a couple of hours before we cast our books aside and then spend the rest of our time just talking about France and Versailles and the family that I am about to marry into. It seems like mere idle chatter but I always find afterwards that I remember every single thing that we have spoken about so perhaps I am learning after all.

'I can't wait to see France for myself!' I exclaimed during one of our conversations, my eyes shining as I imagined myself walking around the famous gardens at Versailles or sitting in my own box at the Opéra. France sounds so much more thrilling and elegant and wonderful than Austria.

'All in good time, Your Highness,' the Abbé replied with a smile. 'I am sure

that France is just as impatient to see you too.'

Sunday, 13th August, morning before Mass.

Today my sister Carolina is seventeen. It seems like such a long time since we last saw each other and I still long for her daily. I do not think that I will ever get truly used to our being apart.

Happy birthday, Carolina, wherever you are.

Tuesday, 15th August, Italian lesson.

Mama informed me after breakfast that I am to accompany her on a journey to the shrine of Mariazell in northern Styria, which is in south west Austria. The shrine there is the most important pilgrimage site in Austria and Mama believes that it would do me good to visit. Naturally, the idea of undertaking a long journey alone with Mama is extremely daunting, however I cannot help but be excited to be travelling outside Vienna and it is an honour, of course, to be singled out in such a particular way. I am sure that Christina will be extremely envious.

Sunday, 20th August, I don't know where we are.

We set off two days ago from Vienna and have been on the road ever since, breaking our dry and dusty journey at castles belonging to Mama's highest ranking courtiers, who have frantically ridden ahead to prepare their homes and retainers for our arrival.

'No fuss, please no fuss,' is Mama's constant refrain and yet we all know that if she is not greeted by a roaring fire, a sumptuous dinner, a hot scented bath and a comfortable bed then there will be trouble indeed for all concerned.

As for me, I care not. I sit opposite Mama in the rolling, bumping Imperial carriage with its soft russet velvet seats and do my best my best to divert her with endless card games and sometimes by reading aloud from a book of devotions. She still spends much of the day working, with official documents piled on the seat beside her and hanging over the edges of the small mahogany writing desk that she props on her knees. At these times I am left to my own devices and after a fruitless half hour spent pretending to read, I usually end up breathing on the windows and drawing pictures or dozing with Mops curled up on my lap as pretty villages, shimmering rivers and lush woodland flash past the window.

Sometimes we pause our carriage in a particularly picturesque village and descend to receive homage from the populace. Mama changes at times like these and becomes smiling, benevolent and even carefree. She bends her head eagerly to listen to the people that surround her and smiles with easy and genuine delight at their children as they cluster around her and offer flowers.

At first I hung back awkwardly, feeling shy and uncertain as I was so unused to contact with ordinary people. Mama has always encouraged us all to be on good terms with the hundreds of servants and retainers who work in our residences but that is very different to the ordinary, humble Austrians who live in the villages outside Vienna. Soon, however I found myself following Mama's lead and bending down to smile, laugh and chat just as she did, clasping their work roughened hands between mine and lifting the small children up for a kiss and a special smile just for them. I find that I enjoy these interludes very much; how sweet it is to be able to make other people so happy just with one's mere presence alone.

'You have a good way with the people, Antonia,' my mother praised me after we have climbed into our carriage after one such occasion. 'It reminds me of your dear father and I think that he would have been very proud had he lived to see it.' We both had tears in our eyes after this and had to gaze out of our respective windows for a while until we had quite composed ourselves.

Tuesday, 22nd August, Mariazell.

We have arrived and are staying in a mansion in the middle of the town, which is situated high up in the mountains, where the only sound is that of the villagers, the distant lowing of goats and the melodious tinkling of the little bells around their necks. The views of the enormous lilac mountains from my bedroom window are impressive and as I write this I cannot stop glancing across and catching my breath again at how stunning it is. I have never before seen anything like it and I wish that Ferdinand and Max were here as well as I am sure they would be just as amazed as I am although I am sure they would rather be here in the Winter when I am told that the mountains and surrounding area are coated in thick white snow.

Tonight we dine with the local dignitaries and then tomorrow we will visit the shrine itself.

Wednesday, 23rd August, late after dinner.

After a breakfast of hot chocolate and rolls with jam, we were taken by carriage to the old basilica which lay on the outskirts of the town. Mama's eyes filled with tears as she gazed up at the lovely white and pink old building with its beautiful tall gothic spire and she reached across and took hold of my hand. I wanted to say that it looked as though it had been made out of icing but decided not to as Mama looked so emotional.

'I took my first Communion here,' she murmured as we stepped through the intricately carved archway into the basilica. 'I still remember the day well. My parents were here and all of the court and I wore a beautiful dress of white satin and lace, with my hair flowing down my back. I thought I looked like an angel.'

I walked at her side down the prettily tiled aisle, wondering at how bright and pretty everything was and looking about myself at the enormous and beautiful old stained glass windows and serene faced wooden statues of saints that stood in alcoves in the whitewashed walls. The basilica was almost empty, except for a few townspeople, who stared at us curiously as we passed but did not approach.

'Here.' Mama stepped inside a chapel and I followed, catching my breath at the exquisite silver work that surrounded the altar and gazing up in awe at the huge silver statues arrayed above it. There in the very centre was placed a tiny wooden statue of the Virgin Mary with the Holy Child on her lap, both crowned and gazing indifferently out upon the world. Mama immediately fell to her knees and crossed herself and after a moment's hesitation I followed her lead, gasping a little as the chill of the tiled floor seeped through my thick blue velvet skirts. I closed my eyes tightly and thought about Carolina and Amalia, who were both so far away, about France and the Dauphin, which were to be my own fate and Josepha, Johanna, Josephina, Isabella and poor Papa who were all dead now. I opened my eyes and gazed up at the solemn, beautiful face of the Virgin and felt all my worries and concerns drain away so that finally and for the first time in months I felt entirely free of anxiety and at peace. I knew then with absolute certainty that everything would work out for the best and that I had nothing to fear.

After this, the priest came and Mama and I took Communion together, which was a great honour and I could hardly hold back my tears as the priest made the sign of the cross above my bowed head.

Sunday, 3rd September, Schönnbrunn.

There was much excitement today when several dozen *poupées*, French wooden dolls beautifully dressed in the very latest (or in this case, next season's) fashions arrived for me. Everyone crowded around and gasped in admiration as I lifted each one from its wooden box and held it up to the light, admiring the delicate laces, the glimmering brocades and silks and the fluttering brightly coloured ribbons.

'You must look at each one and decide which dresses you would like to have made,' Mama instructed me with a smile. 'They are all in the very latest Parisian fashions.' There was a collective sigh from all of the court ladies as each one gazed rapturously at the beautiful miniature dresses and allowed herself to daydream about shopping in Paris, the very centre of fashion and frivolity. Some even looked at me with a new respect. 'There are also some books of fabric swatches,' Mama continued before handing me one of the huge books, which were bound with apple green taffeta.

I took the book reverently and turned the stiff pages, staring in wonder at the bright colours and vivid patterns of the rich brocades, silks, taffetas and satins. Another book was filled with lighter pale and white silks, some plain, some striped and some patterned with beautiful vivid flowers and butterflies and birds and leaves. Yet another book was filled with velvets and another contained lace arranged in perfectly straight, frothy white rows.

The dolls were arranged around one of the drawing rooms and the entire court streamed past to prod and admire them, while I gazed at each one in turn and thought that I loved them all and could never choose between them. It occurred to me for an instant that I was being treated rather like a doll myself but then I forced myself to dismiss the thought from my mind.

Friday, 22nd September, afternoon.

Another letter from Amèlie, this time addressed directly to me and hidden at the bottom of a wicker basket full of violet soaps, which was delivered directly to my rooms. I sent all of my maids away as soon as my fingers touched the parchment envelope at the bottom of the basket and then knelt in front of my bed and ripped it open with trembling fingers.

'My dearest little one,

I hope that you will excuse the subterfuge but I think that you will agree that it is absolutely necessary if we are to correspond as candidly as we would like.

How quiet it must be in Vienna without me! Am I missed? Do the young gentlemen of the court sigh and weep for me? How are you enduring life with just Marianna, Elizabeth and Mimi for company? Have they nagged you to death yet? Do not despair, you will escape soon enough and be free of the awful toils of our family forever, although I must warn you that Mama's letters have arrived as a constant stream of advice and reproach since I departed so don't expect too much.

Parma. It is very hot and very sunny and very pretty. The people are good looking and cheerful, the food is delicious and plentiful and the wine is far superior to anything we have in Austria. In short, I could be happy here if I was at liberty to enjoy it alone, instead of with my husband at my side. We always knew that he would hardly be the handsome and accomplished prince of fairytale didn't we? Ah well.

I wish that I had not come here knowing what it is like to be loved, truly loved. I think that it would have been easier to have given myself as an unattached virgin, with no knowledge and a head full of romantic nonsense and nothings. Promise me again, Antonia, that you will be more circumspect than your unfortunate sister for I think that I could easier bear the inept and rough embrace of my husband if I had not always the memory of Karl's kisses. And more. But then is it not better to have loved once rather than not at all?

Life is very strange.

I must go now as I fear that I have already said too much. I miss you terribly, my dearest one and hope that you will spare a thought for me every now and then. Be kind to my Karl if he is still in Vienna. I have asked him to come to me in Parma but he is being proud and refuses to come. I hope that he will change his mind soon.

Embraces from your ever loving,

Marie-Amélie de Parme.'

Tuesday, 24th October, late, I do not feel like sleeping.

Tonight at dinner, which Mama missed as she had some important dispatches to work through, Joseph idly cast a piece of paper across the table to me. 'Here are the arrangements that are being made for your journey to France,' he said with a smile. 'I thought that it might amuse you to read through them and see for yourself how much fuss is being made in your honour, little sister.'

I put down my knife and fork, picked up the paper, which I have now in front of me, then blushed as I read it through. 'One hundred and thirty two dignitaries? Cooks? Bakers?' I stared open mouthed at Joseph. 'Fifty seven coaches and a total of twenty thousand horses?' I pushed the list away in confusion and disgust. 'It is too much.'

Joseph sighed. 'Certainly not! You forget your great position, Antonia.' He shrugged and took a sip of his wine. 'You are not a... a butcher's daughter being sent to her sweetheart in the next village. For heaven's sake, remember who you are and who we are!'

'Let me see.' Elizabeth reached out and snatched the list from where it lay on the tablecloth between Joseph and me. 'My, what a long list!' She scanned the page then cast it aside. 'Who knew that so much fuss could be made about one spoilt little girl?'

I was too shocked to speak but Joseph looked annoyed and sprang instantly to my defence. 'Really, Elizabeth, you know that that is not fair.' He looked nervously at the footmen who stood behind each of our chair and discreetly signaled that they should all leave. I watched miserably as they all filed out. 'Pray contain yourself.'

She glared at him. 'Oh really? How can you say that, Joseph, when you *know* that it should have been *me* going to France not Antonia.' She shrugged her thin shoulders. 'The girl was never intended for such a great match and well you know it. Why, she is barely educated! What sort of Queen do you think she will make?' Her chest had gone red as it always did when she was angry about something and she scratched at it absentmindedly with one of her white gloved hands.

'I agree,' Christina said with an arch look in my direction that both cut me down to size and dismissed me at the same time. 'Elizabeth was by far the most

suitable choice for the Dauphin. I have often been surprised that you and Mama think it appropriate to send such a silly little dunce to Versailles.'

'I care not for your opinions on the matter, Mimi, nor your's, Elizabeth,' Joseph retorted sharply, bringing his hand down hard on the table and spilling some of his wine across the white damask tablecloth. 'Neither of you have any right to comment. The decision has been made – Antonia is to go to France and that is an end to it.'

My hands were shaking as I threw my napkin on top of my plate then stood up, pushing my chair back behind me. 'If you will excuse me, brother, I do not feel very well,' I murmured to Joseph, biting my lip hard as I tried not to cry in front of them all. 'I am sorry.'

I walked from the room with as much dignity as I could muster but then as soon as the door was closed behind me, I gave in to the trembling and leaned for a moment against the white and gold panelling. The footmen had all scattered as I left the room and were now trying to look busy in order to pretend that they had not all been eavesdropping outside the door. They watched me covertly with a mixture of sympathy and curiosity and after a moment this not unfriendly scrutiny gave me the strength to put my shoulders back, dry my eyes and ask one of them to light my way with his candelabra back to my own apartment.

Tuesday, 31st October, afternoon.

Another parcel from Amélie, this time containing a large bottle of Neroli oil and some bars of lily soap. Underneath was tucked a short note and an engraving, both tied up with pink velvet ribbon.

'My darling girl,

I thought that it might interest you to behold your fate. I truly hope that it does not leave you aghast and in utter despair. Personally I think he looks charming, even if he could possibly stand to lose some weight but he is young and I am sure that once he has a charming little wife to make himself handsome for, he will improve immeasurably. This was the best depiction that I could find, short of stealing the miniature that my husband has of him, which I may yet do if no one thinks to send you a portrait of your own soon. I am told, however, by those who are in a position to know such things that he is very tall, very strong and has blond hair and blue eyes. You shall have delightful babies, if you can bring

yourself to contemplate such a thing. I am not sure that I can, so you have all of my sympathy if the idea makes you wail, tear out your hair and gnash your teeth in horror. I think that it is the thought of the dreadful fuss that Mama will inevitably make that I find most offputting of all. Do you know that already she writes to ask if I am in a delicate condition.

Has Karl returned to Vienna yet? I have written to him but alas there has been no reply. I fear that he is picqued. Perhaps he has transferred his attentions elsewhere? Write and let me know everything as soon as you can. Or perhaps not. I can't decide. Is it better to know or not?

Don't let our darling sisters bully you. Nor Mama either. I hear that she took you to Mariazell? What fun that must have been for you. Give each of our odious brothers a kiss from me and especially so if they look likely to resist and run away from your embrace. I miss them so much. Who would have thought it possible?

Your devoted and doting sister,

Amélie de Parme.'

I picked up the engraving with trembling fingers and saw that it depicted a very young, rather *fleshy* young man with a high intelligent forehead, round cheeks, pouting lips and large clear eyes. He was not handsome but nor was he displeasing either; I could imagine myself being friends with him even if I could never bring myself to love him. '*Louis Auguste, Dauphin de France*' the inscription proudly declared in elaborate, swirly writing. I thought of poor Josephina, whose cousin the glamorous Dauphine had been his mother and I thought, just for a second, that I could see something of her in his eyes.

Louis Auguste. My fate.

Thursday, 2nd November, Hofburg.

I am fourteen. It feels very old but Joseph laughed at me when I said so and remarked that I should wait until I am as old as *he* is and then see how I feel. I had to be honest and admit that I can't possibly imagine being as old as him and he looked rather put out.

The day started as usual with a private breakfast with Mama, during which I

drank hot chocolate and fielded innumerable questions about French history. She has developed a strange, frowning worried look whenever she happens to cast her gaze upon me, that I do not quite understand. I hope that they have not changed their minds about the marriage.

After breakfast we went together to one of the salons where my brothers and sisters were waiting to give me my presents, then Durfort came in with a great amount of fuss and preceded by a strong aroma of Lavender and Violet cologne to give me my gift from his master, the King of France: a gorgeous and enormous diamond ring, which Joseph slipped on to the third finger of my left hand while I blushed becomingly and everyone applauded.

'From this day forward my dearest daughter will no longer be known as Maria Antonia but as Marie Antoinette!' my mother announced loudly, her voice ringing out across the room. 'It is the dearest wish of King Louis of France and myself.'

Marie Antoinette. Everyone stared at me and mouthed the new and unfamiliar name. Marie Antoinette. Marie Antoinette.

I do not know if I will ever get used to it. It sounds so *French* and unfamiliar and not like me at all. I think that in my heart I will always be Antonia.

Monday, 6th November.

Marie Antoinette. Marie Antoinette. Marie Antoinette.

Wednesday, 15th November.

I went to see Durfort today and asked if it would be possible for me to take my ladies in waiting with me to France. I should have asked Mama and Joseph of course but I felt suddenly quite bold and decided to see Durfort himself.

I thought it quite a reasonable request but he stared at me in horror, his cheeks purpling with rage. 'No, it is quite impossible.'

I must admit that I had expected this. 'Why not? They are nobly born. What possible reason could there be for refusing to let them accompany me?' I came perilously close to stamping my feet.

Durfort recovered himself a little but could not help looking contemptuous.

'As Dauphine of France you will be expected to only have French attendants. It would not be suitable or acceptable for a Princess of France to surround herself with *foreigners*.' This last word was said with absolute revulsion. 'Your attendants may be perfectly adequate here in Vienna but they will not be at all suitable for Versailles.'

'You do not like us do you, Monsieur de Durfort?' I am still amazed that I said this but frankly what right has this awful, perfumed, nasty little man to be so critical of us and our ways? 'I have heard the way that you speak about my mother's court and the people that I care for and even about me and I want you to know that it displeases me very much.' And with this I turned on my heel and walked away as gracefully and unhurriedly as I could manage.

I hope he knows that he has made an enemy and I hope it frightens him.

Sunday, 3rd December, Advent Sunday, late.

How very different tonight was in comparison to all the jolly, happy Advent Sundays we have enjoyed in the past. On the surface, all was as it had always been with all the court gathering after dinner to watch me light the first twisted red and gold candle on the *Adventkrantz* and then feast on special cinnamon and nutmeg biscuits as the musicians struck up and Joseph and then Leopold led me out to dance. However, my heart ached for all who are absent this year and far from home.

Afterwards the footmen helped us into heavy fur cloaks and hats and we all ran outside into the snow and pelted each other with snow balls, giggling insanely as we slid about on the icy ground and breathed on our red hands to warm them up.

'You will miss this,' Joseph said to me in an undertone, as I came to stand beside him, my cheeks very pink and warm and my hair escaping in coils from its tight chignon.

I looked at him and smiled. 'Yes, of course but I am sure that the courtiers at Versailles know how to have fun as well.'

Joseph did not reply but simply looked sad and patted my cheek.

'Well, if they do not know to have fun then I shall have to show them, won't I?' I said with a defiant look. 'They really do sound like a disagreeable lot.'

Joseph laughed then and brought my hand to his lips for a kiss. 'That is always how I have regarded them, certainly. I believe that it was very different when Madame la Marquise de Pompadour was still alive but nowadays, ah, well...' He shook his head and would not say any more.

Tuesday, 18th December, afternoon, so tired.

There was the most enormous masked ball last night at Schönnbrunn. Joseph tells me that almost 4,000 people attended and I can well believe it as the rooms were so terribly crowded. Luckily it did not snow last night so the footmen were able to throw open the doors to the gardens so that people could don cloaks and stroll about the lawns when it became too hot inside to be quite comfortable.

Oh, I do love masked balls! I wore a gown of midnight blue velvet and silk, with gold and silver stars embroidered on the skirts and across the bodice. I even had matching diamond stars in my hair and decorating my blue velvet mask. Of course it was impossible for me to be incognito (which I would have loved above anything) as Mama insisted that I remain at her side all night and would only allow me to dance with my brothers. Such a shame.

I am so tired now though! We left the ball in the early hours and drove back to the Hofburg in the moonlight, which was excessively romantic even if I only had Clementina, Lucia and my brother Leopold for company.

Perhaps one day something truly romantic will happen to me? Is it very wrong to hope, just a little tiny bit for something so very lovely to happen to me?

Chapter Six
1770

Monday, 1st January 1770, New Year's Day.

And yet another year begins with champagne, schnapps, dancing and fireworks high up in the sky above Vienna. It is snowing now and I can hear the courtiers dashing on their clattering high heels around the corridors of the Hofburg, giving each other gifts and hallooing 'Prosit Neujahr!' at each other.

I feel oddly deflated and apprehensive about how this year will unfold for me, which is only natural I suppose.

Perhaps I should go back to bed for a bit.

Tuesday, 2nd January, morning.

I was not permitted to return to bed for my brother Joseph came to my rooms and informed me that little Theresia wanted me present at the puppet show that she has been working on for weeks. Of course I was delighted to accompany him and with Clementina, Anna and Anton following close behind we made our way to the nurseries, bumping into Durfort outside my *salon* door as we went. He looked highly embarrassed and stammered his way through a speech about how happy the French court are that this year will see me finally embraced to their bosom and other such nonsense. I nodded very coolly, much to Joseph's unashamed amusement and swept past.

'You know, you really should do your best not to alienate Durfort,' my brother whispered to me as we ran arm in arm up the stairs to Theresia's rooms upstairs. 'I know that he is utterly absurd in every possible way but he is still the envoy of the French King and you can be sure that he sends very full reports back to Versailles about you and your behaviour.'

I flushed scarlet, not having thought of this before. 'I did not know.'

Joseph smiled down at me and patted my hand consolingly. 'I am sure that all will be forgiven as soon as they set eyes upon you, my dearest one.'

We had reached the nurseries and went into the large white and pink *salon*, which had been set up as a miniature theatre with rows of gilt and crimson chairs arranged in front of a specially erected shallow stage upon which the puppet

theatre stood. Theresia was waiting by the door to receive us and gave cries of delight as she hugged first her father and then myself before taking our hands and leading us to the very front, where Mama was already sitting with Christina on one side and Elizabeth on the other.

'I hope that you will like the play,' Theresia whispered to me, looking a little bit nervous. 'My governess wrote it and there are a great many long words!'

I laughed, instantly reminded of poor dear Countess Brandeis and her attempts to hoodwink Mama by writing my exercises for me in pencil so that I could trace over them in ink and pass them off as my own. 'I am sure that it will be wonderful,' I reassured her with a kiss.

I truth, it was terribly boring – a series of short vignettes illustrating memorable scenes from Mama's reign but Theresia looked so proud and relieved when it was all over that we all stood up and applauded her as though it had been a masterpiece. I squeezed Joseph's arm as he applauded, touched by how happy and proud he looked of his daughter.

Thursday, 11th January.

A bitterly cold day which I spent curled up beneath a blanket on a sofa beside the stove in my little sitting room, eating marzipan dipped in chocolate and drinking warm cinnamon flavoured milk while Anna and Lucia took it in turns to read aloud to me.

'I do wish that there was a more elegant way to combat the cold,' Clementina said with a laugh, lifting her red velvet skirts to reveal several brightly coloured woolen petticoats and her thick and distinctly inelegant green knitted stockings. 'I am so glad that no one can see this!'

'Except us,' Lucia broke off reading to say rather tersely. 'Now, do please put them away.'

Vermond came to see me in the afternoon, which cheered us all up excessively as he is a great favourite with my ladies in waiting who consider him infinitely more charming than horrid Durfort, who looks down his long nose at them and makes it clear that he thinks that they are not as pretty or refined as the ladies of his precious Versailles. He smiled to see me bundled up beneath a blanket and handed me a small wooden box saying, 'I thought it might amuse you to see this.'

I opened the box to find a small, gleaming medal with my very much idealised likeness embossed on one side and '*From the most august blood she has seen the light of day, yet her high birth is the least of her merits*' inscribed in flowery French on the other. I could not help but go into a peal of laughter. 'But how absurd!' I cried to Vermond, who was also laughing. 'They really do not know anything at all about me, do they?' I passed the box to my ladies so that they too could examine the medal and share the joke.

He grinned. 'I think not, your Highness.'

'I wonder what these merits are?' I pretended to muse before collapsing into giggles again. 'Oh, it is all just too ridiculous! They are going to be so disappointed when they finally get to see me!'

Saturday, 20th January.

Poor Theresia has developed a horrible cough and is being confined to her bed. Joseph is terribly worried but hides it as best he can by being his usual fond, smiling, joking self. I went to visit her this morning and it was pitiful indeed to see the poor child lying marooned in her enormous canopied bed and looking so ill and pale with her long fair hair spread in thick plaits on the pillows.

'Aunt Antoinette,' she whispered when she saw me and I instantly smiled and sat on the edge of the bed and gave her my hand to hold, trying not to look concerned when I felt how dry and warm her little hand was against my own. 'Oh I am so bored and my head hurts so much.'

'Poor little darling,' I murmured, leaning over her and kissing her hot forehead before motioning one of her ladies to come forward with a cloth and cooling bowl of cold water and lavender. 'You will be well again soon,' I said as gaily as I could as I wet the cloth and then gently pressed it against her forehead and scarlet cheeks. 'Just in time for the Spring.' I looked quickly up at Joseph and saw that he was frowning as he watched us.

'I do not like that red, hectic colour in her cheeks,' he muttered as we left together. 'It does not look right. I am sure that there is more that can be done.' We could hear Theresia's terrible hacking cough from behind the door and looked at each other in fright. 'There must be something that can be done.'

Monday, 22nd January, late.

Theresia has slipped into a fever and is terribly ill. Joseph is beside himself. The doctors say that it is not small pox but is some sort of horrible colicky disorder. They have tried bleeding her but to no avail. I am going now with Elizabeth and Marianna to the chapel to light candles and pray for her as we don't know what else to do.

Tuesday, 23rd January.

Theresia slipped away from us forever earlier this evening while Joseph held her in his arms. Poor little girl.

I cannot write any more.

Thursday, 25th January.

We are all in mourning and Durfort went in all his state, followed by a trail of black velvet clad page boys and absolutely stinking of rose water, to inform Mama and Joseph that as Theresia was the great granddaughter of King Louis and therefore *une fille de France* the whole of the French court and the capital, Paris has gone into mourning also for her passing. How strange it must be for them all to be wearing black and looking sad and attending Masses for the death of a little girl who lived far away and that not one of them had ever seen with their own eyes. It is different for us of course for we all knew and loved her.

Mama nodded and smiled her thanks of course but Joseph went red and for a moment looked as though he wanted to turn his back on the ambassador.

'It is an honour, of course,' he said to me when he came to visit me in my rooms later on and we were able to talk privately. 'It is just that the damned fakery and arrogance of the French really sticks in my craw and as for my poor Theresia being *une fille de France*? She was *my* daughter first but of course that means nothing to them!'

I sighed and patted his hand, not really knowing what to say for the best. 'I think that they thought only of the honour that they were showing to you and to Theresia,' I murmured. 'I do not think they wanted to cause you any pain.'

Joseph took my hand and raised it to his lips. 'It makes me sorry that you have to go there and live amongst them.' He sighed. 'I fear that they will do everything in their power to turn you against us.'

I was shocked. 'No! No, such a thing could never be possible! I will always be an Austrian first and foremost!' I thought of Durfort and his snide comments about how he hoped that I would not introduce anything of Viennese manners to his precious Versailles and of his insistence that as Dauphine of France I should only be surrounded by French faces.

My brother pulled a face. 'Don't, for the love of all that is holy, let Durfort hear you say anything like that! He told me that you had requested that you be allowed to take your own ladies in waiting to Versailles with you and was very proud of himself for having turned you down.'

'Yes, he did look very pleased indeed,' I replied with a scowl. 'What a horrid little man he is!'

Joseph sighed. 'I am sorry that he could not be more compliant, that the *French* could not be more compliant. In my view you are far too young to be sent defenceless into the midst of strangers but the French have decreed otherwise it would seem.' He stretched his long black stockinged legs out in front of him. 'As usual.'

Tuesday, 6th February.

Another death. This time it was the Countess Lerchenfeld who was snatched away from us, never to be seen again. I have hated and loathed that woman ever since she was made my governess but now that she is gone forever I find that I cannot find it in my heart to feel anything else but the most profound sadness for her passing.

I should write to Carolina to let her know.

Tuesday, 6th February, later.

I have the most terrible stomach pains and have had to spend much of the evening lying on my bed with a pillow clutched to myself. A physician was called for but he does not know what ails me.

Could it be that I am next to die? I am too afraid to sleep in case I do not wake up in the morning.

Wednesday, 8th February, morning.

I am still alive and, it would seem, I am now officially a woman.

Yes, that is right. The cramps went on all night to the terror of my poor attendants who seemed to believe that I was surely about to die. I was in tears myself thinking of poor Josepha and how she never made it to Naples and how dreadful it would be to die before I had even been married. Oh, we were all a very sorry sight indeed until I decided in the early hours to get up and use my close stool and Lucia noticed that there was blood on my white cotton nightdress.

Of course I was terribly afraid at first and started to panic and cry even more, thinking that blood must surely mean that I was about to expire but then Anna laughed, put her arms around me and whispered that it was only the start of my monthly courses and meant no harm at all and how could I have remained so ignorant when I have so many elder sisters to tell me about it. In fact it is a good thing as it means that I am now a woman at last and able to bear a child to my husband.

'Your Mama will have to know immediately,' Clementina said with a smile as they sent my maids away in search of a basin of warm water, cloths, towels and hot wine and then stripped me of my stained nightdress. 'She will be so pleased.'

'I fail to see what is so pleasing about something so utterly revolting,' I remarked, covering my nakedness with my hands and perching delicately on the edge of my bed. 'Am I really to endure this every month from now on?'

Anna nodded. 'Unless you are with child, in which case it will stop.' A maid brought in a china basin of water and a pile of cloths and immediately started to help me clean myself. 'There are ways of making it hurt less,' she whispered.

'I am pleased to hear it,' I muttered, feeling embarrassed and rather shameful in front of them all. When I was clean again, the ladies showed me how to make a pad out of linen and place it in my undergarments and then pulled a new nightdress over my head and gently put me back to bed with the glass of warm wine.

An urgent message has been sent to Mama to let her know and I expect everyone at court will find out shortly after that, if they don't know already. Oh dear. The thought of all the fuss and scrutiny makes me want to stay in bed

forever.

Wednesday, 8th February, late.

Mama is thrilled. Of course. She sent a message requesting that I see her as soon as I had finished breakfast and so dutifully I trotted wearily to her rooms, remembering to wrap a thick blue velvet cloak around my shoulders on the way as of course all of her windows would be wide open as usual and it was bitterly cold today.

'My dearest, darling girl!' She jumped up from behind her huge desk, which as usual was covered with documents, books and random bits of screwed up paper and greeted me with arms outstretched and a wide smile. 'I am so delighted by your news!'

I curtsied. 'I am glad.' Snow was blowing in through the windows and landing on the floor but my mother did not seem to care at all. I shivered and pulled my cloak even closer, praying that this interview would be short lived.

'It is terribly uncomfortable of course and unpleasant but as an Archduchess of Austria you will not concern yourself with that,' Mama continued airily. 'A small amount of inconvenience is a small price to pay when one is fated to be the mother of princes and kings.'

I nodded, my teeth chattering so loudly in my head that I was sure that she must be able to hear them. 'Yes, of course.'

Mama sighed and touched my pale cheeks. 'It is always hard at first but it will get easier, my dear child. I myself had terrible courses when I was a young girl but it improved immeasurably once I was married and bringing forth children and I am sure that it will be much the same for you.'

'Yes, Mama.' I sighed inwardly, thinking not for the first time that it was terribly unfair to have a mother who was such a fearless and splendidly healthy specimen and one moreover who assumed that each of her daughters was just as impervious as she. I longed to tell her that actually it *did* hurt and I minded the inconvenience very much but did not dare.

Mama smiled and swept back to her desk, picking up a letter and waving it in the air. 'I have written to announce our happy news to King Louis,' she said triumphantly. 'He will be delighted to learn that you have attained maturity

already and with only a few months left to go before the wedding. It is an excellent omen for the future happiness of your match.'

I blushed. 'Is that really necessary?' Does *everyone* in Europe need to know?

Mama looked shocked and dropped the letter back on to the desk, where it fell amongst a huge and untidy pile of other letters and papers. 'But of course it is necessary!' she exclaimed. 'Can you not see that your aptness and readiness to conceive is of paramount importance right now? Your marriage is not just about pretty dresses and new shoes and Paris! It is about creating an alliance between your country and France and cementing it by producing heirs for the French throne.' She began to pace a little, her heavy black taffeta skirts swishing briskly above her black silk shoes. 'Heirs who will be half Austrian by blood. *Everything* depends upon this.' She swung around to face me. 'I hope that you are not going to be silly about this, Antoinette?'

I paled and shook my head. 'No, of course not! No! I *want* to have children!' And this is the absolute truth. My sisters may complain at length about how awful it is to be expected to have babies and bemoan losing their neat figures as the result of pregnancy but I personally cannot wait.

Mama nodded and looked pleased. 'I am glad to hear it,' she said, sitting down behind her desk again and absentmindedly sifting through a large pile of letters. 'I have often worried that you might have the same unfortunate attitude as your elder sisters to such matters. It is all very well for them to complain about the necessity of bearing children but *they* are not married to the heir to France.' She looked me directly in the eye in a way that made me shift uncomfortably from one foot to the other. 'I hope that you fully understand that this matter is of *primary* importance.'

I nodded, longing now to escape back to my own nice snug, warm rooms and have some hot chocolate and then curl up for a little nap. 'Yes, Mama, I understand.'

She sighed and picked up a pen, which she tapped to her forehead as she spoke. 'Very well. I am pleased to hear it. Let my own physician know if you are in any discomfort and he will attend to you immediately.' And with this I was dismissed from her presence and no doubt from her very thoughts also.

Friday, 16th February, late.

Another letter from Amélie, this time hidden beneath a large porcelain pot of violet and lily hair powder.

'My dearest one,

Congratulations on attaining womanhood! It will come as no surprise to you that the commencement of your menses is the sole topic of conversation throughout Europe with all and sundry delighting in the happy news. I am sure that it is only a matter of time before a medal is struck to commemorate the event, featuring a very demure and toga clad you offering flowers and fruit to a statue of Hymen. I will be sure to send one to you if it ever comes to pass.

Everything here is much the same as usual – it is snowing, my husband bores me and I long to be back in Vienna again. How are you all? Did you know that our own dear Max sent me a letter last week? Yes, I was shocked as well. It was the most illegible scrawl in which only the words 'dogs', 'snow' and 'shooting' could be discerned but I was exceedingly touched to receive it nonetheless. Do please give him a kiss from me and have one for yourself as well.

Your loving sister in Parma.'

Thursday, 1st March.

How I detest Durfort. Horrible, nasty little man!

There was a small card party in my mother's rooms last night and Durfort was there in force, dressed to impress in black and silver taffeta and followed by at least a dozen bored looking pages in crimson satin, who lounged around the edges of the room yawning and whispering to each other in a most tiresome manner.

I did my best to avoid him but he accosted me as I took a turn about the room with my sister Elizabeth and leered at me in a very familiar and rather repulsive manner after taking my shrinking hand in his sweaty paw and kissing it lingeringly.

'Are these French manners then?' I could not resist asking him, with an arch look.

Durfort looked displeased and dabbed his upper lip with a musk drenched

kerchief. 'You shall find none better, your Highness.' He looked about himself with undisguised disdain. 'The manners here in Vienna are nothing to those which you will encounter at Versailles. This is the merest barnyard in comparison.'

'Really, Monsieur?' I could feel myself getting angrier by the moment and Elizabeth, recognising the angry flush that spread across my collarbones, placed a warning hand upon my arm. 'I can assure you that there cannot possibly be any finer manners or people in all the world than those that you will encounter at my mother's court.' I looked him over with a curled lip, from the diamond encrusted shoes upon his feet to the absurdly over powdered violet hued wig upon his pate. 'You think it some sort of game do you not, Monsieur, to insult me, my family and my country and to find us always sadly lacking in comparison to your beloved Versailles?'

He looked flustered now, realising too late that he had blundered unforgiveably. 'I seek only to educate you, your Highness, in what will await you upon your marriage. Things are very different at Versailles...'

'Enough!' I raised my voice rather more than I had intended to and saw my brother Joseph stop mid sentence and look over in concern. 'I do not want to hear another word about Versailles! Enough, Monsieur!'

'Is all well, sister?' Joseph was at my shoulder now, looking with his habitual distaste at Durfort. 'I do hope that nothing has distressed you.'

'Not at all,' Durfort cut in smoothly. 'We were talking of France. I had just asked her Highness what she thought of the great king Henri IV, one of our most august monarchs.'

'Hm.' Joseph looked dubious. 'And what do you think of him, Antoinette?' He brushed an imaginary speck of snuff from his black velvet sleeve, clearly entirely disinterested in my response.

I stared at them both in horror, my mouth suddenly so dry that I could not speak at all. I stared in mute appeal at my abbé, who was standing with Marianna on the other side of the room and utterly failing to meet my agonised eye. I had been taught about Henri IV, the 'evergreen gallant' of course but at that moment all my knowledge fled and I could not think of a single intelligent

thing to say. Joseph looked up from his sleeve with a quizzical and rather disappointed look, while Durfort absolutely glowed with this unlooked for triumph over me.

‘Come, come,’ he murmured in faux concern. ‘Surely you have heard of Henri IV?’ He could not conceal his smirk.

‘My sister is tired,’ Elizabeth said then clearly, with a discreet pinch to my arm. ‘We speak of our ancestor, le roi Henri, often do we not Antoinette?’ She did not wait for an answer but instead plunged on. ‘We particularly like to talk about his charitable works and how fond he was of the common man. A chicken in every pot, was it not, Monsieur de Durfort?’

He looked furious but managed to smile and nod his head. ‘Indeed, yes, your Highness.’

When he had gone, Joseph crooked his finger at Abbé Vermond, beckoning him forward, and fixed me with a steely blue glare. ‘That must never happen again. Do I make myself clear, Antonia? You are not to bandy words with that man again and you must apply yourself more to your studies.’ He sighed heavily. ‘I have no wish to appear inferior to the likes of Durfort.’

Tuesday, 6th March, late.

Today, one of my former maids, Ludmilla, brought her new baby son to the palace so that I could see him. As was traditional, she had left royal service upon her marriage armed with a generous pension from my mother and a wedding gift of a silver goblet from my brother and me. We were always encouraged to stay in contact with our favoured servants as they often stayed with us for decades and so I was quick to send a bag of gold coins and some delicately embroidered baby clothes and invite Ludmilla to visit after she had given birth.

She was flushed with happiness when she came to my rooms, holding the slumbering baby who was wrapped snugly in a red wool blanket, close to her bosom and pausing every so often to kiss his soft forehead and rub noses with him. Clementina, who had little time for babies, rolled her eyes at this but the rest of us were enthralled, our arms itching to hold the infant ourselves and kiss his plump pink cheeks.

‘What was it like?’ Clara asked at last, asking the question that we all, even

Clementina, longed to know the answer to. 'Was it very horrid?'

Ludmilla laughed. 'It was not the most pleasant experience and did hurt very much but it was all worth it in the end.' She gazed down again at her son and we all sighed. 'I had no idea how wonderful being a mother would be.' She looked up and smiled. 'Wonderful and tiring but mostly wonderful.'

'It won't be like that for Antoinette,' Clementina said with an arch look. 'She will have dozens of nursery maids to help her with her babies.'

I laughed. 'Oh pish! I won't let anyone help me! I shall do it all myself!' I mean it as well. I don't want some other woman looking after my precious baby when I am perfectly capable of doing it myself. I want to bathe him myself, dress him in lovely clothes and then hold him close all day and all night long, just breathing in his beautiful baby scent.

'Easy for you to say,' Clara said with a wink. 'Just wait until the baby's first teeth come and you don't get a wink of sleep! You will be grateful for help then!'

'Shush!' Ludmilla shook her pretty head so that her blonde curls tumbled about her shoulders and laughed. 'Don't ruin things! It is not so bad as all that, your Highness!' She jiggled the baby and kissed the downy blond hair on top of his head. 'I would not have it any other way.'

'And your husband, Ludmilla? Does he help?' Clementina asked. 'It is not a man's business is it?'

Ludmilla blushed. 'He does his best but he can't feed the babe as I do and finds it harder to quiet him when he cries. It will be easier when Josef is older and needs me less.' She looked at me and smiled. 'I am sure your husband won't have as much time to help as he would like.'

I thought of the Dauphin Louis, of his fleshy face and sleepy blue eyes and tried to imagine him holding a baby, our baby, jiggling it against his shoulder when it cried as I had seen young fathers in Vienna do and speaking to it in a singsong voice. It seemed impossible. It all seemed impossible and I felt suddenly weary and afraid.

‘Your Highness?’ Ludmilla held her son out to me. ‘Would you like to hold the baby and give him your blessing?’ She smiled shyly.

I smiled back. ‘It feels more appropriate for him to bless me but of course I will do as you ask.’ I held out my arms and tenderly, gingerly she placed the precious baby in them. ‘Oh, Ludmilla, he is so beautiful.’ I gazed down at him, mesmerised by the perfect rosebud pout of his lips, the dark sweep of his long eyelashes against his flushed cheeks and the way his tiny, dimpled hands clutched at the soft, warm wool of his blanket. ‘You are so fortunate.’ I leaned down and nuzzled his neck with my nose, closing my eyes and inhaling the delicious milky, vanilla scent of new baby. ‘Oh, I bless you, you sweet little man. May your life be long, happy and fortunate.’ I kissed his forehead and allowed myself the pleasure for just a few short moments of imagining that he was mine.

Wednesday, 21st March, morning.

Amèlie has sent me a well thumbed copy of a French biography of Henri IV, which she clearly filched from the royal library in Parma.

Inside the front cover she has written: ‘Better luck next time.’

Indeed.

Friday, 23rd March, late.

I am writing this in haste and could be interrupted at any moment so will have to be brief.

I had returned from dinner and was sitting with my ladies in my sitting room earlier this evening when there was a smart knock upon the door and my brother Joseph entered, accompanied by four footmen dressed in Imperial livery. ‘My dear one, Mama has decided that from this night on you will sleep on a bed in her chambers so that she can keep you close to her at all times.’ He looked rather embarrassed as he said this and shrugged and smiled apologetically at my confused look. ‘I know that this must be a shock but I have only just been informed.’

‘What have I done now?’ I had risen at his entrance but now sat down heavily upon my raspberry silk covered sofa. ‘Is this about Henri IV? I am truly sorry,

Joseph but my mind went blank and I could not think of a single thing to say! You know how much Durfort dislikes me and I get all flustered around him which makes me seem even more stupid than usual.' I began to cry. 'I am so sorry and it really won't happen again.'

Joseph held up a hand to silence me. 'No, it is not just about that, Antoinette,' he said. 'Mama is concerned that your education has been overly lax and thinks that keeping you close to her during these final weeks in Austria will prepare you for what lies ahead. She has had a bed prepared for you in her own room so that she can speak privately with you at the beginning and end of every day and keep close watch over you at all times.'

I felt my cheeks go red with anger. 'This is intolerable,' I whispered furiously. 'There is no need for Mama to watch over me and I have my Abbé to teach me about France. Such ridiculous fuss is absolutely unnecessary!'

He shrugged. 'Mama believes otherwise.'

The footmen were now helping my maids gather together some of my belongings which were placed into a large chest and I watched them in helpless, impotent despair. 'I can't refuse to go can I?' I said. 'This is so humiliating.' I bent down and picked up Mops, who wandered past, confused and a little frightened by all of the noise at what was usually a quiet time of day. I nuzzled her soft neck and kissed her nose until she was calm again.

'It is not intended to be so,' my brother said softly, taking my hand which I had balled into a fist and gently uncurling my fingers. 'She thinks only of you and of your future comfort, Antoinette. She worries constantly about what awaits you at Versailles and this is the only way she can think of to prepare you for your future life.' He sighed. 'Surely you cannot blame her for having a natural motherly concern for her daughter?'

I shrugged rather gracelessly. 'I suppose not.'

Joseph grinned. 'That is better. I knew you would see her point of view.'

I can hear footsteps and so had better go.

Saturday, 24th March, early morning.

It was every bit as awful as I had anticipated. Worse in fact. Mama had ordered that a simple camp bed be set up for me in the corner of her large and draughty bedroom, with only a painted screen pulled around it for privacy. One of the windows was open as usual and I had to pull on thick woollen socks and cover myself in heavy blankets in order to keep myself warm. How does Mama endure it?

She came in, already in her nightdress and with her silver and gold hair in a thick, long plait down her back after I had got into bed and immediately began to lecture me about Queenship and duty and made it all sound about as dreary as possible, which is very dreary indeed. I wanted to fall asleep oh so many times but pure fear kept me awake throughout as I could well imagine her fury if I showed myself to be anything less than absolutely attentive.

In the morning she woke at the crack of dawn and strode across the freezing cold floor to shake me awake before beginning to talk at me about my wifely duties and the 'nice little things' that my husband may well expect from me. It is my duty not just to bring forth children but also to be an ornament to the court and a joy to my husband. It all sounds so unimaginably and dreadfully exhausting. How will I manage?

'I hope that you will enjoy our little chats, Antoinette,' she said to me this morning before leaving to start work in her office next door. 'I have certainly enjoyed myself.'

I nodded in what I hoped was sufficient enthusiasm then, as soon as the door was pulled shut behind her, I pulled the blankets back up over my head and went back to sleep.

Sunday, 25th March, after breakfast.

The Secrets of the Boudoir are secrets no longer. I wish that they were.

Mama insisted upon explaining it all to me last night, with a large dose of far too much information about what she and Papa used to enjoy during their days of conjugal bliss. Ugh. I blush to think of it.

It really is quite shocking. Do I really have to do it? If the Dauphin tries to do THAT to me, then I think I will just pretend to be asleep and hope that he goes away.

Tuesday, 27th March, late.

Oh dear. I was sitting with my dear Vermond in my little school room when a terrible bustle outside the door warned us that we were about to be interrupted. To be honest, I did not mind in the slightest as he was talking to me about that unsavoury wench, Catherine de Medici and I did not care to hear anything more. There was a knock on the door and we looked at each other with wry smiles, wondering what it was this time. More presents perhaps?

‘Your highness,’ the footman paused and cleared his throat. He was very young and had bright red hair underneath his neatly clipped and powdered wig. ‘Your Imperial mother requests your presence in her apartments.’

I sighed and stood up, shaking out my sadly crumpled black silk skirts. ‘I will be there directly.’ I looked at Vermond. ‘It is always going to be like this from now on isn’t it?’ I said a little regretfully. There is less than a month to go now before I am married and after that I do not think we will ever be left alone together again.

I anxiously wrung my pearl bracelets around my wrists as I followed the footman down the stairs and through the numerous white and gold panelled rooms that led to my mother’s reception room. The pearls clicked against each other, beating time as my high heels tip tapped on the polished wooden floors.

I longed to ask him if he knew what was happening but dared not as I did not wish to appear foolish and the pity that I sometimes saw in the eyes of those around me, which was always swiftly hidden as soon as they realised that my gaze was upon them was not something that I wanted to see directly. I do not know why they feel so sorry for me. Possibly they think me too young, too innocent to be sent away from home. Possibly they know something that I do not.

The Swiss Guards swung the doors open and the footman stood aside, bowing his head reverently as I passed by and stepped into the room, looking around me anxiously before I swiftly lowered my gaze. There were only a dozen people present besides my mother, Joseph, my sisters and Durfort so not the huge court gathering that I had been afraid of. My mother has a bad habit of springing such things upon us - remember Amalia’s betrothal?

‘My dearest one,’ Mama greeted me fondly and kissed me on both cheeks. ‘Monsieur de Durfort has something for you.’ She beckoned him forward and smiled on us both as he stepped towards me carrying a thin red leather box stamped with a large gold fleur de lis, symbol of France.

‘My master, the King has sent this for you.’ He handed me the box and they all held their breath and leaned forward, waiting for me to open it. My hands trembled as I opened the lid, my mind racing as I imagined what lay inside. What could it be? I could hardly contain my excitement.

‘He hopes that you like it.’ Something in his voice made me look up and I realised at once, from his smirk, that he already knew what lay inside and furthermore, he knew that I would not like it.

I would show him. I proudly put back my shoulders and lifted the lid, not allowing a single trace of disappointment to cross my face as I looked down at a black and white engraving of a portly young man pushing a plough, a look of intense concentration on his chubby face. ‘Monsieur le Dauphin,’ it said underneath. There could be no doubt that firstly, this was my intended husband and secondly, someone somewhere in France wanted to insult me and was using Durfort as their proxy.

‘How charming.’ My lips formed a smile of purest pleasure and I forced myself to look him in the eyes. ‘He looks very handsome and just as a young man should be. I look forward to meeting him.’

Durfort did not trouble to hide his chagrin and turned immediately away, while I exchanged a look and a wink with Joseph. It will take more than such childishness to break my spirit.

Friday, 30th March, after dinner.

It has been decided that I will spend the first three days of April closeted alone with Abbé Vermond for a period of silent reflection, lectures about spirituality and prayer. It sounds thoroughly dismal, although my dear Abbé has promised to keep his lectures short and to the point. He could not promise, however, to make them amusing.

I am still sleeping in Mama’s bedroom and the nightly lectures continue. I do not know what sort of terrible moral degradation she expects me to fall into

when I am living in Versailles but there is a heavy emphasis on morality, faithfulness, marital duties and not allowing my head to be turned by the shallow and self serving flattery of my social inferiors.

Every night I fall asleep, my head aching horribly after listening to her talk and in the morning I am woken early as she flings aside her coverlets and causes a cascade of state papers to fall to the floor as she is in the habit of working while in bed and cares nothing for the splashes of ink and red sealing wax that cover her fine linen sheets. My mother never stops working, even in her sleep she mumbles to herself about the Prussians. I suspect that even I appear to her as a sort of project, as something that needs to be sorted out and dealt with like a particularly troublesome edict or treaty.

This morning she presented me with a large bundle of papers, all tied up with pink velvet ribbon and sealed shut with the Imperial seal. 'I have taken the precaution of writing down some thoughts for you to read when you are away from home,' she said, handing me the bundle. 'I have included the rules that I expect you to abide by in your new life, some advice about suitable modes of behaviour and also lists of the people that you will be permitted to correspond with once you are installed at Versailles.'

'Thank you.' I looked down at the letter and gulped. She had clearly spent many hours putting it together.

'I expect you to read it once a month, in order to focus your mind on your duties and strengthen your purpose against the many temptations that will assail you.' She briefly touched my hair. 'I have wondered if perhaps it is too soon for you to be going away from me but I know, Antoinette, that you will make me very proud.' I quickly looked up at her face and saw a doubt and uncertainty in her blue eyes that contrasted sharply with her words. My mother had never been uncertain about anything, ever. Until now and about me, it would seem.

'I will do my best, Mama,' I whispered, not knowing how else to reassure her. How could I ever tell her, or anyone else, how young and unprepared and insignificant I felt when confronted by the hugeness and magnificence of my projected destiny? I tried to imagine the weight of a crown upon my small head and could not.

'I want you to do better than that,' she replied rather curtly, turning away.

Wednesday, 4th April, afternoon.

I have spent the last three days sequestered alone at Schönbrunn with only the Abbé and my thoughts for company. I have given more thought and consideration in the last few days to the state of my frail flesh and immortal soul than at any other time in my life and you may rest assured that if some tragic accident were to overtake me between now and my marriage then I would be fully prepared and ready to meet my maker in my present virgin state.

Do I feel cleansed of sin and more spiritual? It remains to be seen, although I have to say that I am so bored now with prayer and worthy introspection that I am almost tempted to misbehave, just to feel myself again.

I am not sure that I like the Antoinette that they want to send to Versailles.

Sunday, 15th April, Easter Sunday, evening.

Lent is over once again and we are gorging ourselves on hot chocolate and cakes . It is always hard for me to practise restraint when it comes to the sweet things in life but this year has been particularly difficult.

Of course, now that life has returned to normal, it is time to prepare for my wedding on the nineteenth which is only, oh my heart beats faster and my head spins whenever I think about it, four days away. My dress is finished, presents are starting to arrive from all over Europe and the final details of my triumphant journey to France have been completed.

Today there was Mass followed by a huge reception in the state rooms of the Hofburg. Everyone was in attendance as Durfort was due to make a grand entrance to mark his promotion from mere Ambassador to the far more grandiose Ambassador Extraordinary. He left court three days ago with a great deal of bowing and scraping to all and sundry before re-entering the capital yesterday at the head of an enormous cavalcade and today he is due to return garbed in what is reportedly a new magnificent suit of embroidered purple silk with gold rosettes everywhere and enormous ostrich feathers on his hat.

I stood beside my mother and Joseph, smiling and bowing my head gracefully in response to all the courtiers who filed past to kiss our hands and wish us a happy Easter. I find that I am paying a lot of attention now to how I look to others and often glance at myself in the huge gilt framed mirrors that line the

walls to check how I tilt my head or smile, keen to appear as the most perfect princess ever. I know that I am not beautiful but I am told that my face is charming and it is amazing what can be achieved with the help of lovely clothes, high heeled shoes, diamonds and carefully styled and powdered hair.

Clementina and Anna had positioned themselves by the tall windows so as to have a view across the courtyard, they both turned and, stifling their giggles, nodded at me when Durfort pulled up with his forty eight painted and gilt embellished carriages, each drawn by six of the finest horses in Vienna and with a stiff backed postillion perched on the back, lavishly dressed in the finest livery. Yes, forty eight. Really, the vainglory and arrogance of the man knows no bounds. He may well protest that it is all intended to reflect the glory and grandeur of his master, the King of France but we all know the truth - that it is intended to reflect his glory alone. Silly, pompous, puffed up little man.

He entered in great state, preceded and followed by a train of dozens of pages, all dressed to match him in purple silk with gold embroidery, their high heeled polished shoes tapping on the wooden parquet and their sly eyes roving here and there about the assembled courtiers. They parted to allow Durfort through as he doffed his enormous black, feathered hat and bowed several times to my mother and brother. I hid my smile behind my painted ivory handled fan as his eyes slid over me and he accorded me the merest of bows.

‘You are welcome to our court, Monsieur,’ my mother said politely, protocol requiring that she go along with the absurd charade that he had returned to France in order to gain his promotion and had only just come back when the truth is that he had retreated to his estate on the outskirts of Vienna for a couple of days.

‘Your Majesty is most kind and gracious.’ Durfort bowed again. ‘I have in my possession a gift from my master, his Majesty the King of France for your august daughter, her Royal Highness the Archduchess Marie Antoinette.’ He clicked his fingers and two of the pages sprang forward, one carrying a small wooden box while the other held what was clearly a painting beneath a large piece of cloth of gold.

‘I thank you.’ I stepped forward and took the box, wondering what embarrassing surprise lay within. ‘Your master is most kind to think of me.’ I opened the box to find a miniature of the Dauphin, this time dressed to impress

in blue watered silk and covered with a plethora of sashes and decorations. 'He looks very kind.' I lifted out the miniature, which was surrounded by fine diamonds, and immediately pinned it to my dress, while a gentle ripple of applause passed through the assembled company.

The other page came forward with the painting, which Durfort uncovered with a great deal of flourish. As expected this portrait was also of my fiancé, this time dressed in crimson velvet with a blue sash tied across his broad chest. He looked handsome but kindly with sleepy blue eyes that gazed out upon the world almost apathetically, a big nose and a chin that was less decisive than I would have liked but would have to do.

'May I hang this portrait in my room until it is time for me to leave?' I asked with a pretty smile. 'We have been betrothed for a long time now without having seen each other and I should like to have my future husband close to me during these final days in Vienna.'

My mother smiled her approval and rubbed her plump, white hands together. 'Of course, of course.' She came forward and looked at the Dauphin's portrait, taking a pince nez from her jet embroidered reticule so as to examine him more thoroughly, this son in law that she might never meet. 'Hm, I don't think much of his chin,' she murmured in an aside to Joseph, who peered closely then nodded. 'This one is clearly not going to be a man of action and I fear that our little Antoinette will have trouble getting him to make decisions.'

Joseph shrugged and turned away. 'So long as he is a man in the bedchamber, who cares if he is also a man in the salon?'

I blushed to hear them speak this way and made a great show of looking at the portrait so that Durfort would not think that I too was criticising the prince. 'Thank you,' I said, tracing the Dauphin's painted and much maligned chin with my finger. 'I think he looks very nice.'

Durfort bowed, his face expressionless. 'There is also a letter, your Highness,' he said, pulling a large white envelope from within his splendid coat. 'Monsieur le Dauphin is keen to express his very true love and esteem towards you and hopes that you will look with favour upon his words.' He handed me the letter, which was tied with silver ribbon and sealed with a large red seal in the shape of a dolphin.

‘Thank you.’ I held the letter awkwardly, unsure as to whether I was supposed to open it immediately or save it for later, when I was finally alone. It was a love letter after all, surely? I stared at my name ‘Antoinette’ on the front, written in a flowing elegant hand that was alien to me but which would surely become more familiar with time. I imagined the prince sitting at his desk, tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth as he carefully inscribed the name of his future wife upon the ivory envelope. I wondered what he thought of me, so far away and yet so intimately linked.

‘I shall save it for later,’ I said shyly, not getting any guidance from my mother as to what to do now. ‘I do not think it seemly to open a love letter in public.’ There was laughter then and I saw that I had said just the right thing. Everyone knew that this match had been arranged, that it was a matter of state alone and that we had never so much as set eyes on each other but no one wanted to think about it. If they could pretend to themselves that the Dauphin and I were in love then so much the better for us all.

‘Ah,’ said my mother with what was almost a coquettish smile and wink at Durfort, ‘love is in the air.’

Tuesday, 17th April.

This afternoon I made my way with my ladies in waiting down the stairs to one of the huge state reception rooms of the Hofburg, there to stand before all of the court and renounce all claim to the Hapsburg inheritance of my ancestors. I felt very small and very young before them all, my hair covered with a heavy lace veil and my voice shaking and wavering as I solemnly repeated the oath that meant that myself, my husband and our future children would never lay claim to the Holy Roman Empire.

‘I, Marie Antoinette Josèphe Jeanne...’ I sounded like a child and my hand shook as I took the red feathered quill from Joseph and signed the huge document that was spread out on the table before me.

Afterwards I knelt before my mother so that my blue and gold taffeta skirts fell gracefully across the parquet and closed my eyes as she kissed my forehead, her lips cool and dry against my skin.

There is to be a huge supper and ball tonight at the Belvedere Palace to

celebrate.

Wednesday, 18th April, early hours.

It is four o'clock in the morning and we have only just arrived back at the Hofburg after tonight's masked ball at the Belvedere Palace. I am absolutely exhausted and would like nothing better than to rest my head upon this desk and give myself up to the deepest, dreamiest sleep and yet, no, I feel that I must write it all down for who knows how much I will remember when I wake up again?

Joseph was very secretive about his party plans and so I had no idea what to expect until we arrived there in a great cavalcade of carriages in the evening. I was wearing a really lovely new dress of pink silk, sewn all over with diamonds and shimmering sequins and with gold lace on the cuffs, hem and bosom although you could not see all of it underneath the white silk domino that we were all told to wear, which is a shame. We were all wearing the same though and also white half masks, which Anna and Clementine were very excited about as they had never been to a masked ball before and were looking forward to flirting incognito with all of the young men.

Anyway, we arrived to find the palace, which is very lovely, all lit up with torches and thousands upon thousands of candles with footmen running here and there and the grounds swarming with thousands of people, all dressed in their finest clothes and hiding their identities behind the same plain masks and white silk cloaks. I clapped my hands together in glee when I first beheld them as they looked so romantic and mysterious, flitting between the statues and the trees like ghosts and chattering excitedly behind their fans. Everyone was being flirtatious and I saw several couples exchange lingering looks from behind their masks.

Joseph himself led me into supper, looking very dashing in diamond spangled black velvet and I think he must have admired me very much as I heard him say to Mama that if she could only find him a princess as pretty as me then he would consider marrying again immediately. How kind of him. Supper was delicious, although I was far too excited to eat much and had to be reminded to have some lobster and wine before I had finally had enough and jumped up from the table to dance, first with my sweet Max and next with Ferdinand, both of whom were dressed in crimson silk and eyeing up the ladies of the court with small magnifying glasses that hung from their gold embroidered waistcoats.

I was so happy and excited that I even managed to be pleasant to Christina and

Elizabeth, even though they both looked very sour and disapproving as they watched the dancing from a special raised dais. 'What a shocking rabble,' I heard Elizabeth murmur to Christina behind her feathered fan. 'I should be ashamed to behave in such a way.' I longed to say that perhaps she would be happier if she would only forget such silly inhibitions and join in with the fun but did not know how to. If she and Christina are happy being such dull, priggish snobs then that is their problem isn't it?

Oh, I danced and danced, first with this gentleman and then with that and everywhere I went I heard a murmur of 'There she goes, Marie Antoinette, the Dauphine!' as people moved aside to let me pass and pretended not to stare. Old courtiers who have known me all my life came up to take my hands and kiss them, while wishing me good fortune for the future. Everyone looks so happy for me and yet at the same time a trifle wary as if there is something wrong, something missing from this fairytale.

'They do not want you to leave,' my brother Joseph murmured as we danced together later on. 'You are the loveliest of the Archduchesses after all and the pride of Vienna.'

'That is too kind.' I blushed underneath my mask. 'They hardly know me.'

'There is regret that you are leaving so soon after your debut into society.' He smiled down at me, my kindly, wonderful brother. 'The French have all the luck, it seems.'

I squeezed his hand, suddenly anxious. 'You will come and visit me?' I asked. 'I do not think I could bear it if I were never to see any of you ever again.'

'Of course.' His smile was non-committal but I believed him nonetheless. I had to.

After this, Charlotte, Frederike, Clementina and I went into a billowing pink silk pavillion that had been erected beneath the trees to act as a refreshment tent and took hot chocolate and coffee with huge dollops of fresh cream on top while sitting at a dainty little table. The other girls giggled and gossiped about the gentlemen of the court, while I pretended to listen but instead looked around the other tables, committing it all to memory. And it was at that moment that I spotted him.

‘I can’t believe that it is almost your wedding day,’ Frederike said with a dreamy smile. ‘You must be so excited, Antoinette.’

‘Mm, yes, I suppose so.’ I smiled at her, but my mind was elsewhere. Where had he gone? ‘Yes, it is very exciting.’ Ah, there he was. ‘Please, excuse me.’ I stood up and, ignoring their open mouthed, confused stares, hurried towards him, my pink silk skirts rustling.

He smiled then, his delicious lips curling underneath the mask as the hazel eyes that I would know anywhere crinkled with amusement. ‘Your Highness.’

‘Karl.’ I gave him my hand and he raised it slowly to his lips, while I stared at him, reminding myself how much my sister Amalia had loved this man. How much she loved him still.

‘I did not mean to come,’ he said with a wry look. ‘I wanted to stay away.’

‘I am glad that you are here,’ I replied, suddenly breathless. ‘I am always pleased to see you.’ I knew that people were staring at us, but I did not care. Let them look. In two days I would be married and we might never be alone like this again.

‘You look very beautiful.’ Again that rueful smile. ‘I always knew that you would be exquisite.’

I stopped breathing. ‘Did you?’ Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Christina coming towards us and I knew that I had to be quick. ‘Will you be at the French Ambassador’s ball tomorrow night?’ I asked.

He nodded. ‘I shall see you there?’

‘Yes.’

Christina was upon us. ‘Antoinette, Mama is asking for you.’ She did not look at Karl, did not even so much acknowledge his bow. ‘The fireworks are about to begin and she would like you at her side for them as she knows how much they delight you.’

‘Of course.’ Joseph had spared no expense and tonight’s display was to be one of the greatest ever seen in Vienna, in all of Austria even. I did not want to miss it for anything. ‘I shall come with you now.’ I turned back towards Karl but he had already gone.

Wednesday, 18th April, evening.

We are about to leave for Durfort’s ball at the Liechtenstein Palace, which lies just outside Vienna. I must admit that I am terribly nervous about the whole affair as I have no idea what he has in store for us although Anna tells me that there are rumours all over Vienna that no expense has been spared and his party will outshine the Imperial ball last night. In which case I am glad that I am wearing a new Parisian gown of shimmering cream silk, covered all over with gold lace and sequins. I have tiny little diamond stars in my hair as well, which I think look très becoming. I did not get enough sleep after the party last night and so my maids have smoothed a little rouge on my cheeks to hide my paleness and make me look more awake and lively.

I can hear Mama asking where I am (I am writing this in the little closet behind her bedchamber, which is the only place that I can be entirely private now) so must go.

I hope that Karl is there. He said that he would be but that means nothing. I must remember Amalia and her feelings. She is far away though and need never know.

Oh, that makes it sound like I am planning some sort of wrong doing but I am not. Truly. He is my sister’s lover, not mine. I do not have a lover and do not think to have one.

They are shouting for me now. I must go.

Thursday, 19th April, early, my wedding day.

We have just got back from Durfort’s party and my goodness, it was magnificent! The exquisite Liechtenstein Palace lies just outside Vienna and as we approached in our long train of carriages, it soon became obvious that the entire building and the splendid gardens were lit up by the golden blaze of thousands upon thousands of torches and candles, all casting their light across the graceful parterres, the sweeping avenues and the beautiful statues that lined them. I have been there many times before, of course, but have never seen the

palace looking quite so beautiful, so imposing as it did last night.

Durfort was waiting to greet us in one of the gorgeous, painted reception rooms on the ground floor, a benign and almost friendly smile fixed on his plump face and his beringed hands outstretched to welcome us in.

‘You are most welcome,’ he bowed low before me, his tight blue silk suit creaking ominously as he did so. ‘I hope that you will enjoy our small party in your honour.’

‘Small party indeed!’ Clementina hissed at me as we passed through to the music and light filled gardens, the feathers on our elaborate coiffures brushing in an alarming fashion against the pink and orange lanterns strung from the doorway as we did so. ‘If this is their idea of a small party...’

‘Hush.’ I smiled and squeezed her arm with my gloved hand. ‘Let’s just enjoy ourselves.’ I took a deep, satisfied breath as we walked along the avenue, smiling and bowing to the courtiers as we went by. ‘Well, he has certainly pulled out all the stops hasn’t he?’ Everywhere I looked there were candles and gold dolphins in reference to the Dauphin and enormous blue, white and yellow bouquets and blue and gold liveried servants running here and there carrying silver trays laden with wine, champagne, small glasses of liqueurs and cakes.

‘I heard that there is a servant for every guest,’ Clementina whispered, linking her arm with mine. ‘He has certainly spared no expense and here was I thinking that he hated you.’

I grinned. ‘Oh, he may well dislike me but Durfort would never willingly miss an opportunity to outdo Austria and make us look inferior to France.’ I could hear my sisters Elizabeth and Christina laughing behind us, enjoying some light flirtation with male friends as they sauntered along the path, their matching ruffled yellow silk skirts sweeping the dust while further back my mother walked with Joseph, leaning heavily on his black velvet clad arm. Marianna had vanished straight away and was probably enjoying the palace’s famous library while my other brothers were no doubt running amock, fuelled with hot chocolate and cakes.

‘I will miss all of this,’ I said with a sigh.

Clementina looked at me sadly. 'In any other circumstance I would ask if you were having second thoughts but...' Her eyes dropped, hiding her pity from me.

'But I never had any choice in the matter,' I finished for her. 'And I couldn't back out even if I wanted to.' I shivered a little, feeling suddenly cold and exposed. 'I wonder what would happen if I refused to go through with it?'

Clementina laughed. 'Well your mother would almost certainly drag you kicking and screaming up the aisle to the altar.' She arranged the shimmering pink silk stole that matched my beautiful, diamond strewn dress around my shoulders. 'I am sure it has had to be done before.'

I smiled then. 'I am sure that you are right. I am fortunate really to be marrying someone not ill looking and who is close to my own age.' I shrugged lightly, trying not to think of the Dauphin's podgy cheeks and weak chin. 'It could be much worse.'

'Oh yes, things could always be much worse! For a start, he could be old and ugly!' she agreed with a laugh. 'Or spotty.'

'With nasty teeth!' I whispered, giggling, 'Bad breath! Long fingernails!' I was laughing properly now, gasping for air. 'He could look like Durfort!'

'Only much, much worse! Clementina was bent double with laughter now. 'Like a big fat, French toad!'

'There is nothing worse! Oh, oh, this is too funny!' I cried, wiping away tears of laughter, my amusement heightened by the awareness that Christina and Elizabeth had halted in the middle of the path and were both staring at me, their plucked eyebrows raised, their rouged lips pursed with disapproval.

'Wait,' Clementina had stopped laughing and was looking down across the gardens. 'He is here.'

'Where?' There was no need to ask who 'he' was. Clementina and I had no secrets from each other. 'Has he seen me? How do I look?' I did a little twirl, the diamond stars on my pink silk skirts glimmering in the torchlight.

'You look beautiful,' she whispered. 'I will walk with you but my ears as well

as my lips are sealed.'

'Oh, Clementina, what would I do without you?' We linked arms again and sauntered across the crowded terrace towards Karl. I blushed and ducked my head away beneath the weight of his admiring stare, reminding myself that he had once been Amalia's lover and probably still was, at least as far as Amalia was concerned.

'Your Highness.' He was in front of me now, grinning widely as he bowed and lifted my hand up to his warm lips, his hazel eyes smiling down into mine. 'You look enchanting.'

'Thank you.' I gazed up at him, thinking how handsome he looked in his russet velvet suit and wondering what it would be like to press my lips, just once to his. This last thought made me blush again and pull my hand away, overcome with embarrassment and terrified lest he could discern my thoughts in some way.

'Shall we walk?' He offered me his arm and I hesitated for a moment before placing my hand upon it. 'A few minutes won't do any harm.' He looked over my shoulder and his smile melted away while a wariness crept into his eyes. 'Ah.'

'Antoinette?' I turned and there was Joseph, looming over us, his clear blue eyes concerned as they met my own. 'Will you walk with me for a while?'

I forced a smile and transferred my hand from Karl's arm to that of my brother, hardly daring to look back at him in case my face betrayed my disappointment. 'Of course.'

'I was just about to take Her Highness to you,' Karl lied smoothly, moving aside.

Joseph bowed, clearly disbelieving. 'Of course.' He swept me away, leaving Clementina with Karl and I dared not look back to see what they were doing, although I felt a sudden pang of jealousy that my lady in waiting would get to enjoy his company whereas I...

'I do not want you to be alone with that young man again.' Joseph's voice was clipped and cold. 'Amalia broke her heart over him and I am not keen to see

another of my sisters fall into his clutches.'

'I have always thought him to be very amiable,' I remarked, trying to keep my tone light and unconcerned. 'We are friends merely.'

Joseph gave a short laugh. 'I am not a fool, Antoinette!' he said, looking almost angry. 'I saw the way that he was looking at you, the way that you almost fell over your skirts in your haste to get to him.' He looked disdainful. 'I think that you will agree that it is not often that I find occasion to speak to you like this, but kindly remember who you are!' He looked at me then and his face softened. 'It is hard, I know, to be given away in marriage and to feel like you have no control over your own destiny but you will learn how to bear it, truly you will.'

Will I learn to bear it? Really?

Oh, my head hurts and I should go to bed. It is now the early hours of my wedding day and already I can see a little bit of dawn peeping out from behind the rooftops while overhead the birds are beginning to sing, hailing the new day in their usual cheerful way.

My wedding day. I can hardly believe that it is here at last and that next time I write in this book I will be Madame la Dauphine de France and someone else entirely. First I was Maria Antonia, then I was Marie Antoinette and next I shall be Madame la Dauphine. I wonder what the Dauphin is thinking right now? If he is even awake, which of course he won't be.

Oh, I am rambling now. I should go to bed. Not to dream of Karl. No. Poor Karl. Poor me. Poor all of us.

19th April, afternoon.

I have not had enough sleep and desperately wish that I could return to bed and pull the covers over my head and sink back into my interrupted dreams of Paris. I am running out of time, however and even as I write this I can hear my maids bustling in the next room, running my lily and rose scented bath, gossiping with the fashionable Viennese hairdresser who has come to do my coiffure and fluffing out the skirts of my elaborate cloth of silver wedding dress.

The tiny green and white porcelain clock on my desk is counting down the

hours – only two left now before I make my way to the church of the Augustine Friars, there to kneel beside my brother Ferdinand and make my vows. I feel faint and sick just thinking about it, thinking about the attendant fuss and all those eyes staring at my back as I say the words that will separate me from home forever and ever.

I am wondering also about the boy who is to become my husband, all those miles away in France. I wonder what he is thinking right now? Does he think of me at all?

19th April, evening.

It is done. I am married, I am Madame la Dauphine and I don't feel any different.

After my bath, my maids and ladies in waiting dressed me in my gorgeous cloth of silver and lace wedding dress and slipped beautiful diamond heeled shoes on to my feet before the hairdresser stepped forward to attach thick hair pieces and tease and powder and pomade my fair hair into a formal style which was then decorated with diamond hearts and orange blossom.

'A little rouge?' Clementina skipped forward with a tiny porcelain pot of rouge, sent all the way from Paris by Madame la Duchesse de Choiseul as a wedding present. It smelt faintly of roses and violets.

I stared at myself in the mirror on my dressing table, unable to ignore how tired and pale my face looked despite the rouge and how frightened my eyes were as I took in my magnificent dress and looked shyly down to touch the ornate necklace of pearls and diamonds that had been lent by my mother for the occasion. 'This necklace has been worn by every Imperial bride for generations,' she had whispered as she opened their blue velvet box and fastened them around my neck. 'I think that it brings us luck. I was wearing it when I married your father.' She gazed away into the distance and I knew that she was thinking about Papa and how much she had loved him, loved him still in fact and how much she missed him. He should be here with us now.

'Oh, Mama,' I whispered, tears rising in my eyes. 'I wish that Papa was here to see this.' I took her hand in mine, something that I had never before been brave

enough to do and to my surprise she curled her plump fingers around mine and squeezed. Perhaps, sometimes, Mama is as frightened as everyone else? Perhaps. It seems impossible, I know.

'He would have been so proud,' she said, nodding and smiling through the tears that streamed down her cheeks. 'France was always so special to him. He always considered himself to be a Prince of Lorraine first and Emperor second.'

'I know, I know,' I soothed, resting my head lightly against her black taffeta shoulder, breathing in her familiar scent of lavender and rosemary, the scent that had once been Papa's and which she had enveloped herself with ever since his passing. I tried to imagine myself loving the Dauphin so much that I mourned him as intensely as Mama had mourned my father but I could not. I do not think that I will ever love any man so much. 'He is watching us from Heaven.'

As I looked at myself in the pearls and diamonds of an Imperial bride I found it hard to believe that this was finally and absolutely it, that we had come at last to the moment of truth. At any point up to now the intricate negotiations between France and Austria could have fallen apart but now, finally, it was too late for that and whatever happened from this moment on was down to me alone.

'You look beautiful,' my ladies in waiting all chorused, smiling encouragingly at me, their eyes anxiously searching mine for signs of panic or dread. I knew that they had had their orders, just as I had had mine. Their objective was to get me to the altar at any cost, while mine was simply to make one foot step in front of the other and smile as though I was going willingly to my own true love.

There was a knock on the door and Mama entered, flanked with liveried footmen and looking supremely magnificent in her black silk gown, the diamonds and jet on her stomacher glimmering in the light from the candles that stood on my dressing table. Even today she was wearing mourning, her only concession to the happy occasion being a little rouge on her lips, a pair of red silk shoes concealed beneath her voluminous skirts and a scattering of diamond pins in her pale hair. 'Come, Antonia,' she said holding out her hand and smiling as she deliberately used my Austrian name for the final time. 'Come. It is time.'

We went on foot from the Hofburg to the austere, white fronted Augustinerkirche, the church of Saint Augustine where Imperial weddings have been held for centuries. My sisters and brothers were married there as were our

parents and grandparents before them. I myself had been baptized there but of course have no recognition at all of this important occasion.

A huge crowd of courtiers and ordinary Viennese people lined the purple carpeted route between the palace and the church, which had been covered with a long canopy of white silk embroidered with the Imperial insignia. I felt faint and rather sick as my mother took my hand and led me out into the waning sunlight and cool breezes of Spring while behind me the Countess Trautmannsdorf heroically carried my heavy silver and lace train. I bit my lip and concentrated on placing one foot before the other, hardly noticing the stares and applause of the crowd that watched us pass or the whispers and giggles of my sisters behind us.

'What a lovely day,' Mama whispered, trying to put me at my ease. 'The perfect day for a wedding.'

'Yes.' I nodded and, reminded of my duty, tried to smile and nod at the gathered people, very much aware that reports of my behaviour and appearance would be winging their way across Europe as soon as I had set foot within the church and there was nothing more to see outside.

'Courage, courage, my darling girl,' Mama murmured, squeezing my fingers. 'Not long now.'

I smiled and nodded to either side of me, relieved to note that we were almost at the church door and that this particular ordeal was nearly at an end. And it was at this point that I saw him standing at the back of the crowd but tall enough to tower over them.

Karl. His gaze were fixed upon me and I blushed as our eyes met for a moment before I looked quickly away. He looked so handsome that for a brief impure moment I wished that it was he who would be kneeling beside me as I took my vows.

'And here we are.' We were in front of the doors, which swung upon to invite us into the gloomy, pungent, incense scented depths of the church, its velvety darkness broken only by the bright facets of light that fell like shattered rainbows from the tall windows on to the stone floor and rows of wooden pews below. I took a deep breath and stepped inside as a swell of organ music started

up before the choir began to sing.

'Remember, one foot in front of the other,' my mother admonished with a smile as we began our slow walk up the aisle towards the altar, where my brother Ferdinand waited for us dressed in the full robes and furbelows of the Imperial orders. He looked magnificent and also extremely young as I suppose that we both did.

Again, I ignored the stares and concentrated on the huge gold embellished cross that stood on the gold and crimson embroidered altar cloth. The organ master was clearly enjoying himself and the music soared and peaked around us as we walked, miraculously creating an atmosphere of sanctity and also joy. I wished suddenly that I had asked for Wolferl Mozart to play at my wedding but he was doubtless far away as usual, maybe even in France. One day I will get him to play for me. Perhaps I will even commission a piece for myself.

We reached the altar and my mother gracefully gave my hand to my brother before kissing me on both cheeks and then turning away to step up on to the dais where Joseph was already sitting and take her place on an ornate throne at his side. I met Joseph's eye for an instant and he winked and smiled encouragingly, knowing more than most just how hard this was going to be. I could see Durfort, magnificently dressed as ever in ice blue satin and gold lace, standing just behind Ferdinand, his dark eyes were fixed in a show of reverence upon the altar cross but I knew that he was as intensely aware of me as I was of him and that as soon as my back was turned he would be staring like everyone else and making mental notes of all the catty things he could report back to whoever his friends were in France.

'Ready?' Ferdinand whispered, holding my hand almost gingerly and at arm's length. He looked extremely young and shy.

I smiled and nodded, trying not to think about how truly bizarre this actually was. 'Ready.'

And with that we knelt together before God and I was married by the Papal Nuncio, Monseigneur Visconti to Monsieur le Dauphin de France, a boy that I had never even seen. I knelt as Maria Antonia Josepha Johanna, Erzherzogin von Österreich, Prinzessin von Ungarn and arose to the blowing of trumpets and sounds of triumphant salvos being fired outside with his consecrated gold ring

upon my finger as Marie Antoinette Josephe Jeanne, Dauphine de France, Duchesse de Berri.

I wonder when it will begin to seem real?

Friday, 20th April, morning.

I awoke on this, my first morning as a married woman, to the sound of my mother snoring in her crimson brocade hung state bed. With a sigh I lay back against the lace edged pillows and stared up at the ceiling, thinking how strange it is that at once everything and nothing can change. Again my thoughts wandered to the Dauphin and I wondered if he was lying in bed too, thinking of me?

I rolled over on to my side and pulled his miniature out from underneath my pillow, where I had hidden it. 'My husband,' I whispered, tracing his face with my finger. 'Louis. My husband, Louis. *Mon mari*, Louis.' His face is so familiar to me now and yet he is a stranger still. I wonder if he ever looks at the portrait of me that lives at Versailles? Does he feel like he knows me or does he feel as confused as I do? I tried to imagine him saying my name and smiled to myself as I decided that I would be his 'Antoinette' when he loved me and 'Marie Antoinette' when he was cross. I looked at his face again, this time doubtfully, as I really can't imagine him ever being cross with anyone. Perhaps I am wrong though.

This morning has gone past quickly. Mama was up and dressed shortly after me and retreated into her private sitting room to write letters to my new grandfather in law, King Louis and other heads of state. It is my turn to write letters after lunch. 'Do not worry, Antoinette! I will tell you exactly what to write!' Mama patted my cheek. 'King Louis will be quite enchanted with you.'

'And the Dauphin?' I asked her shyly.

Mama sighed and rolled her eyes. 'Oh, I do not think that we need trouble ourselves about that at present.'

20th April, later.

I am supposed to be writing my letter to King Louis but oh my, how tedious it is! Well, I say 'writing' when actually all I have to do is sit here with Abbé Vermond and copy the letter that Mama has already written for me and then sign

it. I have had strict instructions not to make any changes to the letter and to start again should I make the slightest mistake. My overwhelming feeling is relief that I have been told what to write but a small part of me wishes that I had been trusted to find my own words. Surely King Louis will recognize my mother's hand in this plaintive, simpering missive?

'All the same, I feel my age and inexperience may often need his indulgence...' I rolled my eyes as I wrote this, thinking how childish I sounded or rather how childish Mama wants me to sound.

'He will never respect me,' I muttered darkly to my Abbé as he smiled at me in his usual mild mannered way. 'I want him to find me...' I searched for the right word, *'impressive.'*

'Impressive?' The Abbé laughed as I reddened a little with embarrassment. 'Oh, I can assure you that

the King will find you extremely impressive.' His words were just what I wanted to hear but there was something else in his tone of voice, something that I could not put my finger on and that troubled me a little.

Saturday, 21st April, early hours of my last morning in Vienna.

I have just returned from a state banquet at the Hofburg. All of the usual people were there, including Durfort who stood to attention behind Joseph's chair all night, glowering at us furiously from beneath his eyebrows and looking sour whenever any unwary person attempted to engage him in conversation. I wish that Amalia had been there as she was always the best of all of us at handling Durfort and his many and various whimsies.

I should be in bed but am loath to go as tonight is my last night here in Vienna and the act of getting into bed makes it all seem so final, so definite. I am struggling to stay awake and yet I know that I must, just for a few minutes more as I savour every moment of these last few hours at home.

'May I say, Your Highness, that we are all so sorry to see you go,' a young footman whispered to me as he carried a torch before me through the dark and gloomy corridors that lead from the reception rooms to my mother's bedchamber. 'I hope you will forgive my saying so.'

I smiled at him. 'I do not mind at all,' I whispered back, blinking away my tears. 'I will miss you all so much.'

The candle is burning low and the clock on the mantle piece is about to chime away another hour or herald the next, depending on how you look at it. My sisters have always said that I am a glass half full sort of person but today, today I really feel like my glass is empty.

I am not ready to go. I am only fourteen years old and have never been away from home, from Austria. What is to become of me?

21st April, almost nine o'clock in the morning.

I leave at nine.

I have had my final breakfast with my family (Mama dignified, Christina and Elizabeth sullen and mocking by turns, Ferdinand and Max pulling silly faces and spilling coffee all over the tablecloth), said farewell to and given presents to all of my maids, pageboys and footmen and am now sitting here in Mama's bedroom in my new travelling dress of pale pink velvet with Mops at my feet, waiting for Ferdinand to come and escort me downstairs, where the fabulous carriage provided for me by King Louis awaits. Clementina, Anton, Clara and Anna are to travel with me and they are all wild with excitement about the beauties of our vehicle, with its blue velvet upholstery, shiny mirrored doors painted with symbols of the four elements and the profusion of gold flowers that twisted around its sides reaching up to a fragile crown of thornless roses on the roof.

Everything is packed and has been sent on ahead, piled high in carriages and on carts. My sumptuous trousseau was packed with especial care, with silk sachets of lavender and rose petals strewn in between the hundreds of gowns, silk stockings and fine linen chemises. There is literally nothing left of me here other than myself, my darling Mops and you, the repository of my most secret thoughts, who will be entrusted to the pale blue silk reticule that I will carry with me in my carriage. There you will reside with a lace edged handkerchief and a small porcelain box of violet comfits.

Everything has gone and all my loose ends have been tied up. There is nothing left for me to do but wait.

21st April.

We have just gone past Schönbrunn. Oh, darling, darling Schönbrunn. Will I

ever see you again?

My goodness, the road is lined with crowds, all staring at me and cheering and shouting my name. I smile and wave, smile and wave as I pass, hoping that no one can see the tears that are still drying on my cheeks, the falseness of my smile.

Mama cried when the time came to say goodbye. I clung to her and wept as she gently prised my fingers apart and then walked me to my waiting carriage. I do not think that I will ever see her again. Not in this life time. I do not think that I have ever before cried so much. As my carriage pulled away from the Hofburg, I sobbed without restraint as I stared helplessly at my mother and family for what could be the very last time.

More later. I must compose myself. We have two long weeks on the road ahead of us and I will need all of my strength.

This is worse than I could ever have imagined.

Sunday, 22nd April, early morning, Melk Abbey.

I am so tired. I could sleep for days and it still wouldn't be enough and now I have to pin on a smile, go to Mass and prepare myself for another long day.

We travelled for hours yesterday through leafy countryside and busy towns and villages, their roads lined with grinning, cheering people who threw flowers at my carriage and held their babies up to see me until finally at sunset and just as I was beginning to feel utterly sick of being crammed into a carriage despite the best efforts of Anton and Clara who tried in vain to entertain me with silly guessing games, we arrived at Melk, a beautiful old city built alongside the Danube and overlooked by an enormous yet elegant white and yellow stone abbey built atop a hill. The beautiful old stones glowed in the mellow light of the setting sun and we all stared out of the carriage windows in wonderment as my enormous cortege (fifty seven carriages just for me!) passed underneath the windows, wound around the side and then drove up to the entrance where my brother Joseph was waiting for me flanked by footmen, guards and the solemn, black garbed Benedictine monks who lived at the abbey. Above his head on the portico was chiseled the words: '*Absit Gloriari nisi in Cruce*'.

I looked puzzled until my dear Clementina leaned forward and whispered: 'God forbid that I should boast save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

'How did you...?' I stared at her in shock. Did that really just happen?

'What?' She gave a little shrug. 'My father taught me when I was a little girl. It is not so difficult.'

All of this was forgotten a few seconds later. 'Joseph!' I squealed as he stepped forward and pulled my door open himself. 'Oh, I am so glad to see you!' I jumped into his arms and, suddenly exhausted and overwhelmed by everything that had happened burst into tears.

'Oh, Antonia, Antonia.' He kissed my wet cheeks, pinched my chin and led me through an arched doorway into the building. 'Come inside and rest and then tell me all about it.'

Joseph himself took me to my rooms, escorting me down long vaulted, light filled corridors where the silent monks paced quietly and stood aside to let us pass, their eyes downcast, their hands folded in perpetual prayer. 'I hope that you will be comfortable, little one,' my brother said as he held open the door to let myself and my ladies enter a lovely white and gold bedroom hung with beautiful tapestries. 'I will see you again at dinner.'

I sank thankfully down on to the bed and sat in an exhausted daze as my ladies in waiting fussed around me, pulling off my shoes, wiping my face and hands with rose water, taking off my pink feathered hat and carefully placing it on the dark wood dressing table. 'I thought that we would be in that carriage forever,' I sighed at last, wiggling my toes in their silk stockings and smiling up at Clara as she rubbed at my forehead with gentle fingers, erasing a headache that had threatened for hours to erupt.

'Only two more weeks to go!' Clementina said with a laugh and a raised eyebrow. 'Two loooong weeks.'

'Oh don't!' I laughed. 'Don't remind me!' The schedule planned for me by Mama and King Louis was punishing with the journey taking over two weeks with each separate leg taking eight hours, which is a lot of time to spend

crammed in a carriage, even with such delightful companions.

'The things that we do for you!' Clara said with a mock sigh. 'And just think! You get to go on to France and glory and we just have to turn around and come straight back again!' Her tone was light but her words still cast a damper on the boyuant mood. My appeal to Durfort had fallen on deaf ears and I would be going to France utterly alone with my Abbé as the only friendly and familiar face. I couldn't bear to think of it and so I did my best to push it all from my mind.

We had just enough time for me to change into a blue silk dress trimmed with black lace and pearls before it was time for supper and my brother himself knocked on my door to take me down. 'I hope that you are not too tired,' he whispered as we walked, my hand on his arm down to the wonderful marble hall where there was to be a banquet (oh la la, another banquet!) in my honour before an opera performance.

'I will do my best to stay awake,' I assured him with my sunniest smile as we stepped into the hall and even I, raised at the Hofburg and Schönbrunn gasped as I looked up at the amazing painted ceiling, which was such a stark contrast to the black robed monks who sat with the splendidly dressed local dignitaries.

After dinner, Joseph and I went for a walk on one of the stone terraces that looked out across the Danube towards the distant hills. The view was ravishing and I leaned on the cold parapet and filled my lungs with the fresh air, relishing the soft and comforting sound of the river as it flowed past. 'I have never been very far away from the Danube,' I murmured with a little sigh. 'It is my very own river.' I imagined myself as a baby lying in the gold and damask Imperial crib, lulled to sleep by the rush and hiss of the Danube as it flowed through Vienna.

Joseph laughed. 'I know just what you mean.' He leaned on his elbows against the wall and breathed in deeply. 'I love this country. There is none so beautiful in all of the world. None so fresh and green and lovely.'

'Not even France?' I asked with a smile, trying out my new loyalty for size and finding it distinctly wanting.

'Definitely not.' He looked down at me. 'I hate to see you go,' he said suddenly, his face inscrutable in the moonlight. 'I wish that it had been possible to...'

I swiftly covered his hand with my own, not wanting to hear his apologies, his explanations. 'I know.' And a silence fell as I thought of our lost ones, of Amalia, Carolina and Josepha and gazed back towards Vienna.

22nd April, morning, carriage, bump bump bump.

I have just said goodbye to my brother Joseph, perhaps for the last time ever. It was so sad and I am still crying now as I write this and remember the way his arms felt around me and the kind way that he stroked my hair and kissed my forehead.

'I will miss you so much, *liebchen*,' he murmured, smiling down into my eyes. 'I will come and visit you as soon as I can, just try to stop me.'

'You promise?' I gazed up at him. Perhaps I would not be abandoned after all? Perhaps it would all be alright. 'I will count the days, Joseph.'

We hugged again and I cried on his shoulder until finally he disengaged himself and lifted me up into my carriage before slamming the door shut on my protests and shouting: 'Onwards to France! Good luck, my darling girl!'

I watched out of the window as his figure receded from view, watched until he turned and went inside and there was nothing more to see.

My heart is breaking with all of the farewells.

24th April, in the carriage, I am so tired and bored.

When the time came to say goodbye, Mama leaned in and whispered: 'Farewell, dearest child. A great distance will separate us but be just, be humane and imbued with a sense of the duties of your rank and I shall be proud of the regrets which I shall always feel. You have the gift of pleasing others; use it for the happiness of your husband. Do so much good to the French people that they can say that I have sent them an angel.'

I keep thinking about her words. Will they learn to love me? I have not thought about the French people, only the King and the Dauphin but it now it seems that they must care for me also. What if I fail?

Wednesday, 25th April, another castle, another town.

I hab a colb. My nose is blocked and I can't stop coughing despite all the hot honey drinks that Clara and Anna keep on plying me with. The long, endless days in the carriage are taking their toll and we are all bored and discontented with nothing to talk about and nothing to do.

The people are very welcoming and glad to see us but I do not delight in their cheers and smiles as much as I ought to. I wave and grin and nod as prettily as I can but something is missing. My Abbé sighs sadly when he sees me after each stage and tells me that I am pale and ought to rest more but I am sick of resting and doing nothing and instead spend my nights pacing my chamber with Mops at my heels, restless and unable to sleep.

How long until we get to France? How long?

Thursday, 26th April, late, Amalienburg Pavilion at the Nymphenburg Palace, Munich.

We arrived in Munich this afternoon. I pinned on a happy smile and waved without cease as the carriage bounced over the cobbled streets past thousands of cheering, ecstatic people. We have been on the road for five days now. Five long days. It seems like I left Vienna only yesterday and yet at the same time it already feels so far away. In between stops I lean my head against the padded blue velvet carriage seat and stare listlessly out across the verdant, beautiful landscape as we meander past, seeing nothing and caring even less.

My ladies whisper together and look at me with concern. They ask me how I feel, pat my hands ineffectually, coo and sigh and flutter about me and pour endless, unwanted drinks which are destined to sit between us untouched and cooling rapidly in the sharp, chill Spring air. I don't have the words to tell them how I really feel right now and they wouldn't understand anyway. I am *the* princess after all. I am above pain, above sorrow, above regret. I am only fulfilling my destiny and in comparison to other girls, in comparison to *them*, I am fortunate indeed.

After all, who wouldn't want to marry a prince and live out their days in a legendary palace? Who wouldn't want all the beautiful dresses, the jewels, the

servants? Who wouldn't want the *power*?

We are in a palace now, the beautiful white stone Nymphenburg, Summer home of the Elector of Bavaria who is a cousin of my mother (no surprise there as all the crowned heads in Europe are related to each other – even the Dauphin is a cousin of mine) and, disconcertingly, the older brother of poor unlamented Josephina while his wife is the Dauphin's aunt. The Elector and Josephina look so similar that I would have known them for siblings instantly as Elector Max has his sister's melancholy direct gaze and straight nose. I was worried that he might greet me coldly as all the world knows that my brother was not exactly the fondest husband ever but my fears were entirely allayed when I stepped into the lovely, lofty entrance hall and Elector Max, magnificently dressed in crimson brocade, black silk and an abundance of gold strode forward, took me into his arms and hugged me tightly, surrounding me with a clean male scent of lemons and rosemary while his pretty little blonde haired Saxon wife, Maria Anna smiled benevolently upon us both and nodded her head approvingly.

'You are most welcome,' Elector Max said with a grin, leading me forward to meet his wife, who sank into a low curtsy at my feet, her pale blue silk skirts billowing around her. 'I hope that you will be comfortable here with us.'

I smiled up at him, reassured and instantly at my ease for who could not be in the face of such warmth? 'I am sure that I will be.'

The Electress, who is a wonderful little chatterbox and a mine of information about her nephew, my bridegroom, took me to her own rooms to prepare for dinner and discreetly removed herself as I sank down upon the pink velvet coverlet on her bed and wearily closed my eyes while the maids busied themselves around me, pouring out hot water and lavender oil into a porcelain basin, arranging fine linen towels and shaking out the yellow silk dress that I was to wear to dinner that evening.

'It is so lovely here,' Clementina said with a sigh from her post beside the window. 'I had no idea that Munich was so beautiful! I expected rain and gloom and ugliness but instead there is light and beauty in abundance.' She breathed on the window and traced a rudimentary face with her fingertip.

I went to stand beside her and gasped at the view across the immense formal garden with its long canal bordered on each side with intricately shaped flower

beds crammed full of brightly hued seasonal blooms. Splendidly dressed courtiers wandered about in groups on the wide parterres and as I watched a group of girls laughed and shrieked with delight after getting too close to the huge golden fountain at the very centre of the garden. Josephina had seemed so provincial and dowdy with her plain, dark dresses and un-powdered hair that it seemed ridiculous that she had grown up in the midst of so much splendour.

'Did the Empress Josephina really come from here?' Anna asked in a disbelieving whisper, almost as though she had read my shamefully irreverent thoughts. 'She was so very austere wasn't she? Do you remember?'

'Of course I remember!' I snapped. 'It was not so very long ago.' I looked across the gardens that she must once have known so well and now would never see again and understood for the very first time just how miserable and out of place and alienated she must have felt in Vienna. 'Poor Josephina.' I felt a sharp stab of guilt, remembering how carelessly cruel we had all been to her and how meekly she had borne it.

Before dinner we all donned our hats and shawls and went out for a stroll in the park, with Elector Max himself firmly placing my gloved hand on his crimson sleeve with an avuncular wink and insisting that I allow him to accompany me. I had taken a great liking to him and so was pleased to let him lead me across the parterre and down to the great canal, the gravel crunching loudly beneath our feet as we walked. A stray stone became caught in my pink silk shoes but I was too polite to pause and remove it and so hobbled on, smiling all the while to mask my discomfort. 'I wanted you to see my view before sunset,' he said, gazing proudly at the vista that unfolded before us and inhaling deeply. 'I always think that it looks its best at this time of the day.'

'It is very lovely,' I remarked softly. 'You must be so proud.' There were miniature barges and gondolas on the canal, piloted by grinning sailors who waved and shouted at us in Italian as we watched them row. I dread to think what they were calling. 'How delightful!'

The Elector smiled down at me, evidently pleased with my reaction. 'I know that it could be considered big headed to say so but I truly believe that there is no finer spot in all the World. Versailles itself is nothing to this.' I stiffened a little, already feeling a little defensive of my future home but then relaxed my shoulders as he winked and raised my hand to his lips. 'I mean no harm,' he

murmured. 'Let me have my moment.'

We turned away and made our way back up to the palace. 'I hope that you do not mind but I have arranged for you to spend the next two nights at the Amalienburg lodge in the park rather than the palace itself. It was built for my mother and is quite enchanting so I am sure that you will be very happy there.' He smiled and kissed my hand again. 'I will escort you there after dinner.'

'You are too kind,' I replied, thinking how unusual this arrangement was and wondering if there was to be a revenge for our treatment of Josephina after all? Perhaps the Amalienburg was damp or full of spiders and beetles? Perhaps it had no roof?

My fears turned out to be nonsensical of course. After a very delicious dinner with the court and most important grandees of Munich, a small party made up of myself, the Elector and Electress and our closest attendants climbed into small carriages and we were swiftly carried through the darkness to a corner of the park. I couldn't see very much in the gloom as a waiting footman helped me down from the vehicle but there was just enough light to make out a most beautiful pale pink and white single storey pavilion shimmering amongst the trees with tall, shuttered windows, all of which were ablaze with light from dozens of candles.

'I hope that you will be comfortable,' the Electress whispered with a reassuring squeeze of my hand as we walked inside. 'We could think of nowhere more suitable for a lovely young bride to sleep on her way to her wedding. You are my niece now after all!'

I nodded, unable to speak as I gazed around in wonderment at the polished marble and wooden floors, the tall gilt mirrors, the beautiful paintings that covered the walls and ceilings and the mass of gold, silver and mother of pearl decoration that covered every possible surface. It was like stepping inside a fairy tale.

'My father built this for my mother as a present,' the Elector said as he led us all from room to room. 'I think that she would have lived here permanently if she had been allowed.' He paused for a moment in front of a painting in one of the salons. 'Ah, Josephina.' I looked up unwillingly and met her quizzical dark painted eyes. The Elector sighed. 'My poor little sister.'

'Yes.' I didn't know what to say and trained my gaze upon her pale face, thinking how pretty she had looked in her youth, dressed up in pink, with pearls in her hair and flowers in her hands. What had happened to this smiling girl? What had we done to her?

'She spoke of you often in her letters,' Elector Max said with a melancholy smile, so similar to Josephina's. 'She was deeply unhappy in Vienna and would seem to have had much to complain about but never failed to comment on how kind you were to her. I think that you must have been her only friend.'

'I was there when she was taken ill,' I whispered, wishing that I had more to offer him. 'I do not think that she suffered.'

He nodded and I saw that his eyes were shining with tears. 'I am glad, yes, very glad to hear it. It was hard that she died so far away from home.' He turned to me, his face sad. 'One always hopes of course that any girl sent away will start to look upon their new country as their home and that in time they will become reconciled to their fate but in poor Josephina's case that just didn't seem to happen.' He seemed to realise then who he was talking to and immediately shook himself and patted my hand. 'That won't happen to you though, my dear.'

'I hope not.' It was too late though. His words could never be recalled and had already taken root in my mind. What would happen to me if I never became reconciled to my fate, never felt at home in France? Would I be as unhappy as Josephina? Would I one day be spoken of pityingly by my family as 'poor Antonia'?

We hurried away from the portrait and suddenly there *he* was before us. I was totally unprepared and could only stop dead and stare in open mouthed shock at the portrait that hung on the opposite wall. 'Karl? What is he doing here?' Karl von Zweibrücken looked just as he had done when I last saw him in Vienna, his tawny hair was hidden beneath a formal white wig and his hazel eyes gazed out upon the world with an expression that was at once tender and amused.

The Elector laughed. 'I forgot that you know my dashing young cousin.' Of *course*, we are all cousins here aren't we? I might have known that Karl would get in on the act as well. 'He is in direct line to inherit Bavaria one day should myself and our other cousin Karl Theodor be so unfortunate as to die without

any heirs.'

'Let us hope that that never comes to pass,' I remarked rather sourly, thinking of poor Maria Amalia and her undoubted chagrin should the relatively humble son of the Duke of Zweibrücken be elevated to Elector of Bavaria. I had never concerned myself with Karl's lineage but it seemed odd that Mama had not been prepared to take a chance on him.

'You don't approve of him?' We were walking on now and Elector Max was looking down at me with concern in his eyes. 'I must admit that we are both very fond of him.'

I did not know how much Elector Max knew about Karl and his dealings with my family and so opted for a neutral shrug and laugh and 'Oh, I like him well enough! I was just surprised to see his painting here, that is all.'

Karl. I do not know what it feels like to be in love but sometimes I wonder...

Friday, 27th April, morning.

I woke up early this morning in the beautiful yellow and silver bedroom of the Amalienburg pavilion, just as the fresh Spring sunlight was beginning to filter between the heavy yellow brocade curtains, spilling over the parquet floor and highlighting the soft motes that fluttered through the air.

I wriggled my toes beneath the embroidered counterpane then stretched out luxuriously and lay back against the lace edged linen pillows, enjoying the solitude, the peace. In only a few moments the servants would begin their daily routine and their chattering would pierce the spell but for now I could pretend that I was just like any other girl, waking up alone in my bedroom and preparing for the day ahead.

Of course it wasn't long before there was a gentle knock on the door and Clara poked her head around with a smile. 'Oh, you are already awake! What a lovely day it is! Would you like your breakfast now? Soft rolls and hot chocolate or something else?' Her red high heels clip clopped on the shiny parquet flooring as she went to the windows and pulled open the heavy curtains so that light flooded the room. 'What glorious sunshine! Shall we take a walk in the gardens this morning?'

I sighed, resenting the intrusion and bustle but not daring to let my smile slip even for a second. 'Yes, why not?' A troupe of maids followed her into the room and began to fuss around me, lifting the pillows, arranging the counterpane neatly over my legs, dusting tables and the finally producing a large silver tray laden with the promised soft rolls, strawberry conserve, curls of butter and a steaming, silver pot of hot chocolate.

The morning passed very pleasantly. After donning my favourite pink and white striped silk dress we all went out and walked about the lovely formal garden that surrounded the pavilion. I trailed my hands over the sweetly scented roses and lilies and thought how lovely it would be to have a little pleasure palace of my own one day. Perhaps Louis will build me one? Or I could build my own? The Antoniaberg? I must ask my Abbé how that would translate into French. I can imagine Durfort's face should I try to introduce a German sounding building to his beloved Versailles. Which almost makes me want to do it.

Anyway, I must go. We are spending the afternoon with the Electress and she is apparently keen to talk to me about her elusive nephew. I can't wait!

Forget what I said about Karl last night. I was tired and didn't know what I was talking about.

27th April, later.

I have spent the afternoon sitting with the Duchess Maria Anna in her green and gold sitting room being plied with sugared cakes, hot chocolate served in beautiful rose patterned Sèvres cups and delicious, wonderful gossip. Do not be fooled by the tiny little Electress of Bavaria's pretty pink and white face, earnest blue eyes and little girl voice as she sits on her delicate chair and gently pulls the ears of the tiny little white spaniel that lazes comfortably on her pale yellow silk lap. This woman, thanks to personal relationships to every crowned head in Europe and a formidable amount of correspondents in every court has her finger very firmly placed on the pulse, the beating heart of the Western world. She is also, despite her doll like appearance, incredibly shrewd and intensely intelligent. I would not like to have her for an enemy and so I consider myself fortunate indeed that she has decided to be my friend.

'I am almost forty two years old!' she trilled with a delighted laugh as I admired her lovely flounced silk dress. 'Some might say, and I am absolutely sure that they do, that I am far too old to be concerned with such frippery but I don't care!'

'You look wonderful,' I replied with a smile, taken aback by her candour and rather surprised as she absolutely does not look her age. 'Truly.'

'Thank you my dear.' She waved away the hovering footmen and poured me a cup of hot chocolate with her own hands. 'I must say that I hope my nephew appreciates how fortunate he is to have such a lovely bride. I am sure that his mother, my poor sister would have been very pleased with you.' She lifted the ornate silver sugar tongs and cast me a quizzical look. 'Sugar?'

'Yes, please.' I smiled and blushed. 'I hope that everyone will be pleased with me. I wish that my... the Dauphin's mother was still alive so that I could meet her.' The Dauphine Marie-Josèphe had died three years previously from tuberculosis.

'She was not entirely happy with the match you know,' the Electress was

clearly trying to pick her words carefully. 'My dear sister was very keen that her son should marry our niece, Maria Amalia of Saxony and was quite determined to bring about a match between the two.' She heaped thick whipped cream on top of my hot chocolate and passed it to me. 'Amalia is the eldest daughter of our brother, the Elector of Saxony and is very pretty. My poor Maria Josepha had always taken an interest in the girl and had decided that having her at Versailles would be a comfort to her once her own two daughters, Clotilde and Élisabeth had married and gone to live elsewhere.'

'Oh.' I could not help but feel downcast. 'I see.' At no point had anyone ever mentioned that there had been another Princess in the running and the news made me feel rather insignificant in the general scheme of things. Yes, I had won the prize but it had almost been snatched away from me by some unknown girl, who had furthermore been the favourite of my prospective mother in law. 'What does she look like?' I knew that the question made me look foolish and jealous but couldn't help myself.

The Electress smiled to herself as though she had been expecting my question and did not at all think any less of me for it. 'Maria Amalia is very pretty but, I think, not as pretty or charming as you.' She leaned forward and squeezed my hands. 'You have nothing to worry about, dearest!' She beckoned forward a footman who held a long mahogany box in his hands. 'Here, I will show you.'

The box was opened to reveal a collection of several dozen miniatures arranged in neat rows against pale blue velvet. The Electress frowned as she scanned the painted faces. 'Aha!' She selected a miniature and handed it to me. 'Maria Amalia.'

I looked down at the miniature, half expecting to see some sort of heavy lidded, voluptuous temptress depicted within but instead I beheld an attractive girl with regular features, slightly protruding blue eyes and corn coloured hair drawn back in a pearl studded chignon. In short she looked like any other German princess and the only sign of any character that I could discern was a certain mutinous tilt to her chin, which probably boded no good to any future husband. She was nothing special, in fact she was absolutely ordinary. I hated her.

'See?' The Electress took back the miniature and replaced it in the box. 'Nothing to be frightened of.' She selected another picture. 'Now, who do you

suppose this is?' She handed me a picture of a pale youth with dark eyes and an untidy mop of dark hair, pulled back with a blue ribbon.

'I do not know.' I scrutinised his face for a clue but found none.

She laughed, delighted with her game. 'Why, it is my other nephew, Ferdinand of Naples!'

'Carolina's husband?' I stared at him in amazement. He was not at all as I had imagined him to be. 'I did not realise that he was your nephew as well.' Was there no one that this woman was not related to?

The Electress smiled. 'Ah yes, he is the son of my *other* sister, Amalia who married the King of Spain. She is dead now too of course, which is very sad.' She handed me a miniature of a lovely pink cheeked girl in a red hat. 'She was so pretty, poor thing. I do not think that the climate in Spain agreed with her at all.'

'What a pity,' I agreed.

And so it went on. Miniature after miniature came out of the box, portraits of princesses, dukes and kings, their eyes gazing up into mine as I cradled them on my palm and listened to the Electress hold forth.

On Louis XV: 'The most charming man imaginable. Terribly shy of course, thanks to his upbringing and early loss of his entire family to an outbreak of measles. Yes, they all died within a week of each other and only Louis survived thanks to his governess having the presence of mind to hide him away from the royal doctors.'

On Madame de Pompadour: 'The most cultured woman imaginable. Her death was a true tragedy. I wish that she was still alive to welcome you to Versailles as I am sure that she would have been delighted with you. The match with Austria was her doing you know so you have much to thank her for!'

On the Dauphine Maria Josepha: 'My beautiful sister. She was the sweetest, funniest girl imaginable. The King adored her, you know and called her his 'Pepa'. I hear that he was quite bereft when she died. More so than when La Pompadour passed away. She was truly devout and yet at the same time was so full of laughter and fun. I am sure that she is still missed at Versailles.'

On the Dauphin: 'A loving and intelligent boy, who is much sharper than anyone gives him credit for. They all think that he is dull, boring and stupid but if they only made the effort to truly know him they would soon realise that there is much more to him. I am sure that you will get along famously. I am sure that a pretty girl like you will find it easy to draw him out of his shell.'

On Karl: 'An impetuous and dangerous young man.'

Hm.

Saturday, 28th April, Augsburg.

We said a sad farewell to Nymphenburg and its gracious inhabitants this morning and continued on our way, refreshed and rejuvenated by our two days of rest. My ladies and I were in high spirits as our carriage rolled slowly through woods, villages and fields, followed by a huge cloud of dust as the fifty seven coaches of my courtège rumbled behind us, churning up the road as they went.

Tonight we rest in Augsburg, an ancient city in South West Bavaria. I can't stop yawning and am longing for bed but instead I must allow the maids to bath me before I dress up in my finery, pin on my brightest smile and go out for a banquet followed by the opera.

Waiting for me here was a letter from Amalia, hidden inside a wooden box containing the most lovely pale pink cashmere shawl.

'My darling little sister,

How are you? I hear that you made the most beautiful bride imaginable and that King Louis is already rubbing his hands with glee at the prospect of having you live with him at Versailles. My poor husband is his favourite grandson you know and they write to each other often, usually about the most mundane subjects imaginable but occasionally about you, my dearest one. I do not know what it is about my husband that makes his grandfather so fond of him but suspect that it is due to his Mama being King Louis' favourite daughter. She was dead long before I came here but I hear that she was very fat, exceedingly arrogant and extremely and resolutely French. Make of that what you will.

Anyway! I have news! I am sure that this will come as something of a shock but I am expecting a baby. Yes, your eyes do not deceive you, I said 'baby'. I am told that the small person is due to make their appearance sometime in November, which is not so long is it? I have waited this long before telling anyone because I wanted to be sure and also because I just could not bear the idea of all the fuss that Mama will make about the prospect. It could not be kept secret for much longer though as I am already beginning to grow large and ungainly.

Ferdinand is beside himself with joy, of course and brags of the coming infant in the most embarrassing way. He is so happy though that I cannot bring myself to stop him and so I endure as best I can.

I have written to Karl to let him know. I do not know how he will take the news. Let me know if you hear anything from him? Joseph wrote to tell me that you were staying with Elector Max at Nymphenberg. How envious I am! If only things had been different...

I must go now. Much love to you, my darling! I think of you always.

Your Amélie.'

Friday 4th May, Freiberg, afternoon.

We have just arrived at the city of Freiberg after what has been the most extraordinary and exhausting week of my entire life as my cortège crossed Germany, enjoying the hospitality of several towns along the way. Never before have I beheld such adulation and although I know that it was mostly inspired by the love that my mother inspires I hope that at least some of the shouts, cheers and applause were just for me. It feels wrong and sad that I may never see any of these places again and am only seeing them now as I prepare to say goodbye.

The best part of the week was the two days that we spent in Günzburg with Papa's sister Princess Charlotte of Lorraine. She was very kind to me and made many lovely comments about how similar I am to my dear Papa and how he would often talk about me in his letters.

'You would think that having so many children would have made him quite blasé by the time you arrived but it was quite the reverse,' she remarked with a

gentle smile over dinner. 'He was as proud of you as he was of any of your siblings and often remarked that out of all his children you were the one that he treasured the most as you were the most like him in every way.'

As you can imagine, it made my heart burst with pride to hear this. Oh, Papa, how I wish that you were here now. I am so sure that things would have been totally different if only Papa had not died when he did. I am sure that Mama would never have made poor Josepha go down into the crypt and so she would not have caught smallpox and so Carolina would not have gone to Naples and might have gone to Parma instead and on and on it goes. Amalia might even have been allowed to marry her Karl and I... I do not know what the future would have held for me but perhaps I would not be here now, almost at the end of my journey to France but instead still safely at home in Vienna, basking in the love of a father that was cruelly taken from me before his time.

A letter from Mama was waiting for me when we got here, full of the usual exhortations to remember my duty, never forget for an instant who and what I am, be gracious to all who approach me and to '*above all smile*'. The letter also contained the interesting news that my brother Leopold and his ugly Spanish wife have had yet another baby, this time a perfect little girl who is to be called Maria Anna. How wonderful. I hugged myself as I read this, dreaming of a time when it will be me whose babies are joyfully announced to all the family.

'I expect that you already know about your sister Amalia's pregnancy? I am very pleased indeed as I know that she has had much to try her in her time at Parma. Pray God that she will have a safe delivery. I hope to hear happy news from France before long also. We all do.'

Sunday, 6th May, Schüttern Abbey in the Black Forest, late.

I am so exhausted. The journey has been incredibly long and at times it seemed as though we would be on the road forever but now, amazingly the end is in sight and here we are at the enormous old abbey in Schüttern on what is to be my last ever night on Hapsburg soil. I can hardly believe that it has finally come to this, that my new life is finally about to begin.

I am both terrified and excited.

Tonight we attended a very formal dinner in the huge stone vaulted dining hall and I hid my yawns behind my hand as the local dignitaries gave several

speeches, all lauding my beauty, wisdom, grace and other manifold charms. I caught the Abbé's eye during one particularly fulsome speech and we shared a smile across the room. I am so glad that he is coming with me to Versailles; I will need a friendly face there.

Afterwards my ladies wrapped my cashmere shawl around my shoulders and we took a turn around the gardens with Mops prancing at our feet, admiring the beautiful roses and splashing each other playfully with water from the several fountains. Anna and Clementina did their best to distract me and to keep the mood as lighthearted as possible but there was a weird and heavy atmosphere in the air as we walked around the formal parterres and it was hard to ignore the fact that this is to be our last night together for tomorrow they will be returning to Vienna while I go on to France.

'I will miss you all so much,' I whispered to Clara as we walked together, arm in arm. 'I wish with all my heart that you could come with me.' I admired our reflection in a basin of water, thinking how lovely we looked in our pretty dresses with our blue eyes shining like stars in the light cast by the dozens of flambeaux that lit up the gardens and a delicate flush that owed nothing at all to rouge on our soft cheeks. I wish that I could be young forever and ever.

'Oh, I wish that we could come with you too,' Clara replied, giving my arm a friendly squeeze. 'Perhaps one day we will be permitted to visit you? How I long to see Versailles and Paris! Oh, Paris! Imagine!' She lifted her green silk skirts and swished them from side to side, clearly imagining herself in the finest Parisian fashions. 'How lucky you are, Antonia!' My old name slipped out and for once I did not correct her.

I pretended to pout. 'Do you want to visit me or the dressmakers?' I didn't really mind; I am excited by the prospect of the legendary Parisian shops as well. Just think of all those shops and all those designers that will surely be vying with each other for the chance to dress me.

Clara laughed and kissed my cheek. 'You of course!' She sighed then. 'Although I can't wait to see the shops as well.'

I took her hand and held it to my cheek for a moment. 'Promise me that you will come and visit?' I was dreading the moment when we would have to say our farewells and they would leave my side forever. I am sure that I will make new

friends at Versailles but they won't be real friends will they? They won't know what I am really like. They will only be interested in staying close to the crown, in trying to ingratiate themselves with Madame la Dauphine. Never again will I be entirely sure that people like me just for myself.

'Of course I will!' She smiled, unaware of the dark path that my thoughts had taken. 'You just try keeping me away!'

'I could even try to write!' I said with a laugh.

'Now, now, let's not push our luck shall we?'

Monday, 7th May, early morning.

The abbey is silent but for the sound of Clementina softly snoring in the adjoining bedchamber. I am too excited to sleep and am sitting up in bed with my diary on my knees and little Mops resting his head against my leg. I hope that the Versailles dogs will be kind to him. Poor little Mops, it is an upheaval for him as well. I wonder what he thinks of it all?

You will never guess what happened earlier! My ladies had just left the room after preparing me for bed and I was still sitting in front of the dressing table mirror idly running my fingers through my loose hair and admiring the way the silver threads that ran through my pink gauze wrap shimmered in the candlelight when I suddenly heard a rattling sound that I quickly realized was down to small stones or soil being thrown against my window, which look out over the Abbey gardens.

I hesitated for only a few seconds before leaping up, pulling the heavy purple velvet curtains apart and peering out into the darkness determined to see who was responsible for such an appalling affront.

'Down here!' I heard a male voice hiss. 'Do not be alarmed, Antonia.' I could have recognised that voice anywhere and instantly my heart leaped within my bosom.

'Karl.' I could just make out his pale face in the shadows beneath me. 'What on Earth are you doing here?' I clutched the lovely but rather diaphanous wrap to myself, fully conscious of the impropriety of what we were doing and praying

that no one was observing us.

'I came to apologise,' he whispered so quietly that I had to strain my ears in order to hear him, 'and to say goodbye.' I heard the sound of flower stems snapping beneath his boots as he shifted impatiently. 'Can you come down? I would come up but I fear that it may lead to scandal.' He laughed softly.

'And my coming down to you won't?' I snapped. It was on the tip of my tongue to refuse him, as we both knew that I should but the hammering of my heart drowned out any last vestiges of sense and I found myself agreeing to meet him. 'I will come down as soon as I can. Wait there.' I ran back into the room and quickly fastened a red taffeta cloak over my nightdress, hiding my fair hair underneath the fur lined hood and then slipping my bare feet into a pair of black leather shoes.

I felt tremulous with anticipation and excitement and knew that I would have to act quickly before I totally lost my nerve. I opened the door and went out into a long tapestry lined corridor that led to a stone spiral staircase at the far end, which I knew went down to a door leading out to the gardens below. To my intense relief there were no guards on duty and the corridor was entirely empty and silent, lit only by the moonlight that flooded through the high arched windows on the opposite side.

I took a deep breath then silently closed the door behind me, pulled the cloak close and ran down the corridor as swiftly as possible then down the dark staircase, across the small stone floored vestibule at the bottom, out of the heavy door and into Karl's arms.

'Let me go!' I pulled back. 'Why did you come here?' He looked very pale and his long tawny hair hung loosely about his shoulders, giving him a wild, disordered look that was most attractive although I did my best to ignore this fact. 'I did not expect to ever see you again.'

Karl sighed. 'I wanted to say sorry for behaving so badly when I saw you last,' he said somewhat inadequately. 'I had no right to make you feel awkward or to cause a row between you and Joseph.'

I raised my shoulders defensively, not wanting to talk about any of that. 'You didn't and besides that is all in the past now.' We walked across the lawn to

where I knew a small classical styled pavilion stood. 'You don't have anything to apologise for.'

We stepped into the pavilion and I sat down on a bench beside the window, dreamily gazing out across the moonlight bathed garden and thinking, irreverently, how romantic all of this would have been if only I had not been on my way to marry someone else and Karl had not been my sister's lover. 'Why are you here?' I asked again. 'It is a long way to come just to say goodbye.'

'Not really,' Karl replied with a grin. 'You have only ever seen me dressed up like a fool at court balls or hanging about your family like some sort of lapdog haven't you? You have not the slightest idea of what sort of man I am really, Antonia.'

'Oh?' I looked at him now with renewed interest, taking in his mud splattered leather breeches, his elderly boots that had clearly seen many years of service, the crimson fur edged coat with slightly threadbare elbows that he wore with such careless aplomb, the heavy sword that hung from his waist. 'You are a soldier.' It was a statement of fact. He was right; I had never seen him as he really was.

'Yes.' He came to me then and took my trembling hands in his. 'I am not willing to be a despised plaything to your family any more, Antonia. Do you understand me?' He pulled away and began to pace the floor. 'Your mother thought that I wasn't good enough for Amalia, even though we were in love, even though I would have done anything for her. I offered her everything that a man can offer and still your mother thought it right to sell my girl abroad to some weak little princeling who dresses in a monk's habit and rings bells for fun. What sort of a man is that?' He spat the words out and I cowered back in my chair. 'I was treated like nothing, like a pathetic nonentity.'

'I am sorry,' I whispered, not knowing what else to say. 'Truly I am.' I wondered if he knew about Amalia's baby then decided not to say anything as, like the coward that I am, I did not want to be the one to tell him.

'You have been to Nymphenberg haven't you? You have seen for yourself what may with time be mine, what might one day have belonged to your Amalia.' He ran his fingers through his loose hair. 'And yet it was still not good enough for your mother, not good enough for the Austrians.' He turned to me

furiously. 'I was not good enough for them. Do you know how that makes me feel?'

I nodded my head, too afraid to speak. I had no idea what had happened between him and Amalia or what had been said behind closed doors when my mother had made the decision not to let them marry and to send my sister to Parma instead. There was nothing that I could say to reassure him and so I remained silent.

'She could have been Electress of Bavaria one day,' he whispered. 'That is surely equal to Parma isn't it? None of this should have happened if it wasn't for your mother and her desperate need to be... to be the most expensive pimp in Europe.'

'What did you say?' I was utterly shocked. Had he really just called my mother that? 'Do not speak about Mama in that way.'

He had the grace to look a little abashed but forced a laugh and waved his hands about in a show of false bravado. 'Why not? I am only speaking the truth.'

I stared at him in horror. 'It is absolutely not the truth, Karl! How could you say such a thing? Why do you have to make it all sound so sordid?'

'If that isn't the truth then why are you sitting here now? Why are you being packed off to France to marry some fat boy that you have never before set eyes upon?' His eyes bored into me and I looked quickly away, squirming uneasily beneath his gaze. 'Your mother is a bawd. You have been sold to the French just as surely as Amalia was sold to Parma and Carolina was sold to Naples and what else would you call a woman who so cynically sells her own daughters off to the highest bidders?'

'That isn't true.' I forced myself to stand up then. 'I do not like you when you speak to me in this way and so I will leave you now, Karl.' I pulled my cloak about myself with majestic dignity and prepared to leave. 'I bid you farewell. Will you not wish me good luck?'

He glared at me. 'No.'

'Very well then.' I took a step towards the door and at that moment he took

hold of my hand and pulled me towards him, crushing me against his chest. 'You forget yourself, Karl. Please let me go!' I tried to speak pleasantly, in order to mask the terrible fear that suddenly gripped me. We were totally alone in the pavilion and no one knew that I was here. Anything could happen.

He stared down into my face and with his free hand stroked the hair away from my face. 'Do you not want to know what it is like to be kissed by a real man before you go to your podgy little princeling?' Karl bent his head towards mine and I caught my breath, half wanting him to kiss me and half wanting to push him away. 'Well?' He smelt of lemons, rosemary and horse sweat and I began to feel quite giddy as his face came ever closer. 'Have you ever been kissed before, Antonia?'

'No,' I replied truthfully. 'Never.' I closed my eyes for a second and imagined his lips on mine, just as I had done countless times before. 'Who would dare to kiss me?' I opened my eyes then and looked straight at him, knowing that I couldn't let him do this, that I wanted to go to France utterly untouched and as pure in thought and deed as everyone believed me to be. 'I do not want to kiss you, Karl,' I lied, pulling my hand out of his and moving away. 'You were my sister's lover and I am the Dauphine of France. It would not be right.'

He stared at me in consternation then began to laugh. 'As you wish, princess,' he said with a mocking bow. 'I thought it only fair to give you a chance before you went to your fate.' He took my hand again and lifted it to his lips. 'Are you sure?'

I smiled and gently pulled my hand away. 'Quite sure.' I allowed myself one last look at his face before I turned away, pulled the hood back up over my head and ran swiftly back through the gardens.

I know that I have done the right thing although a part of me feels mortified by the hideously priggish manner in which I rejected Karl's kiss. I am sure that at some point in the future I will regret not kissing him when I had the chance but such is life and it would not feel right to me to go to my husband with another man's kiss fresh upon my lips. Maybe I am just being old fashioned though.

7th May, even later.

I think that I have made a terrible mistake.

7th May, morning.

I am dressed and ready to go. The next time that I update I will be in France.

Wish me luck?

7th May, late, Strasbourg, FRANCE.

I am here. It is done. I am in FRANCE.

I managed to get only a few hours sleep after last night's adventure before my ladies came into my room, pulled my curtains open and wafted a reviving, delicious smelling cup of hot chocolate beneath my nose. They had all dressed in their finest gowns in honour of this day and looked as fresh as roses in vibrant pink, green and yellow silks.

'I wish that I could say that it is a beautiful day,' Clara announced with a laugh as she peered out of the tall window dubiously, 'but alas it is pouring down with rain.' She gave a shrug. 'How typical, your Highness, that we should be blessed with sunshine and clement breezes all the way here but on the day itself there should be rain and I do believe the promise of a splendid storm later on.'

I struggled to sit up in the bed as Clementina rushed forward to plump my pillows and pull them up behind me. 'They won't cancel the handing over ceremony will they?' I asked in some anxiety. It would be simply too awful to come all the way here, get worked up in expectation and then have the '*remise*' ceremony postponed just because of the stupid weather.

Clementina laughed and handed me my hot chocolate and some hot buttered rolls on a silver tray. 'Of course they won't postpone the *remise*, your Highness!'

Clara brought over a vase full of softly blooming pink and yellow roses, which she placed on the table next to my bed so that I could breathe in their sweet scent as I breakfasted. 'We are traveling to a very strict timetable and just one day's delay would upset everything,' she said with a smile.

There were many tears, both happy and sad, as my ladies dressed me for the very last time in my finery then accompanied me downstairs to where my carriage was waiting. My mother had instructed that I should be dressed that day in a formal panniered gown of beautiful pink brocade trimmed with exquisite French lace and pearls. I touched the fine fabric tenderly as I sat before the

dressing table and watched my handsome Viennese hairdresser pin up my long hair, coat it with pomade and powder then fasten flowers and pearl pins amongst the curls. It would be the last time that he would do my hair as he was returning to Vienna that afternoon as well, his job complete. We exchanged a sad farewell in front of the mirror and he cried, clutching his silver backed brush to his chest as I handed him a purple velvet bag filled with gold coins in thanks for his services.

Clara fastened a heavy string of pearls around my neck and slipped a beautiful painted fan into my hand while Clementina knelt before me and pulled a pair of fine white silk stockings up my legs before sliding my feet into soft yellow leather shoes with dear little pink silk pompoms on their fronts. Anna then sprayed me with a lily and violet scent and dabbed more behind my ears, from which pearl earrings swung low, almost to my collarbones and with that I was ready although hardly prepared.

Anton ran ahead of us with Mops in his arms as we were helped into the waiting carriage and then sat looking sadly at each other as it pulled away. 'I can't believe that this is our last journey together,' I said, struggling not to cry.

It did not take us long to reach the Île des Épis, a small island situated in the middle of the Rhine almost directly in between the Hapsburg city of Kehl and Strasbourg in France. The carriage clattered across the narrow little bridge and pulled up beside the river and we sat for a moment in stunned and terrified silence before all at once the door was flung open and a group of liveried trumpeters lifted their instruments to their lips and loudly proclaimed my arrival.

'*Mein Gott, mein Gott*,' I whispered, reverting to our own language as I clasped Clara and Clementina's hands and prepared myself to jump down from the vehicle. 'I don't think that I can do this.'

Clementina kissed my hand. 'Of course you can, Antonia!' she said, all formality forgotten as she responded as one girl to another. 'We have come so far and you have done so well. This will soon pass and then before you know it you will be in Versailles and safe in your new life with nothing more to trouble you.' She tenderly stroked my face as the footman holding the door open coughed and discreetly turned his eyes elsewhere while beyond him I could see our Austrian company standing about looking awkward and clearly wondering what was happening in the carriage. 'There is just this one hurdle to overcome before your

life can begin.'

I stared at her. 'I am afraid, so afraid,' I whispered. 'What if they all hate me? What if it all goes wrong?'

Clementina smiled then and gave my hand one last kiss. 'They won't hate you and it will all be marvellous.' She patted away my tears with her own yellow silk handkerchief. 'Just wait and see.'

My Abbé appeared at the carriage door, his dark eyes filled with concern as he took in the scene before him. 'Your Highness? Is something the matter?' I could see officious Prince von Starhemberg, who had accompanied me all the way from Vienna, striding forward, shaking his long head from side to side at the irregularity of it all. I knew that he had been sending detailed reports of my behaviour back to Mama in Vienna and so forced a smile on to my face, determined that there should not be anything out of the ordinary for him to observe here.

'Is there a problem?' He asked now, his eyes gleaming at the prospect of some juicy morsel of gossip. 'Her Highness is now a few minutes late.'

I smiled and shrugged. 'No problem at all! My shoe was merely caught in my skirt.' I faked a merry laugh. 'I am ready now.' I caught my Abbé's eye and gave a more genuine smile. 'I am sorry if I caused anyone any concern.'

I jumped down from the carriage and took a deep breath as I placed my hand on the Prince's blue watered silk arm and allowed him to lead me to the small wooden pavilion that had been erected especially for today's ceremony. 'It was at this exact spot that his Highness the Dauphin's mother, the Princess Maria Josepha of Saxony was handed over before the occasion of her marriage,' he said in a lecturing tone. 'Unfortunately the wooden pavilion built for that happy occasion had long since fallen into a state of disrepair and so we were forced to build a new one. It was essential then as now that no offense be caused to either royal house and so hand over was designed to take place exactly between the two. When his Majesty, the King of France's mother, the Princess Marie Adélaïde went to France from her native Savoy, she was handed over on a bridge with the back wheels of her carriage resting in the land of her birth and the front in France so that she stepped out directly in between the two.' He gave a stiff bow. 'It is of the utmost importance that not the slightest offense is offered

to either party.'

I nodded politely. 'How interesting.' I smiled at the large gathering of local dignitaries and faithful Viennese courtiers who waited for me beside the entrance to the pavilion. Only my ladies and the most important would be following me inside and so this would be the last time that I would ever see most of them.

7th May, even later, did I mention that I am in FRANCE?

Now, where was I? Ah yes. A sudden chill wind whipped up my pink brocade skirts and frothy layers of fine linen and silk petticoats as we entered the pretty but flimsy pavilion and the wooden door slammed shut behind us. I was led to a small blue painted dressing room with paintings of flowers on the walls, where a large gilt and green silk covered screen stood in front of a magnificent full length mirror.

'If your Highness would be so kind as to change her clothes?' The Prince bowed and my trio of ladies stepped forward ready to remove my beautiful Austrian dress (which had been made for me in Paris along with all the rest of my enormous *trousseau*) that I had worn for such a short time and replace it with a new ensemble in the French style. Every single item about my person was to be removed and replaced in an act that symbolised my domestic transformation from Austrian Archduchess to French Dauphine.

My ladies in waiting pulled the pretty shoes from my feet, unrolled the silk stockings, removed my jewels and the pearl pins in my hair and then unlaced my dress and pulled the fine lawn chemise over my head so that for a second I stood shivering and naked before them. 'Oh do hurry up!' I implored with a laugh. 'It is so cold in here!'

Anna winked at me. 'We are working as fast as we can!' She pretended not to notice when I unpinned the little diamond and enamel watch that Mama had given me from my bosom and hid it in my fist, determined to have something of home about my person as I entered my new country.

I watched in the mirror as they applied more violet scented powder to my hair then powdered my face and applied two heavy circles of rouge to my already rosily blushing cheeks. 'This is how it is done at Versailles,' Clementina

whispered in my ear. 'We have been instructed to make you look exactly as like a Dauphine.' She dabbed some heavy jasmine scent at the base of my throat and on my wrists. 'You must even smell like a Dauphine,' she said with a smile.

I touched my rouged cheeks and stared at myself in shock, thinking how alien and odd I looked and how unnecessary such false colours are when my own complexion is so fresh and clear. When I get to Versailles there will be no more rouge. The smell of jasmine made my head hurt and swim and I longed for my usual fresh lilies, roses and violets: the scents of my girlhood.

My ladies, to their credit, were very conscious of how cold I must be in such a draughty, damp room and worked quickly to dress me again in layers of fresh silk petticoats, a lace edged chemise, gold embroidered stockings and then a heavy silk corset and the wide wooden panniers that would support my heavy cloth of gold gown with its complicated layers of lace and gold spangled gauze ruffles and tiny gold ribbon bows. I gazed at myself in the mirror as Clementina slipped my new gold and diamond shoes on to my stockinged feet, impressed and terrified by my much altered appearance. I no longer looked like the Archduchess Antonia that had romped so playfully at Schönbrunn and the gardens of Laxenburg with my fair hair bobbing about my shoulders and my blue cotton skirts stained by grass, mud and dirty paws. 'I look like a princess,' I murmured.

'Then our work here is done,' Clara said with a proud smile.

There was time for a last secret hug before I lifted up Mops and we went into the adjoining ante room, where we were to officially say our farewells. I kissed and hugged each of them close, making no effort to check the tears that welled up in my eyes and ran down my red cheeks as we said our last sad goodbye. My ladies had been with me for a long time and I knew that I would miss them terribly in the times to come.

'I will never forget you,' I whispered as we all sobbed together. 'I owe so much to all of you.' I had given them my parting presents the night before – each one was given a diamond surrounded miniature of myself and also one of my own rings that I had pulled from my fingers to give to them.

Prince Starhemberg gave an impatient cough as I moved from person to person, saying goodbye and hugging each and everyone as the tears continued to

spill down my cheeks, blurring the hated rouge. 'Your Highness, France awaits us,' he said.

I nodded and after one last kiss, one last hug I took my place in front of the door and prepared myself for what lay beyond. Only a few seconds more and everything would change.

'Wait!' The Prince pursed his lips then summarily pulled my little Mops from my arms and handed him to Clara. 'There must be nothing Austrian about your Highness' person,' he reminded me with an awful look. 'Is there anything else that you have neglected to remove?'

I thought of Mama's watch and shook my head firmly, while gazing at poor Mops, who whined and struggled, not understanding why he had been taken away from me. 'Please can I take him with me?' It seemed terribly cruel that even my dog would have to remain behind. 'The French surely won't object to just one little dog?'

'I am sorry but my instructions were very clear,' the Prince said in as unapologetic a tone as I have ever heard. 'Perhaps you will be able to request his return once you are ensconced at Versailles.'

'Then I will have to submit won't I?' I said with an attempt at cheerfulness that belied the misery that I felt and the tears that continued to stream from my eyes. I reached out to give Mops' soft nose one last pat then forced myself to turn away, silently vowing that I would force them to return him to me at whatever cost.

'Good luck,' Clementina whispered as a footman opened the door and I stepped clumsily and blinded by tears into the large tapestry hung *salon* that stood in the very centre of the pavilion. I turned to take one last look at my friends but it was too late and the door had already swung shut behind me, hiding them from my view forever.

'Madame la Dauphine.' I wiped away my tears with the back of my hand as the Prince bowed to the trio of French notables who cautiously watched us from the other side of the red velvet covered table that ran down the centre of the room, presumably symbolising the boundary between our two nations. I looked at them from beneath my lowered lashes, noting their disdainful expressions and rude

stares as the Prince handed me up on to a dais at the far end of the room and the three French noblemen stepped up also.

'May I present Monsieur le Comte de Noailles, who has been charged with the great privilege and honour of escorting you into France.' He pronounced it rather self consciously as 'No Ay' and I hid my smile behind my fan as a tall rather stupid looking man bowed low before me.

I was then led to an ornate, purple velvet upholstered chair that stood at the very top of the table, upon which a pile of state papers had been arranged. I made myself comfortable and looked around the room, taking in the sumptuous tapestries depicting the marriage of Jason and Medea that hung on every wall and, less splendidly, the rain that was beginning to trickle down through the makeshift ceiling making large puddles of water on the wooden floor.

There followed a lengthy series of speeches from both sides, complimenting myself, the Dauphin Louis and our respective families and also professing all manner of perpetual affections and amities between us all. I made every attempt to look alert and interested, knowing that all eyes were upon me but in my mind I was drifting far far away and straining to hear my dear friends and poor Mops through the door that separated us, unwilling to believe that they had already begun their long journey home. A loud crack of thunder nearby made us all jump as I was handed a pen and, frowning a little with concentration, leaned forward to apply my new name '*Marie Antoinette Josephe Jeanne*' to the papers in front of me, not really knowing what I was signing and caring even less.

The Comte de Noailles then very gravely led me around the puddles to the other side of the table and a door on the other side of the splendid *salon* opened and a crowd of splendidly dressed ladies entered the room with a haughty, tight lipped *grande dame* at their head, stumbling a little as she came and after them there came several dozen splendidly dressed nobles, both male and female who ogled me in the most unabashed manner and giggled slyly behind their fans. 'May I present my wife, Madame la Comtesse de Noailles, who has the honour to be your *dame d'honneur*. ' She made a low curtsy, her blue silk skirts billowing around her and instinctively I moved quickly forward and embraced her, just as I would have done with one of my own ladies in waiting.

'Madame la Dauphine forgets herself,' she muttered, firmly removing herself and stepping away, shivering all the while in obvious distaste while I stared after

her in confusion. Was not an embrace from me an honour? Did she not want to be my friend? I quickly realised that I had committed a *faux pas* but could not bring myself to feel sorry for it. If they did not like my manners then that was their stuck up French problem, not mine.

I took a deep breath. 'Forgive me, Madame, the tears that I have just shed for my family and for my homeland. From this day forward, I shall never again forget that I am a Frenchwoman.'

Madame la Comtesse then introduced me to the other ladies that had entered in her wake, all of whom were older than me and had, as Monsieur de Comte de Noailles whispered to me, making me shudder with his mephitic breath, formerly acted as ladies in waiting to the now dead Queen Marie and had been waiting for two years for a new mistress.

First there was the Duchesse de Villars, a tall, boldly rouged redhead with a disdainful expression and arrogant mien. Then there was the icily beautiful Marquise de Duras who was dressed to kill in shimmering green satin, black lace and diamonds. They both flicked their eyes over me in a contemptuous manner, giving me a quick up-and-down once over that was most disconcerting and made me crimson beneath my rouge and powder.

I turned quickly and with much thankfulness to the three younger ladies in the party: the Duchesse de Chaulnes, a soulful blonde with a faintly melancholy air that was emphasized by her exquisite gauze and lace white dress, soft voice and manner of earnestly wringing her tiny hands whenever she spoke and the Comtesse de Mailly, who was slightly less pretty but infinitely more lively with sparkling dark eyes, a ready smile and sincere manner. Last of all was the Comtesse de Saulx-Tavannes, a tiny, petulant, elegant brunette with a mutinous air about her.

It must all seem very strange,' Madame de Mailly whispered to me as we exchanged curtseys, 'but you really have nothing to be afraid of. Madame de Noailles is a stickler for etiquette but harmless beyond that and I am sure you will soon learn to ignore Madame de Duras' ridiculously egotistical barbs.' She gave my arm a friendly pinch. 'They are simply eaten up with jealousy, you see. Since the Queen died, everyone has desperately wanted to be the *Grande Dame* of Versailles and now, here you are and to add insult to injury, looking so fresh and pretty and *young* too.' She gave me a saucy wink. 'Well, can you blame them

for wanting to hate you?'

I nodded but felt quite bewildered by their stares, the way that they all pressed close to me and above all the rapid way that they spoke French. It was quite different from the sedate lessons with my Abbé and Mama and I had to really concentrate in order to keep up, which gave mesdames de Noailles and Villars yet more excuses to roll their eyes at my stupidity.

Finally, I was led out through the antechambers on the French side of the pavilion and the Comte flung open the doors with a grand gesture, ignoring the darkly ominous sky above and the heavy rainfall as he grandly and proudly announced: '*Bienvenue à France!*'

Welcome to France. I am here! I can hardly believe it. More later as I am being called away.

7th May, Strasbourg, even later still.

After we had left the pavilion, I was led, picking our way carefully around the puddles and soft muddy ground to my splendid *berline* carriage and we set out on the next stage of our journey. Behind me I heard shouts and consternation as the pavilion roof collapsed beneath the weight of the rainwater and the locals started to tear apart the splendid interior, pillaging the beautiful decorations inside and bearing them away.

I tried to look behind as my carriage rolled over the bridge and onto muddy French soil but could see nothing but the carriages of the French nobility who were to accompany me and a few laughing peasants running away bearing rolls of tapestry and paintings over their heads to protect themselves against the rain. Of my Austrian companions there was nothing more to be seen and I sank back against the soft blue velvet upholstery feeling lonely and quite abandoned.

The rain began to clear and was gradually replaced by brilliant sunshine as we approached the city of Strasbourg and by the time we had driven beneath the first of several flower and ribbon bedecked arches the day had been quite transformed from one of gloom to one of sunshine, joy and promise. As the rain vanished so did my tears and I began to look out of the carriage windows with real interest and pleasure, enjoying the smiles, shouts and cheers of the multitudes that had come out to see me and the flowers that were being thrown so lavishly in my path while the hundreds of handsome young soldiers who lined

the route cheered, threw their hats and fired their guns into the air at my approach.

My carriage drove through the teeming streets of the city, rumbling underneath triumphal arches, passing by the beautiful gothic pink sandstone cathedral and stopping every so often as the press of people became too great to let us pass while all the while I could hear the distant and constant ringing of church bells, a joyous sound that made my lonely heart soar.

We were greeted by Cardinal de Rohan in the courtyard of his exquisitely elegant palace on the Place du Château. I took an instant liking to the Cardinal, who had a kindly twinkle in his small blue eyes and took my hand in the most friendly manner before formally welcoming me to the city in German.

'Please, Monsieur, do not address me in German,' I said with a gentle smile, cutting his effusions short. 'From this moment on, I understand only French.' I hoped that Madame de Noailles heard and approved but really who cares as everyone who heard me began to applaud then passed my words from the courtyard to the big square beyond until finally everyone was cheering and shouting my name over and over again.

After this a large group of beautiful shepherds and shepherdesses appeared before us in lovely colourful local costumes and bearing rush baskets filled to the brim with sweetly scented red and pink rose petals which they proceeded to scatter before me as they danced. Next up were twenty four noble maidens from the best families in the area who danced before me in beautiful white silk dresses and flung yet more rose petals in the air until the ground was covered in a blanket of pink, white and red and the air was heady and sweet with the luscious scent of roses as we crushed them underfoot. When they had stopped and were standing, panting slightly, in a row before me I walked amongst them, asking each her name and presenting them with a posy of roses as a keepsake. One of them reminded me of my sister Carolina, with the same wide blue eyes, high forehead and crimson pouting lips and to her I bestowed the beautiful painted fan that I had been carrying since I got changed at the pavilion.

Everywhere I looked, I saw happy smiling faces and youth and beauty in abundance and I could not help looking about myself in pleasure. The Cardinal smiled benevolently as he led me into the palace and then took me through several light filled, beautifully appointed reception chambers to the splendid

rooms that had been prepared for me and which overlooked the river. 'You are come amongst us like Spring itself,' he said, kissing my hand. 'I do believe that the city of Strasbourg has given you its heart.'

'And in return you have mine,' I assured him as Madame de Chaulnes flung open my tall bedchamber windows so that we could hear the cheers and acclaim outside. 'I do not think that I could ever have expected such a wondrous welcome.' I looked about myself with real pleasure as I went from room to room, especially appreciating the enormous bedchamber with its white and gilt paneled walls, crimson brocade hung four poster bed and stately gold balustrade that separated the bed from the rest of the room.

'This is the *chambre du roi*,' the Cardinal explained with a smile, noticing my look of delight. 'I hope that you will make yourself comfortable here.'

Later, after a banquet and a trip to the theatre that I was too tired to fully appreciate we all went to the Salon d'Assemblée and stood at the windows that overlooked the square, which was illuminated with hundreds of red, yellow and orange lanterns with even the beautiful cathedral opposite lit up from the tip of its spire to the ground so that it shimmered like a candle flame in the darkness. The people of the city swarmed below, shouting and singing as they freely drank the wine that flowed like water from the fountains and ate meat from the oxen that were roasting on enormous spits on the street corners. There had already been an enormous firework display that had filled the ink black night sky with light, colour and the heavy scent of gunpowder.

'I have never seen anything so wonderful,' I whispered to Madame de Mailly, hugging my velvet cloak close as we stared down into the square. 'How happy they all look.'

The Comtesse smiled kindly. 'That is because we are all just so thrilled to have you here.' She hesitated for a moment and frowned as if unsure about what to say next before continuing: 'After Madame la Marquise de Pompadour died the court became impossibly dreary and then even more so after the poor, dear Queen passed away also and I am afraid that we have all been stagnating somewhat, waiting for something or *someone* to come along to shake us all up again.' Again that careful pause. 'I fear that things will not be as you expected.'

Before I could ask her what she meant by this rather cryptic utterance, the

Comtesse de Chaulx-Tavannes advanced upon us and gave Madame de Mailly's arm a sharp rap with her ivory handled fan. 'Shush now,' she hissed with a glittering and eminently false smile, 'let's not frighten the little bride shall we?' And with that she remained steadfastly at our side until it was time for me to withdraw to my bedchamber.

It was not pleasant to be prepared for bed by almost total strangers but I think I endured it quite well and did nothing that could give rise to offense or, worse, malicious comment. I find that the ladies here are very quick to be offended, apt to perceive a slight where there is none and very jealous of their rights so that it is too easy to say or do entirely the wrong thing. They are also extremely eager to gain precedence over each other, which I find amusing although this will probably soon get tiresome.

Madame de Mailly is the kindest of them all and also the most useful when it comes to imparting information to a novice like myself as she is very friendly and also seems to absolutely understand how lost I feel at the moment. I think that perhaps we might become friends.

Tuesday 8th May, after breakfast.

Madame de Mailly on Madame de Chaulnes: 'Marie-Paule always looks miserable because her life really is a trial, poor thing. Well, for a start she is a daughter of the Duc de Luynes (this said with a significant look that I have yet to decipher) and then on top of that her husband is very strange indeed and cares more about his plants and trees than he does about her and as for his mother! Well, the old Duchesse has been a mortification to us all for many years now and is quite possibly the most annoying, ridiculous example of a sadly aging coquette that you could ever hope to meet. Of course she has never quite recovered from the blow of La Pompadour's little girl dying before she could succeed in marrying her to her awful son. Monsieur le Duc is apparently so in love with his plants that he has refused to be a husband to the poor girl and so she affects to always wear white in order to either advertise her virginity or shame him into taking action, I am not sure which. It is admirable of course but imagine the scandal should she ever step out in anything coloured.'

Madame de Chaulnes on Madame de Mailly: 'She is the same as all the rest of the Talleyrand-Périgord family: pretending to be utterly insouciant and with a smile for everyone but nonetheless convinced at all times of her own superiority.'

Be warned.'

8th May, later.

We have just returned from the cathedral, where Mass was celebrated by the Cardinal's handsome nephew, the Prince Louis de Rohan. Nothing could surpass the magnificence of Strasbourg Cathedral, which towered ominously over us as we walked beneath billowing blue, white and silver canopies from the Palais Rohan across the square to its wonderfully carved and embellished golden sandstone portals.

'It is said to be the tallest building in all the world,' Marie-Paule de Chaulnes whispered to me as we paused for a brief moment to stare open mouthed up at the enormous decorated spire. 'You can see the spire from many leagues away.'

'How impressive.' We continued walking. 'I do not think that I have ever seen anything quite so beautiful although beautiful seems like quite the wrong word somehow doesn't it?'

'Superb?' Marie-Paule offered. 'I grew up nearby at Dampierre and used to come to Strasbourg often as a little girl with my parents. I believed that God himself must certainly reside inside the cathedral.'

'I can totally understand why,' I said with a smile. I know that the other ladies think that she is rather ridiculous and affected but I feel very sorry for her and think that they are being very harsh. It must be horrid to have a husband who does not like you and I really don't understand why he isn't madly in love with her as she resembles the girls in Greuze's sad paintings and looks like she should be weeping over dead canaries or sobbing elegantly while clutching pink roses to her tastefully exposed breast. That sort of thing.

8th May, later still.

Prince Louis de Rohan is so handsome. I think it must be very distracting for the ladies of Strasbourg whenever he celebrates Mass as he does so in such a theatrical manner and with much dramatic rolling of his blue eyes and tender smiles upon the congregation. It was very chilly inside the cathedral this morning and yet I saw plenty of ladies, of varying ages, fanning themselves as though quite overcome.

He seemed to reserve his most winsome smiles for my direction but I pretended not to notice.

Sunday 13th May, Soissons, late.

I can't believe that almost a week has passed since I last wrote in my journal. I had thought you lost forever but it turned out that you were hidden at the bottom of a box, which was a massive relief as imagine the terrible scandal should anyone discover you! Imagine the horror should they then broadcast my most secret thoughts to the rest of the world!

Anyway, this has been a week of much travelling and celebration. Whatever fears I may have had about the French people's reaction to my marriage were entirely dissipated by the mass rejoicing and joy that greeted my progress across their country, resting at Nancy, Chalons, Rheims and now Soissons. Never before have I felt so loved, never before have I experienced such approval. I hope that it always stays this way. When I lie down to sleep at night my ears are ringing with the echo of cheers and the sound of fireworks exploding into the night sky.

In return I respond as eagerly as I can to their overtures. I return their smiles, gather their bouquets to my heart and listen attentively when they speak. When children come forward to present me with flowers, I kneel down at their level and look them in the face before embracing them. I can't help it. My heart is overflowing with love for all people and for the French in particular. I have gone from being the very least of Mama's daughters to the most important and I feel like a princess in a fairy tale.

Last night in Soissons there was a huge banquet followed by some oratory by students at the local college before we went to the opera. They spoke to me in Latin, which I smiled and nodded along with as though I understood every single word before, carefully primed by my Abbé, I replied with a few sentences in the same language. They had the grace to hide their expressions of surprise beneath wild applause. I may not be very clever but I always know what will most please people and that, I think, is far more important.

However, my journey is almost at an end as tomorrow we drive to Compiègne, where I will meet my husband and his family for the first time. I feel myself tremble with fear and excitement every time I think of it. It seems like such a

long time ago now that I first heard talk of my betrothal to the Dauphin and now here I am in France and tomorrow we will finally stand face to face. It has taken me twenty seven days, almost a month to get here and now Vienna feels so very far away.

I wonder if he is thinking of me too? I am so impatient to meet him. I have his miniature lying on the desk beside me and I often pause to look at it and trace his painted face with my finger, imagining what he is like and hoping that he will like me.

I am so ready to fall in love with him.

Monday, 14th May, Château de Compiègne.

It is done. I am here. I do not know what to think or what to say.

The morning seems so long ago now. I will always remember that I was shaking with fear as my ladies in waiting dressed me for my first meeting with the Dauphin and his grandfather, the King at Compiègne. Madame de Noailles was very quick to make it plain that the meeting with the King was the most important thing but we all know that it is his grandson's approval and love that I must win.

'Will they like me? What will they think of me?' I kept asking as Mesdames de Chaulnes and Mailly turned me this way and that, pulling out my yellow silk skirts, patting my powdered hair into place, spraying me with violet scent and fastening my diamond studded lace choker around my throat. 'Will *he* like me?' I held out my arms so that they could clasp diamond and pearl bracelets around my slim wrists. 'Will he think that I am pretty?' I ignored Madame de Noailles exasperated 'chut'.

Madame de Mailly smiled kindly and patted my hand. 'You are worrying far too much. He will think that you are delightful.'

'And the King?' I held on to Madame de Chaulnes' shoulder as I slipped my feet into a pair of pale pink silk shoes with beautiful sapphire buckles. 'What will he think? Will I please him?' I turned this way and that in front of the mirror, still not quite used to the sight of myself in the thick red rouge that was applied to my cheeks every morning. I have pleaded with them not to have it but it is 'expected

of me' according to Madame de Noailles and so, unwillingly, I submit.

They all exchanged a look, one that I was not able to decipher. 'Oh, he will be extremely pleased,' Madame de Saulx-Tavannes said with a laugh that was not entirely genuine. 'I would not trouble your lovely head about that!'

The minutes dragged terribly after this as first we were entertained by some notables of the city and then we all had lunch, which I could only pick at before we went to sit together in the pretty pale blue and gold sitting room next to my bedroom and waited to be called downstairs to the carriages. Madame de Mailly tried her best to distract me with a game of cards but my mind was very definitely elsewhere and the Dauphin was all that I could think or talk about until I am sure they could all have quite cheerfully slapped me.

Finally, the summons came and we made our way swiftly down the marble staircase to the waiting carriages. Mesdames de Noailles and Villars sat opposite me and as usual were keen to find fault with everything so that I left Soissons to a chorus of complaints and criticisms. Like Monsieur de Durfort, they think that Versailles is superior to everything. They really are such foolish creatures.

Our carriage took a road that ran alongside the Aisne river and I gazed out across the water, trying my best to still the wild, almost dizzying thump of my heart within my breast. In my lap I held a beautiful illustrated map that had been the gift of the Cardinal Rohan when we left Strasbourg. It detailed the route that I must take to get to Versailles and included tiny pictures of the places of interest that I might expect to see along the way although I think that I have probably missed most of them either because I was asleep or because I was talking to Madame de Mailly, who is so amusing and interesting. You would not believe the things that she has told me about the court at Versailles. I do not think that I will ever be able to look the people involved in the face!

Finally there was a shout ahead and my carriage came to a juddering halt in a small clearing just inside the forest that surrounds the château. I looked in terror at Madame de Noailles as she pulled down the window and leaned out to see what was happening. 'Is it him?' I asked rather stupidly, placing my gloved hand against my fluttering heart. 'Is it really him?' I could hear the sound of shouts and good humoured laughter nearby as she conversed in rapid French with someone just out of sight.

She pulled her head back in again with a look of ill concealed annoyance. 'No, it is Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul,' she said with a haughty sniff. 'He has ridden ahead to greet you.' The carriage door was pulled open and I was helped down, my feet in their delicate pink shoes squishing slightly into the mulch that covered the forest floor.

'Madame la Dauphine.' A tall man with a round, very pock marked face stepped forward and knelt with much solemnity at my feet, seeming not to care about the well being of the splendid blue velvet suit that he wore with a careless grace. 'I selfishly craved the honour of being first to welcome you,' he said with a charming smile that made his battered face almost handsome again.

I remembered all that I had been told by Mama and my Abbé about Choiseul and how he had worked hard to secure the marriage between the Dauphin and me. I also recalled all the small kindnesses like the hairdresser that he had sent to Vienna. Here at last was someone that I could trust and who, it seemed, had only my best interests at heart. 'Monsieur, I shall never forget that you are responsible for my happiness,' I said, keen to reward him for his efforts.

The Duc grinned up at me like a fellow conspirator before adding with all the smoothness of a polished courtier: 'And that of France, Madame.' He offered me his arm and walked me back to my carriage, patting my hand in the most avuncular manner. 'I am so pleased to see you here at last,' he said with a smile. 'You are every bit as charming as I expected. More so in fact. I hear that you conquered the hearts of all who saw you.'

I blushed and smiled up at Choiseul from beneath my lashes. 'I am glad that the people are pleased by me. It was a long journey, Monsieur, but I got here in the end.'

Again we exchanged that smile and he bent to kiss my hand. 'And that is all that matters, Your Highness.' He pulled open the door to my carriage and handed me up inside himself, shaking his head and smiling at the footman who stepped forward to offer his services. 'The royal family are waiting in a clearing nearby.' He gave me a quizzical look. 'Are you ready?'

I took a deep breath and smiled my most dazzling smile. 'Yes.' I settled back against the luxurious seat and nodded to him as the coach pulled away. This was it. This was the moment.

14th May, even later.

I felt utterly panic stricken as the carriage rolled through the forest although a small detached part of my mind was still able to notice and admire the way that the sunlight filtered softly through the green boughs overhead and dappled on to the trunks of the trees that surrounded us. It was truly a beautiful day, the perfect day in fact upon which to meet your one true love.

I pulled down the window and deeply breathed in the fresh, sweetly scented air, trying my best to calm my fearful nerves and regain my composure. 'It is rather chilly,' Madame de Noailles observed pointedly but I ignored her, enjoying the soft breeze upon my hot cheeks, the soft whisper of the trees, the luminous light.

It did not take long for the carriage to arrive at the clearing where the royal party awaited us and I cannot describe the emotions that I felt as we slowed down and then came to a halt amidst the peals of a triumphant fanfare. My door was pulled open and I had mere seconds left to anxiously pat my hair and waft my painted fan in front of my hot cheeks before the Duc de Choiseul appeared again, offering me his hand with a kindly smile. 'Come,' he said. 'It is time.'

I gave him my hand and stepped gracefully from the carriage, my eyes first shyly fixed to the ground then raised irresistibly to the two male figures, one tall and gleaming with diamonds and the other smaller and more awkwardly postured who stood a small distance away in front of a splendid red and gold carriage. I turned and looked enquiringly at the Duc and he gave a small nod. 'His Majesty,' he murmured.

I could wait no longer and so raised my skirts above my ankles so that the ruffled silk petticoats rustled prettily and ran towards them before sinking to my knees before the taller of the two men. 'Your Majesty,' I said, slightly breathless after my exertions as it is no mean feat to run in whalebone corsetry. 'Sire.' I looked up into his face, taking in the amused dark eyes that he had doubtless inherited from his spitfire Italian mother, his decisive chin and sensual mouth, which now smiled down upon me. 'Grandpapa.'

The charming, rather sad smile wavered a little but remained intact. 'My dear child,' he murmured raising me up then with soft hands that smelled sweetly of jasmine and lavender. 'I am so pleased that you are here with us at last.' He

looked me up and down and then, clearly liking what he saw, leaned forward and kissed me soundly upon each cheek. 'Your youth and beauty will bring the Spring to our court,' he said, his words echoing those of Cardinal Rohan.

He stepped aside then and with a faint look of irritation beckoned forward the second figure who had retreated behind him. 'May I have the honour of presenting my grandson, Monsieur le Dauphin?'

This then was my husband. I blushed and took a deep breath before raising my eyes and looking directly at the boy that I had been daydreaming about virtually every day since I first learned that I was to be his wife. What I beheld was a tall, rather overweight, blue eyed youth with a blank air and eyebrows so thick that they met over his rather big nose. My first thought was '*Oh, he doesn't look at all like his portraits*' followed swiftly by '*He isn't at all handsome*' with '*Oh well, he could be a lot worse and at least he looks kind*' swift on its heels.

I hid my disappointment well and smiled at him kindly as he stepped reluctantly forward and pecked the air beside my cheek as quickly as he could while all the witnesses laughed and applauded. He mumbled something that I could not quite make out but which I assumed was some rehearsed speech about how pleased he was to meet me finally and then retreated back into his grandfather's shadow again. He looked desperately unhappy and as I looked at him I felt my heart sink into my pretty shoes for he was clearly just as disappointed as I was. Only, how could this be when everyone else thought that I was so pretty and dainty?

'My dear granddaughter.' I turned thankfully to King Louis, flushing a little with embarrassment as I met his eyes, which looked at me with such kindness and understanding. Of course he could not apologise to me for his grandson's peculiar behaviour but he could, and did, do his best to mitigate it by putting my hand on his crimson velvet arm, patting it gently and then leading me away, all the while showering me with the most ridiculous compliments and calling me his 'very own beloved daughter' which made me feel quite giddy.

He led me to a trio of over dressed older ladies who stood beside an ornate blue and gold carriage. I had barely noticed them at first but now they were practically hopping up and down, demanding attention. 'May I present my daughters?' the King said, again with that air of melancholy irritation.

I exchanged curtsies with the princesses and remembered Wolferl Mozart's condemnation of the French princesses as being much less pretty than those of Austria. He was right. Madame Adélaïde, the eldest was tall, sallow skinned, rather grubby and dressed in a magnificent gown of diamond spangled raspberry pink silk that would have looked wonderful on a girl of my age but seemed faintly ridiculous on a woman of almost forty. Madame Victoire, the next in age, was extremely fat with thick black eyebrows like her nephew and a rather stupid expression on what might once have been a pretty face while Madame Sophie, the youngest, was as thin as Victoire was portly and tried her best to hide her plainness beneath thick layers of powder and rouge.

'You are very welcome,' Adélaïde said with a bold look that swept from my head to my toes and then back again. 'How pretty you are.' She sounded surprised. Perhaps they expected my portraits to lie as much as those of the Dauphin?

14th May, even later.

After a brief turn about the clearing, the King escorted me to his own magnificent carriage and handed me up inside by himself, giving my hand one last graceful kiss as I settled myself inside beside the Dauphin, who did not look at me at all but instead preferred to stare out of the window at the trees.

'I am missing some excellent hunting today,' he remarked after a moment, still without looking at me.

'Oh.' I did not know what to say to this. 'I am very sorry.'

Any further conversation was halted by the arrival of the King, who briskly climbed into the carriage and sat opposite us, smiling benevolently upon myself and then, rather less so, upon his grandson. 'Louis!' he said sharply as the carriage moved off. 'Are you not pleased to have such a delightful bride?'

The Dauphin slowly removed his gaze from the trees and rather sleepily looked across at his grandfather. 'Of course, *grandpère*.' He looked out of the window again and seemed to move just a little bit further away from me as though even my voluminous yellow silk skirts could contaminate him in some frightful way.

A look of chagrin crossed the King's handsome face but was so swiftly

suppressed so that I could not be quite sure that I had even noticed anything amiss. It seemed to me that the King had long been accustomed to quickly hiding his inner most thoughts and feelings from his companions and felt suddenly rather sorry for him. The Abbé had told me that an already orphaned King Louis had succeeded to the throne of France at the age of five and looking across at him now I thought how awful it must have been for him to have his childhood curtailed so prematurely.

'We will rest at Compiègne tonight as I wish you to meet more of our family and then tomorrow we will travel on to my château of La Muette. I am very fond of it and hope that you will be comfortable there. It is the tradition that all French royal brides spend the night before their wedding day at La Muette.' When he smiled at me I forgot all about the sulking, silent boy at my side and instead gave myself up to basking in the King's evident approval.

It was not long before we came out of the trees and arrived at Compiègne, a beautiful château in the classical style that reminded me a little of my beloved Schönbrunn. 'Oh, how lovely!' I exclaimed as we drove up to the gates, remembering just in time that King Louis himself had remodeled this château and was extremely proud of it.

He grinned then and pulled down the window, the better to appreciate the splendid view, my first of the palaces that I would now inhabit as a member of the French royal family. 'I like to think of this as my monument to posterity.'

'Then they will surely remember you as the creator of something of great beauty,' I immediately replied, earning myself another smile while beside me the Dauphin shifted uneasily and I thought, rather disapprovingly.

We came to a halt in the courtyard and immediately two liveried footmen ran forward to let down the steps and pull open the door. The King stepped down first and held out his hand to assist me, which I gratefully took, pausing for a second on the top step to look around and appreciate my beautiful surroundings, the rows of tall windows and elegant columned portico.

'Welcome to Compiègne,' King Louis said with a proud flourish, tucking my hand under his arm and leading me into the château, leaving the Dauphin trailing miserably behind us. I looked over my shoulder at him once but then quickly turned my eyes elsewhere when for a brief instant he looked up and met my

gaze, his blue eyes curiously apathetic.

I was led up a wonderful staircase lined with courtiers who looked at me curiously as they bowed their heads in reverence and then through a series of beautiful light filled rooms to a large blue and gold *salon* which was filled with splendidly dressed people, all of whom abruptly cut short their conversations and stared at us as we were announced then walked into the room.

'May I present my new daughter, Madame la Dauphine,' the King said with an almost fatherly touch of pride in his voice.

I smiled and curtsied, shyly looking around the gorgeous candlelit room at their faces, some were smiling and friendly but most were rather stern. 'I am very pleased to meet you all.' The King led me between them, personally introducing me to each and every member of my new family. Thanks to Abbé Vermond I already knew the names of most of the people present but there was a vast difference between my lessons in Vienna and actually standing in front of them all, struggling to link names to faces as Condés and Contis passed before my dazzled eyes, all splendidly dressed and reeking of musk and jasmine with haughty Bourbon faces and highly polished manners.

Standing a little apart was the Duc de Chartres, a handsome energetic young man in his early twenties who was heir to the powerful Duc d'Orléans. I had been told all about him by my Abbé and knew that he was highly intelligent, capricious, cultured, bad tempered, vengeful and utterly untrustworthy. I determined to charm him but could tell by the rather disdainful curl of his lip as he regarded me that it would be a struggle to convince him that I was anything other than a foolish *ingénue*. At his side stood his pretty little wife of one year, her wide grey eyes gazing adoringly up into his face and both tiny hands clasped possessively around his blue silk arm. Exquisite, glittering, rose scented Madame de Chartres was the daughter of one of Louis XIV's bastards by Athénaïs de Montespan and was said to be the wealthiest heiress in all France with a dowry of six million livres, a frankly incredible sum of money. She didn't have much to say for herself beyond tittering at all of her husband's jokes and agreeing enthusiastically with every single word that he uttered.

Of more interest was her beautiful blonde widowed sister-in-law, the Princesse de Lamballe, an ethereal vision in frothy mauve gauze and diamonds who twisted her ivory painted fan nervously between her long white fingers as we

were introduced and bestowed upon me the only genuine smile that I was to see all that long evening.

I circled the splendid mirrored room and made sure to exchange a few words with everyone present, keen to make a good impression and hoping that everyone would go away raving about how lovely and kind I was. While deep in conversation with Madame de Lamballe I became oddly aware that I was being closely watched and glanced up to see that the King himself was gazing at me with an approving smile. He did not seem at all abashed when our eyes met and instead raised his glass of champagne to me in a silent toast.

Tuesday 15th May, La Muette.

And what of my new husband? What of him? He did not look at me once that evening in Compiègne and made his excuses and left as soon as he could. I do not understand it at all. Everyone else here seems to think that I am pretty so why doesn't he? I really want to talk to him but don't know how.

Madame de Mailly was very kind when she prepared me for bed last night and whispered that the King admires me very much and she heard him say several times how pleased he is with both my looks and my behaviour.

'Tell me about him,' I said, with a nervous look at Madame de Noailles, who was thankfully not close enough to hear our conversation. 'I find him somewhat perplexing and not at all how I imagined he would be.'

The pretty Comtesse rolled her dark eyes and laughed. 'Oh, I know what you mean. The King is a very complicated man and I believe that Madame de Pompadour is the only person to have ever truly understood him.' She lowered her voice as she said the name of the now deceased favourite as of course it is considered the height of bad manners to mention the dead at court.

'What was she like?' I recollected the lovely presents that she had sent to Carolina and remembered also that along with Choiseul she had been instrumental in arranging my marriage. 'Did the King love her? Does he miss her now?'

Madame de Mailly cast a cautious look at the Comtesse de Noailles who was busy reprimanding the maids at the other side of the room. 'She was very pretty,

really quite charming and extremely witty.' She sighed. 'She really loved that man.'

I felt suddenly breathless, imagining some sort of mystery. 'What happened to her?'

As usual the truth turned out to be utterly commonplace, even banal. 'Oh nothing! She had been ill for a long time and then one day she went to bed and didn't get up again. The King was inconsolable when she died.'

'He always looks so sad,' I said now remembering the way that he had looked at the Dauphin and me in the carriage earlier. 'Sad and disappointed.'

Madame la Comtesse shrugged her thin shoulders. 'He has had much in his life to make him sorrowful,' she said. 'He once told me that he believed himself born to be unhappy as his grandmother was the daughter of the English Princesse Henriette and that like all Stuarts he has a melancholy, even morbid turn of mind.' She laughed. 'They also have a tendency to lose their heads.'

Tuesday 15th May, even later.

This morning we left Compiègne and travelled to La Muette, a beautiful little château nestled like a pearl in the verdant Bois de Boulogne on the outskirts of Paris. We stopped en route at the imposing, dark Carmelite convent at Saint Denis so that I could pay my respects to the King's youngest daughter Louise who came here a few months ago, determined to take the veil and become a nun.

Madame de Mailly told me all about it during the bumpy carriage ride there. 'It caused the most terrific scandal,' she whispered with relish. 'Madame Louise had been saying for a long time that she wanted to leave the court and devote her life to God but of course no one believed her and in fact we all thought that she was being rather melodramatic and attention seeking about the whole thing. However it turned out to be true!'

'What happened?' I couldn't imagine how anyone could possibly prefer the austere life of the cloister to the excitement of court. 'Did the King know?'

'Oh, well he apparently knew all about it and had refused his consent for many years until finally one day he decided that enough was enough and gave his permission. She left early the next morning and went straight to the convent

where it is said that she spends her days praying for her father's soul.'

I laughed. 'How very noble of her! I do hope that he is grateful for her concern!'

Madame de Mailly joined in my laughter but then shook her head and tried to look severe. 'Oh no, we must not mock! You do not yet know how superstitious the poor King is about such things!' She smiled. 'I wish that you could have seen how furious Madame Adélaïde was when she found out. I could hear her screams of chagrin from several rooms away.'

'Did Madame Louise not wish to marry?' I asked, still curious about this princess who had abandoned her life to take the veil.

The Comtesse sighed. 'The King likes to keep his daughters close and only one, Madame Infante was ever sent away to be married.' She lowered her voice then, which I had come to realize was a sign that she was about to impart some particularly juicy morsel of information. 'I have heard that he had plans to marry Louise to Charles Edward Stuart, the pretender to the English throne but it didn't happen after all.'

I was rather disappointed to find that Madame Louise was not the gentle, beautiful heroine that I had imagined her to be but instead a rather dumpy woman with a loud voice, strident manner and the thick black eyebrows that afflicted her nephew, the Dauphin. She looked me swiftly up and down in the brisk way that all Frenchwomen do then gave an approving nod before talking at length about how terrible the dinners in the convent are. I am starting to realize that the Bourbons only really become truly animated when they are on the subject of food.

After I had bowed my head to receive her blessing we all left and drove on to La Muette, entirely bypassing the centre of Paris so that I caught only the merest glimpse from my window despite straining back to see as much as I could of the French capital.

'I had thought that we would see more,' I remarked in some annoyance to Madame de Chaulnes.

She gave a small shrug. 'The King does not like to go there.'

I immediately looked to the Comtesse de Mailly for an explanation but she just pursed her lips and shook her pretty head.

Tuesday 15th May, later still

Upon our arrival at La Muette I was immediately taken to my own rooms, which are really quite delightful. 'It is the custom that all royal brides spend the night before their wedding here,' Madame de Noailles said as I looked about myself with pleasure, admiring the pale blue and gilt panelling, the pretty pink silk curtains embroidered all over with flowers and peacock feathers and the huge arrangements of flowers that stood upon every surface. Someone had put a lot of thought into making the room as pleasant as possible.

'It is charming,' I said to Madame de Noailles with a smile, still hopeful that I could win her over.

She remained impervious and looked coldly and unsmilingly back at me. 'The King had the room refurbished before your arrival in the hopes that it would be to your taste.'

'How kind of him,' I replied, sitting on the bed and bouncing on it a little to see how comfortable it is.

'He wanted to make sure that you were shown all proper attention,' Madame de Noailles replied stiffly. My goodness, I do wish that she would unbend a little. I wonder if she ever smiles at anyone or is it just me that she holds in dislike? Madame de Mailly told me that apparently Madame de Noailles absolutely adored the old Queen and resents the fact that I, a mere girl have taken her place. That is hardly my fault though is it?

It was a delightful day so we went for a walk in the gardens and for the first time since coming to France I felt entirely and wholeheartedly happy and comfortable as I strolled between the Duchesse de Chaulnes and Abbé Vermond, half listening as they talked at length about gardening and invited each other to sniff particularly lovely flowers. I can tell that the Abbé very much admires Madame de Chaulnes' soulful good looks and she in her turn simpers more than usual when she talks to him, which is a frankly nauseating amount of simpering.

After a while I fell back, hoping that the Dauphin would see me walking alone

and come and join me but he remained steadfastly at his grandfather's side and so after a while I was forced to give up and instead link arms with the Princesse de Lamballe, who is thoroughly delightful, smells like lilacs and roses and had swapped last night's gown of mauve gauze for an exquisite ensemble in flounced pale blue silk trimmed with blue and white striped ribbons and lace. 'You seem so much happier today,' she remarked with a friendly squeeze of my hand. 'I felt very sorry indeed for you yesterday.'

I looked at her in some surprise. 'Did you? Why?' I am so used now to thinking myself the luckiest girl in the world that it was a shock to hear someone say that they pitied me.

The Princesse hesitated. 'The Bourbons are not an easy family to enter and you looked so very young and lost and exhausted when you walked into the *salon* at Compiègne.' She gave me a sidelong smile. 'I confess that I was longing to run up to you and give you an enormous hug. It must be quite intolerable for you at times.'

I sighed. 'Yes. Yes, it is.' I thought of Vienna, Joseph and Mama, now all so very far away and then I remembered all the hundreds of miles and the long tedious hours sitting bored out of my mind in a carriage which had brought me here to this moment, to this garden in Paris. 'I can hardly believe that I am here. I still sometimes feel shocked when I wake up in the morning and realize that I am no longer at home in Vienna.'

She nodded sympathetically. 'I came from Turin in Italy to marry my husband and found it very hard.' She gave me a rather embarrassed look and bent over a lovely pink rose in order to hide her blushes. 'I expect that Madame de Mailly has told you all about my marriage?'

I couldn't meet her candid gaze and looked away. 'Um, yes, a little bit.' Actually, Madame de Mailly told me all about it last night as she helped me prepare for bed and I know all about how Madame de Lamballe's handsome young husband had been a dissolute wastrel who had abandoned her shortly after their wedding day and then conveniently died of some hideous disease caught in the brothels of Paris a year later leaving her mistress to an enormous fortune.

The Princesse sighed. 'I was stupidly excited when I first learned that I was to be married to a French prince and indeed I felt very fortunate when I first met

my husband and saw that he was both handsome and charming.' She shrugged and tried to smile. 'Of course, in his case a handsome face and a charming manner only served to disguise the libertine and horrible aspects of his personality.'

I saw that she was on the brink of tears and took her hand in a comforting clasp. 'It must have been terrible. I am so sorry.' I smiled at her, thinking that this poor unhappy princess badly needed someone to pay attention to her and make her feel loved again. I decided that I would be her friend and as I found that the thought of this made my own spirits rise for I too felt abandoned and out of place and in need of a friend in this strange country.

Madame de Lamballe smiled back and snapped a beautiful yellow rose from a nearby bush before handing it to me. 'No, it is I who should apologise for talking about my own personal misfortune with you,' she said. 'Please, forget I said anything.'

I accepted the rose and tucked it behind my ear, which made her laugh. 'There is no need to apologise, Madame,' I replied shyly. 'I am interested in knowing all about you as I want us to be friends.'

She returned my smile. 'I should like that very much.'

At that moment there was one of those sudden delightful rain showers that are so typical of Spring and our conversation was rudely interrupted as all the ladies ran shrieking and laughing for cover, lifting their pale silk skirts and holding their fans and parasols vainly over their powdered heads as they went.

15th May, very late.

There was a private dinner party tonight in the beautiful pale green and gold dining room in La Muette. It was for the royal family only and after being met at the door by the King himself who took me gracefully by the hand and led me, blushing and self conscious into the room, I was finally introduced to the Dauphin's two younger brothers the Comte de Provence, a sly looking fat youth only a few weeks younger than myself with sleepy brown eyes and the youngest of the trio, the Comte d'Artois, who is the best looking of the princes with a distinctly Italianate look about him and full, sensual lips.

The Comte de Provence almost made me laugh behind my fan when he gave me a quick look up and down rather as all the ladies do. 'I am very pleased to meet you at last,' he intoned with a heavy courtesy in German. 'I have been studying your language with my tutor,' he said when I looked surprised and perhaps I imagined it but did I detect a hint of triumph in the look that he shot towards the Dauphin? 'I thought it would be nice for someone to greet you in your own tongue.' No, I didn't imagine it at all, he was definitely trying to get one over his elder brother.

I turned to the Comte d'Artois, whose dark eyes met mine admiringly. 'I do hope that when it is time for me to marry they find a princess as pretty as you,' he said with a charming smile as he raised my hand to his lips with a practised grace. It is hard to believe that he is only twelve years old as he seems far older both in appearance and manners.

With an air of regret the King passed my hand to the Dauphin, who without looking at me stiffly walked to the table, which was lit by dozens of candelabra and covered with luscious blooming pink, peach and yellow Peonies, gleaming silverware, fine crystal glasses and a beautiful Sèvres dinner service.

'How pretty everything looks,' I remarked to my husband in a pleasant manner.

He gave a tiny shrug. 'I suppose that it is.' He stared down miserably at his plate and played nervously with the silver fork that lay beside it.

I watched him for a moment in silence, trying desperately to think of something, anything that I could say that would at least make him look at me or show some enthusiasm. 'Do you enjoy hunting?' was all that I could think of and inwardly I kicked myself.

'Yes, I do.' The Dauphin still didn't look at me and there was another long pause as he played with his fork and tried to think of something else to say. 'Do you hunt?'

I shook my head. 'No, alas.' I caught the eye of the Princesse de Lamballe, who was sitting near the end of the table, next to her sister-in-law, the Duchesse de Chartres and we shared a shy smile. It made me feel so much better to have a friend amongst the guests, especially when I allowed my gaze to wander about

the table and realized that everyone present was staring at me with the same expressions of mixed curiosity and hostility.

Everyone that is except the extremely pretty blonde with melting blue eyes and a charming smile who sat at the far end of the table and whose long lashed eyes regarded me with a disconcerting degree of frank amusement. She was beautifully dressed in a lace edged gown of shimmering pale gold silk that gleamed in the candlelight and revealed rather more of her opulent bosom than was perhaps strictly necessary and the more I looked at her, the more I began to feel that my own carefully chosen gown of pale pink satin trimmed with pink ribbons, diamonds and exquisite lace was hopelessly and embarrassingly gauche.

I stared back at her in envious resentment then quickly turned away with a blush when she caught my eye, winked and sardonically raised her wine glass to me in a silent toast.

I leaned towards the Dauphin, who was enthusiastically chewing on a chicken leg and not paying the slightest bit of attention to any of the conversations about the table or any of the other guests. 'Who is that pretty lady at the end of the table?' I whispered, making sure that I did not allow my eyes to slide again in her direction.

He looked up at me then with a startled expression. 'What?' His mouth hung slightly open as he frowned and peered past me, his eyes screwed up as he tried to see past the rich gleam of the candles and silverware. 'What lady?' I felt myself go crimson lest she overhear him and began to wish that I had not asked.

His cousin, Madame de Chartres who was sitting on his other side came to my rescue and leaned languidly across him with a smile to whisper: 'That, my dear one, is Madame la Comtesse du Barry.'

The name was not familiar to me and I did not remember my Abbé ever mentioning anyone of this name to me. 'Who is she? What is her position at court?'

Madame de Chartres began to laugh while the Dauphin frowned down at his plate, looking as though he wished he could be anywhere else. I had already noticed that his ears went quite pink when he felt embarrassed and now they were glowing scarlet beneath his white, powdered wig.

'Her position at court?' The Duchesse hid a smile behind her diamond encrusted fan. 'Well, let me see, Madame la Comtesse's position is to... *amuse* his Majesty.' She spoke in an exaggerated whisper and I was mortified when a muted ripple of laughter swept down the table.

I did not immediately understand her. Why would I? 'Then I would like to be her rival,' I said rather stiffly with an affectionate look at King Louis, who was pretending not to listen to our conversation. 'I too would like to amuse his Majesty.' I met his eyes and he smiled and like Madame du Barry raised his glass to me.

The Dauphin looked up then, finally, from his meal and fixed his eyes upon me for a moment as though he had only just realized that I was there and was seeing me for the very first time. He looked as though he would have liked to have said something but after a few seconds he looked away again and the moment had gone.

I glanced down the table at Madame du Barry and saw that she was still staring at me, only this time with a hint of defiance. I do not think that we are going to become friends.

Wednesday, 16th May, early morning.

Silly, gossipy Madame de Chartres filled in the gaps after dinner as we walked arm in arm to the lovely yellow and gold salon, where there was to be a recital by some of the stars of the Paris Opéra.

'How pretty we look together,' she said, posing in front of one of the enormous gilt framed mirrors that lined the gallery. 'It is so nice to have another young person to talk to.' I looked at our reflections and had to agree that we looked charming together in our frothy pastel dresses, our eyes starry and cheeks delicately flushed thanks to a little too much wine and our powdered and scented hair tumbling in ringlets about our shoulders.

'Who is Madame du Barry?' I asked in a whisper, looking around carefully to ensure that the lady was not in earshot. 'She is very pretty but, I think, not one of us.'

'Not one of us?' the Duchesse trilled with laughter. 'No, no, most assuredly *not!*' She leaned closer so that I was overpowered by her heavy violet and rose scent and whispered in my ear. 'I do not know all the details but what I do know is all perfectly shocking, my dear! Apparently Madame la Comtesse is the illegitimate daughter of a common seamstress and a monk!' She drew back to observe my reaction and then, clearly satisfied with what she saw, carried on. 'I have also heard that she plied her trade on the streets before she found a wealthy protector and that she was passed from man to man until she caught His Majesty's eye and found herself at Versailles.'

I could not hide my shock. In all my pampered, sheltered life no one, not even Amalia who could be counted on to divulge pretty much anything no matter how shocking, had ever spoken to me about such matters and yet here was the pretty Duchesse de Chartres, a girl not much older than myself, talking about it as though it was just a matter of course.

'Now, now, do not look so scandalized!' Madame de Chartres said with a giggle. 'You will have to get used to such things if you are going to live amongst us all at Versailles! The whole palace is a hotbed of gossip and intrigue.' She gave me a pitying look and I could tell that she found me rather disappointing, all things considered. 'You aren't excessively devout are you?'

'I don't know. No, I don't think so.' I blushed, crossing my fingers behind my back and feeling like I was betraying Mama with every word that dropped from my lips. However, Mama was hundreds of miles away in Vienna and I was here, in Paris and all alone.

The Duchesse gave me a quick shrewd look then shrugged her glittering shoulders and carried on. 'We were all terribly shocked when we found out that Madame la Comtesse du Barry had been invited to the dinner party tonight. It was supposed to be for family only and she may well be the King's mistress but that certainly doesn't make her one of us, does it?' She pulled an exquisite painted porcelain snuff box from her bosom and flicked it open before offering it to me. 'Do you?' She smiled at my disgusted expression. 'Ah, no, you do not.' She tapped some out on to her wrist and sniffed deeply. 'I could not believe my ears when I heard that the King had invited that woman here but what can we do? He is the master here and we have no option but to do as he says or find ourselves shipped off to the provinces, there to kick our poor heels amidst the cows and rustics.' She shook her pretty feather covered head dolefully. 'No, no,

that would not do at *all* and so, my dear one, we endure and so must you.'

Oh really?

16th May, midnight, my wedding day.

The royal family returned to Versailles immediately after the concert and I was left alone at La Muette with my attendants. I felt rather despondent as I walked through dark corridors back to my lovely rooms that overlooked the Bois de Boulogne but my mood soon lifted when Madame de Noailles, who was quivering with an unusual excitement drew my attention to a huge crimson velvet coffer that had been placed beside my lace and ribbon bedecked dressing table.

'It was his Majesty's wish that you be presented with the royal jewels before your wedding,' she said as I ran forward and pulled open the lid. 'These jewels were worn by Her Majesty Queen Marie and also Her Highness the Dauphine.'

I was barely listening, so excited was I by the wonderful, glittering, sumptuous display laid out before me on duck egg blue silk shelves. I allowed my fingers to trail over rubies, sapphires, emeralds, pearls and dazzling, perfect diamonds. It seemed incredible that all this wealth, this splendour should have fallen into my hands.

Madame de Noailles stepped forward and pointed out a particularly fine pearl necklace. 'This belonged to the Queen Marie Thérèse, consort of Louis XIV,' she said in a lecturing tone. 'He presented it to her upon the occasion of the birth of their son, the Dauphin.'

I nodded, unable to take my eyes off the piles of necklaces, parures, stomachers, rings, brooches and bracelets. 'How fascinating,' I murmured, lifting out an exquisite diamond bracelet and fastening it around my slim wrist before turning it this way and that so that I could admire it.

'That was one of the late Dauphine's favourite pieces,' Madame de Noailles said with a disapproving sniff. 'She often wore it when she played cards in the evening. I believe that she was wearing it the evening that she was taken ill.' She paused. 'Before she died.'

I felt suddenly sick and hastily pulled the bracelet off.

16th May, half past seven.

We leave for Versailles in half an hour and I am already sitting here in all of my finery and diamonds, waiting to go. I have been up since dawn and have not had nearly enough sleep thanks to the thunderstorm that raged overhead in the middle of the night, the seemingly endless sound of rain beating against the window panes and the flutterings of panic deep in my stomach.

I had to rush to my little privy to be horribly sick after the fashionable Parisian coiffure had finished dressing, pomading and powdering my hair and poor Mesdames de Chaulnes and Mailly had to hold my ringlets, lace sleeves and blue satin skirts back as I clutched the china chamber pot and heaved and shuddered.

'You worry too much,' Jeanne de Mailly remarked afterwards with a kindly smile as I wiped my face with a linen cloth and tried to compose myself. 'Everyone here thinks that you are exquisite and absolutely charming.' She took my hand and gave it a comforting squeeze. 'You really have nothing to worry about.'

'But what if it all goes wrong?' I said dubiously. 'After all, the Dauphin can barely bring himself to look at me! What if he doesn't like me? Can he have me sent back home to Vienna?'

Jeanne rolled her eyes. 'Dear me, did no one take you aside before you left Vienna and tell you what an odd, cold fish your *fiancé* is?' She took a cup of freshly made orange blossom tea from Madame de Chaulnes and handed it to me. 'Drink this. I can't promise you any miracles but it will at least help to calm your nerves.'

I drank thankfully. 'So the Dauphin doesn't really hate me?' I asked nervously.

Both ladies laughed. 'No, he really doesn't hate you,' Madame de Chaulnes replied with a smile. 'It's just the way that he is.' She shrugged. 'You should consider yourself fortunate that he isn't a shameless flirt like his grandfather.'

'Marie-Paule!' Madame de Mailly stared at her friend, clearly torn between consternation and amusement. 'Be careful!'

Madame de Chaulnes just shrugged again. 'Oh why not just say it?' she said, taking away my cup of tea and putting it back on the table beside us. 'It's only the truth after all.'

16th May, later, Versailles.

I am here! I am finally here! I feel almost giddy with excitement and can't stop looking about myself in awe, pinching myself as I take in the expanse of shiny parqueted floors, the tall windows overlooking the enormous park, the lofty ceilings where the reflected pink, blue and yellow light from enormous crystal chandeliers dances and scatters. Everywhere I look there is beautiful furniture, flowers, statues and paintings. Very little in this palace is designed to be practical, even the chairs are spindly legged, exquisite and horribly uncomfortable but somehow that doesn't matter at all.

I felt quite sick with dread as I climbed into my lovely carriage for the last time but this was swiftly replaced by excitement as I gazed out of the windows and saw the hundreds of happy, smiling people who had lined the route to see me pass. It was a beautiful blossom scented morning; bright, fresh, sunny and giving no hint at all of the storms that had struck during the previous night.

'It is a perfect day for a wedding,' Madame de Chaulnes remarked to me with a smile. 'No bride could ever wish for better.'

I grinned and nodded, feeling as light hearted and cheerful as any simple village girl going to marry her love as we drove through sunlight dappled woods and past charming little cottages swarming with happy, grinning children. For a while I did not allow myself to worry about the Dauphin or the strange family that I was about to enter, but simply gave myself over to enjoying the moment and allowing the obvious excitement of the spectators to lift my spirits.

I do not think that I will ever forget my first glimpse of Versailles. I had seen pictures before of course as the Duc de Choiseul had very kindly sent me engravings of the château, which Mama had had framed and then hung in my rooms at the Hofburg but nothing could ever have really prepared me for the reality. I tried to remain blasé in front of my ladies, who were watching me closely for my initial reaction but I could not help but gasp when we began the short drive up the tree lined avenue that led to the main gates and I saw the

enormous, golden edifice slowly unfold before me, the sunshine making the soft yellow stone appear to shimmer while the light from dozens of tall windows gleamed and glittered.

The chapel bells rang out as my carriage passed through the ornate golden gates and then pulled up in the courtyard, where I was immediately surrounded by a chattering press of courtiers, all impatient to get their first glimpse of me, the girl who may well one day be their Queen. A footman elbowed his way through the throng and let down the carriage steps before pulling open the door and offering me his arm. 'Have a care! Have a care!' he shouted over his shoulder as he helped me down and then led me through the crowd into the marble and glass vestibule of the château and then on to a large white paneled room hung with portraits.

'Your apartments are not yet ready for you and so in the meantime you are to be lodged here in the rooms previously inhabited by her Highness the Dauphine Marie-Josèphe.' It was Madame de Noailles of course, keen as always to impress upon me that I was an imposter leaping into the shoes, jewels and now bedchamber of the dead. 'His Majesty hopes that you will be comfortable here.'

I looked around with a smile, loving the high ceilings and bright, huge windows which opened on to a flower covered parterre. 'It is lovely.' I followed the Comtesse through two more large white airy rooms to the bedchamber, where a crowd of maids and hairdressers awaited me. They all fell silent and curtsied low as I walked into the room, my high heels tip tapping on the polished wooden floor and I blushed as I felt their eyes sweep over me, noting my every deficiency and appraising my good features.

'She has nice eyes,' I heard one of them whisper. 'Pretty hair too.'

Madame de Mailly led me to the huge lace bedecked dressing table that stood in front of the windows and gently pressed me down on to the stool. 'The wedding is in three hours time,' she said with a smile. 'Plenty of time to make you the most beautiful bride that Versailles has ever seen.'

I yawned and struggled to stay awake as they swiftly stripped me then laced me into a new whalebone corset and tied panniers to my slim waist. Next came layer after layer of gauzy petticoats, each one trimmed with beautiful lace and finished with blue and pink velvet ribbons. After this there was a beautiful gown

of white brocade and cloth of silver, spangled all over with diamonds and pearls and with yet more exquisite lace at the bosom and sleeves. There was some consternation when it was discovered that my dress was slightly too small but after much conferring with the dressmaker and maids, it was decided that no one would notice and so they laced me up and hoped for the best.

When I was in my dress and the skirt had been tweaked to the satisfaction of Madame de Noailles, a gorgeous diamond necklace was fastened around my neck, diamond and pearl earrings were hung from my earlobes and the dead Dauphine's diamond bracelets were slipped on to my wrists.

It was then time to sit in front of the mirror, which was surrounded by a swarm of chubby gilt cherubs holding aloft garlands of roses, and allow the ladies to apply a two pink circles of rouge to the apples of my cheeks and a touch of red rouge to my lips.

'You look magnificent,' Madame de Chaulnes said with an approving nod. 'Like a Queen.'

I stared at myself in the mirror and almost burst into tears as I looked so different, so unlike myself, so terribly old. If I ever do become Queen, one of my first acts will be to abolish the hideous and deeply unflattering overuse of rouge that seems to be prevalent at this court. My second act will be to sack Madame de Noailles.

16th May, later.

At the stroke of one exactly, all of the pretty ormolu, porcelain and gold clocks in my rooms chimed in unison and the footmen opened the bedroom doors with a great deal of bowing, clicking of heels and flourishing.

'It is time,' Madame de Noailles intoned with a solemn look. 'The King awaits us.'

I hastily stood up, whereupon all of the maids knelt around my feet and teased out the heavy folds of my wide, panniered skirts so that they would appear to best advantage. As soon as I was deemed absolutely presentable, my ladies in waiting arranged themselves behind me and we slowly retraced our steps through the apartment until we came back to the glass and marble vestibule and

the beautiful maroon and green marble staircase that lay beyond it.

'This is the Queen's staircase,' Madame de Noailles whispered, unable as ever to resist the urge to lecture me. 'It leads to what will be your own rooms in the palace.'

I ignored her as I was too busy trying to remember where we were going and at the same time walk up the staircase with the correct amount of mingled gravitas and grace as my head turned this way and that, admiring the beautiful *trompe l'oeil* architectural vistas on the walls and the exquisite gilt and marble decorations.

At the top of the stairs, a pair of guards swung open a door and I walked through two empty white wainscotted rooms which overlooked the main marble courtyard of the château. 'This is the room of the King's guard,' I could hear Madame de Noailles murmuring behind me, 'and this is his state dining room where his Majesty eats his meals in public.'

I smiled and nodded, while all the while I was listening to every sound and breathing in the very essence of my new home. As I walked through the hyacinth, rose and beeswax scented white and gold rooms, which were more magnificent than beautiful, I listened to the delicate tinkling of the chandeliers overhead, the sound of a harpsichord being jauntily played in the distance, the whispers of my ladies behind me, the gentle squeak of the aged parquet beneath my cloth of silver high heeled shoes and the excited yapping of the dozens of dogs that scampered freely through the state rooms, their sharp nails skittering across polished floors.

We came to a richly decorated room with mirrors set into the walls and a beautiful cornice decorated with a gilt trellis and golden cherubs playing with garlands of flowers. I looked with interest at a huge painting which hung between the tall windows and depicted a young Louis XIV surrounded by his family. I recognized my great grandfather, Philippe d'Orléans sitting in between his pretty English wife, Henriette Anne and her mother, Queen Henrietta Maria and I imagined to myself that he was looking down upon me with approval in his dark eyes.

The doors swung open and I was admitted into a sumptuously decorated gilt encrusted

bedchamber, dominated by an enormous crimson and gold brocade hung four poster bed with huge white ostrich plumes at each corner. 'This is the King's own bedchamber,' Madame de Noailles hissed as I looked about myself with interest. A huge white cat was curled up, fast asleep on a giant blue and silver cushion in front of the fireplace.

'His Majesty awaits you in his council chamber,' she continued as we came to another closed door, which a waiting footman sprang to open.

I took a deep breath and stepped into a large room with beautiful gilt decorations on the white panelled walls, tall mirrored doors and heavy sky blue and gold curtains, which were pulled open so that beams of sunlight spilled across the floor. The King and his family had arranged themselves in front of the fireplace to greet me and I smiled at each in turn, desperately keen to make a good impression.

'Welcome to Versailles,' King Louis said with a gentle smile. 'You are most welcome.' He brought forward two little girls, both of whom seemed to be no more than ten years old. 'May I present my granddaughters, Madame Clothilde and Madame Élisabeth?'

I smiled down at the little girls as they curtsied stiffly before me. 'I hope that I will be like a sister to you,' I said, taking their hands in mine and kissing them. 'How pretty you both look.' Both girls were dressed in matching gowns of pale primrose yellow satin with their hair powdered and dressed in the same formal style as all of the adults. The eldest of the two, Princesse Clothilde was quite fat with merry brown eyes while the younger, Princesse Élisabeth was pale with blue eyes and a distinctly mutinous air.

'I like your dress,' she said now with a smile before retreating behind her grandfather's back and sticking her tongue out at me.

'You must forgive her,' the King said with a fond look at the little girl as I tried not to laugh. 'She was little more than a baby when she lost her mother and has been much indulged ever since.'

16th May, later.

As soon as the introductions were over, the King took my hand and led me to

the Dauphin, whom I had barely noticed since entering the room. He seemed to be trying his best to hide from view and looked uncomfortable and ill at ease in his suit of white satin, sewn all over with diamonds and gold embroidery and I noticed with irritation that he was scratching at his neck underneath the fine white linen of his shirt collar, leaving red scratch marks beneath his powdered wig.

'Are you ready?' the King asked as he gave my hand to the Dauphin. 'All of Versailles awaits you.'

I nodded, feeling the Dauphin's hand grow hot and clammy against my own. 'I am ready.'

The King nodded to the waiting footmen and they instantly flung open the huge doors that led to the Hall of Mirrors. The Dauphin led me out and the King, royal family and our attendants arranged themselves behind us so that we formed a long, glittering procession.

I paused for a second in the doorway, my courage failing me as I looked at the rows upon rows upon rows of splendidly dressed courtiers who all stared at me as they jostled each other rudely for space. I wanted to be able to remember this scene, my first proper glimpse of Versailles for the rest of my life. There was light and crystal and marble and splendour wherever I looked and I knew that the Abbé had not lied when he told me that the Hall of Mirrors was the most beautiful room in all of the world.

'Madame,' the Dauphin murmured, gently reminding me that there was no time to stand and stare.

I gathered up all of my bravado and lifted my head high before allowing him to lead me slowly down the gallery and then through a series of equally opulent and gorgeously appointed rooms, all of which were crammed with beautiful furniture, portraits, statues and wonderful ceiling paintings depicting Roman deities. Each room was filled with people, who fell silent and curtsied with insolent stares as I went past. The women openly looked me up and down then whispered to each other behind their painted fans while the men's gazes were much more appraising and lingered on my bosom then my ankles, which were just visible beneath the heavy silver skirts.

'This is the way to the chapel,' the Dauphin whispered as we went down some stairs, leaving the King who would be watching from his balcony upstairs. Oh marvellous, he likes to lecture me as well. What fun. 'We go this way to Mass every morning.'

'In front of all those people?' I whispered back, aghast.

He looked at me then and I believe that I saw the faintest glimmer of a smile. 'Naturally.'

It did not take us long to reach the royal chapel and there was a small pause in the vestibule as my ladies came forward and tweaked my skirts and tried their best to hide the wide expanse of lacing at my back which betrayed the fact that my dress was much too small for me. 'Good luck,' Madame de Mailly whispered as they melted back again, their silk skirts rustling against the marble floor. 'You look beautiful. Look straight ahead at the altar and ignore all the stares.'

I smiled and squeezed the Dauphin's hand reassuringly, wishing, now that I had overcome my own fears that there was some way that I could bring the colour back to his cheeks and stop him trembling. 'It will be over soon,' was the best that I could manage as we stepped forward into the luminous white and gold light of the chapel.

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When I first started writing this book, it was my intention to focus on Marie Antoinette's childhood, a period that I felt had been generally neglected by other writers when in fact it sheds a lot of light on the woman and Queen that she was eventually to become.

This is a work of fiction based on fact, which was sourced from a terrifying and enormous pile of books about the lives of Marie Antoinette, her family, her friends and the times that they lived in. I would recommend Antonia Fraser's *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*, Joan Haslip's *Marie Antoinette*, Evelyne Lever's *Marie Antoinette: The Last Queen of France*, Caroline Weber's *Queen of Fashion* and Ian Dunlop's *Marie Antoinette* to anyone who wants to know more about this most glamorous, sweet natured and ill fated of Queens.

About the Author

Melanie Clegg is a pink haired art history graduate, casual historian, GIN taster, lapsed goth, failed Parisienne, Versailles obsessive, proud Ripperologist, Georgette Heyer fanatic and Victorian Prostitute re-enactor who lives in deepest darkest Bristol with her family but would rather be in either Whitechapel or Paris.

Meticulously researched and elegantly crafted, 'The Secret Diary of a Princess' was her first novel and was born from a desire to tell the story of Marie Antoinette from an unusual and yet still fascinating angle, focusing on her early life at the Viennese court, the machinations behind her betrothal to the Dauphin Louis and then finally her initial impressions of her new home, Versailles. All told by Marie Antoinette herself as she grows from an enchanting, wilful child into a poised and beautiful young woman.

Melanie's second book, 'Blood Sisters', a sweeping and dramatic saga set during the turbulent years of the French Revolution, follows the fortunes of a trio of aristocratic sisters who are caught up in the Revolution while trying to discover the truth about their past.

Her third book, 'Before the Storm' is a re-imagining of Edith Wharton's *The Buccaneers* set in the opulent and often treacherous worlds of Georgian London, Marie Antoinette's Versailles and the bloodshed and terror of Revolutionary Paris. It's been described as having 'Lush, dreamy historical detail with a slightly punk rock aesthetic...'

Melanie is now working on three very different books - the sequel to *The Secret Diary of a Princess*, a novel set in Whitechapel during the Ripper murders of 1888 and another about Henrietta Stuart, the favourite sister of Charles II and sister in law of Louis XIV.

You can find out more by visiting Melanie's popular art, history and writing blog at www.madameguillotine.org.uk.