



A
Sweep
in Time

A WHISPERING TREE SPIN-OFF

SHIRLEY BEAR

A Sweep in Time

By

Shirley Bear

A Whispering Tree Spin-off

Adult Fiction by Shirley Bear

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Whispering Tree

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To comment or ask questions:

shirley.fedorak5@gmail.com

<https://www.shirleybearfedorakauthor.com>

Dedication

To my loyal readers

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Chapter One

Napoléon III

Paris, 2025

The limousine dropped us at the entrance to the historic hotel, and we stepped into a bygone era of old-world glamour and luxury. How many secrets were locked in this magnificent hotel, and how many ghosts wandered its hallways at night searching for what they had lost? A thrill ran up my spine. What an incredible backdrop for a telepathic empath.

“My gawd, isn’t this something,” Ryan said when we walked into the lobby.

“Breathtaking.”

A glass ceiling rose high above the lobby filled with sofas and chairs in soft shades of green and beige. “It’s a winter garden,” I whispered. Everywhere I looked chandeliers hung from the ceiling and white marble columns held up the roof. “It’s perfect, Ryan, I love it.”

Ryan nuzzled my neck. “I was hoping you would like the old-world charm.” He pulled off a fake leer. “Perfect for the seduction I plan.”

Light from the vaulted ceiling shone down on his blond curls and created an angelic halo around his face. I reached up to brush a curl from his forehead, but a wave of ghostly whispers struck me, and I clutched his arm to keep from falling.

“What’s wrong, Ari?”

“Whispers.” My voice came out a weak croak.

Ryan frowned and his amazing aquamarine eyes clouded with worry. “From whom? The lobby is empty except for a few staff and that old man snoozing in the lobby bar.”

“I-I think it’s memories from guests who once stayed in this hotel, maybe long ago.” The whispers swirled in and out of my mind, and I rubbed my throbbing head. “Longing, sadness, guilt. Wasn’t anyone happy back then?”

Ryan held up his hand to stop the approaching concierge. “Maybe we should move to a newer hotel. Some place without so many memories.”

“No, I love this place.”

The mental block I raised softened the haunting whispers, and I breathed in the rich smells of leather, posh floor coverings, and ancient paintings. “It’s Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque all in one. Like we’ve travelled back in time.”

Ryan nodded to the confused concierge hovering nearby. The young man bowed and smiled. “Monsieur and Madame Levin, welcome. We’ve awaited your arrival. My name is Pierre. Follow me, *s’il vous plait*.”

I held back from running my hands over the marble and onyx decorations or the silver- and gold-plated bronze as we followed the concierge through the lobby. No need to come off as a wide-

eyed tourist, but the opulence and antiquity of the hotel enchanted me. And something else. Despite my mental block, I sensed a presence hovering nearby. Someone powerful and resolute. “I wouldn’t be surprised if the ghost of Napoléon III stepped out of one of these rooms,” I said. Now why did Napoléon III pop into my head?

Ryan smirked. “Better watch yourself, I hear he was quite the womanizer.”

“*Oui, monsieur*, Napoléon III would have found your comely wife quite appetizing, but we do not champion the idea of ghosts in the hotel,” the concierge said. He unlocked the ornate twin doors to the Ambassador suite. “*Voilà!* Your suite, madame and monsieur. You will be most comfortable in this charming apartment.”

The suite was everything I imagined. High ceilings in the French style, inviting blue and beige furniture in the sitting room, and a gigantic bed in the bedroom. “The room is perfect, Pierre,” I said. I tossed my tight shoes and ran my sore toes over the soft geometric carpet. “Ooh, that feels so good.”

The sofa beckoned, but my newly free toes danced around the room. “Oops.” I grabbed a bronze bust of Napoléon Bonaparte as it was about to topple over. “Sorry.”

The concierge gasped, and his face paled.

Ryan caught my arm and pulled me close. “My beautiful, klutzy wife, you nearly gave him a heart attack,” he whispered in my ear.

“He’ll get over it.”

“*Ariana ...*”

“*Gran?*”

“*Yes ... be mindful ...*”

“*About what? I’m on my honeymoon in Paris.*”

“*If you go ... stay true ...*”

“*Go where?*”

Silence.

How were Gran’s whispers reaching all the way to Paris, and what did she mean about being mindful?

Sighs and groans.

That sounded like the women of The Tree. “*Can the women hear me?*”

“*A little, through me.*”

“*Well, tell them to hold on. I’m coming home in a month, and I want to hear more of their stories, but right now buzz off, this is my honeymoon.*”

Their sighs turned to giggles.

I hurried to the balcony and opened the door to the glorious city. Horns honked and diesel fumes floated into the room. The sounds and smells of Paris. The *Opera Garnier* stood center stage across the street. Buskers were performing for a small crowd on the opera house’s steps.

I whirled around. “Let’s—”

The suite blurred, then refocused, but the room looked different, older, and Ryan was gone. My heart sank. Is this what Gran meant about going somewhere? But how was I having a vision

now? I was in Paris, not at the whispering tree on the Canadian prairies. None of the women of The Tree were strong enough to reach all the way to Paris and pull me into their past lives.

“Mademoiselle is something wrong?” a concierge, but not our concierge, said.

He could see me? That was new. “I-I’m a bit confused. Where is my husband?”

The concierge blinked. “Your husband? I am sorry, Mademoiselle Benoit, but you arrived alone except for your chaperone, and you are unmarried.”

Benoit? Who was this Mademoiselle Benoit? And why did the concierge smirk when he said I was unmarried?

The room resembled a smaller version of the Ambassador Suite, but the dim light from candles and the spittoon squatting at the entrance offered a solid clue that I was somewhere or somewhen else. I whirled around and nearly lost my balance in a long, heavy skirt. *Long Skirt?* Why was I wearing a long skirt? The blue jean mini skirt and yellow t-shirt I wore on our flight had disappeared. In its place, a tight-fitting bodice choked my breathing, and a voluminous bell-shaped skirt of dreary brown fabric ballooned around me. My sleeves were so tight I could barely lift my arms to toss away the frumpy cap on my head. And what was with the loopy braids around my ears? A sickening dread took hold of me.

“Mademoiselle?”

“Oh yes, my mistake.”

The concierge left, a puzzled frown on his face, and questions about my mental stability in his mind. I had to be careful. If I was in an earlier time, accusations of insanity, especially being a female, could land me in one of France’s dreadful asylums.

I waddled in my tent dress to a nearby full-length mirror. The lines and features of my face seemed more refined and paler, and I had a brown mole beside my left eye. My brunette hair was the same, minus the blonde highlights, though shaped into hideous earmuff braids. Folds of fabric hid the rest of me or rather Mademoiselle Benoit.

I paced the room, tripping on one or more petticoats when I forgot to be careful. Reality slowly sank in. I was experiencing more than an empathic vision. I was trapped in a different time.

Gran?

No response. But how would Gran reach me in another time? Her spirit was good, but not that good.

A light knock on the door pulled me out of my confused daze. “Yes?”

A parade of women dressed in identical long black dresses and white aprons strutted into the room loaded down with garment bags, make-up cases, and various paraphernalia I could not identify. Three young men followed close behind carrying heavy pails of steaming water.

“What is all this?” I said in native French. When did I learn how to speak French?

A tiny, older woman with gray braided hair and a slight limp curtsied. I sensed nothing but kind thoughts from her. Wisdom shone in her tired eyes, and I liked her right off. “For your bath, mademoiselle. I am Estelle, your lady’s maid. We are coming to fix you for your evening.”

“My evening?”

“Oui, mademoiselle. You must be ready for your evening.”

I backed away and nearly tripped over my pesky skirt. “I-I’m not sure about this.”

Estelle frowned. "But 'tis a most important social event."

Was this a dream? Maybe I was still on the plane in the throes of a jetlag dream. Jetlag did strange things to the mind. But deep down, I doubted the dream part. Well, I would play out whatever was happening. Might even be fun. "Okay, let's get started."

Estelle's maids fussed over me as I bathed. Not something I was comfortable with, but whatever. Their cacophony of thoughts slipped through my block. Most were anxious to finish with me and head to their quarters. Some had assignations planned for the evening that Estelle would not approve of.

Once out of the bath, the dressing ritual began. Layer upon layer of chemises, corsets, and bustles found their way onto me. A metal crinoline that reminded me of chicken wire topped the ensemble.

"Now for doin' your hair, mademoiselle," Estelle said.

Two maids sat me at a dressing table in front of a blurry mirror. They puffed and teased and folded my hair into a dowdy bun at the back of my head. The updo reminded me of my schoolmarm guise before Gran took me under her wing and accomplished a miraculous make-over. I morphed from a moth into a butterfly that summer. At least that's what Ryan called me. Ryan. A deep longing for my husband gripped me. Time to wake up from this strange dream.

One of the younger maids pulled strands of my hair down on both sides of my head and made to cut them off at my ear. I stayed her hand. "No, pull the hair back into the bun, but leave a few long strands falling along my cheeks."

The woman frowned and reached for my hair again. "But, mademoiselle, that is not the style."

I would not go to my "most important social event" with hair like floppy rabbit ears. I dodged her scissors. "It's my style."

Terrified thoughts flew out of her mind. "But you will stand out as coarse. Unfashionable."

"I doubt it."

Estelle put an end to the argument. She clapped her hands. "Enough! Mademoiselle can be wearing her hair how she pleases."

Was that a bit of mirth in her voice?

The younger maids curtsyed and backed away, but their horrified mental chatter was overriding my block. I upped the strength. "Thank you, Estelle."

She curtsyed and a flash of spirit flashed in her eyes. "My pleasure. And now for your gown."

Estelle unwrapped the garment bag and pulled out an exquisite burgundy evening gown. The full skirt had three layers of flounces with burgundy bows and black lace.

I fingered the smooth silk. "Oh, how beautiful, it's almost translucent."

"Oui, mademoiselle, the monsieur sends the finest to his ..."

Monsieur? I had a monsieur in this dream? Perhaps a dashing rogue? "Who is this monsieur?"

Estelle stared at me, her brown eyes wide and appraising. Had I made a serious faux pas?

"We do not know, mademoiselle, it is a mystery," she said at last. "We just obey his secret orders."

The other maids giggled behind their hands. Estelle frowned at them. "You must attend the event is all we know." She clapped her hands again. This time at me. "Now let us begin."

I eyed the massive gown. How did one climb into something the size of a Smart car?

“Don’t worry, mademoiselle, we be helping you.”

“*Merci.*”

Two of the maids lifted the gown over my head, and soft folds fell to the floor. The off-the-shoulder sleeves clung to my arms. Gran’s hearty cooking had given me cleavage that spilled over the tight bodice.

A maid handed me long white gloves. I slipped them on but stopped the maid from placing a frumpy black bonnet on my head. “No, I shall go bareheaded.”

She patted her own ruffled bonnet. “But mademoiselle—”

I closed my mind to her horrified thoughts. “No buts, I won’t wear that thing.”

Estelle stepped in again. “I’m thinking a diamond tiara would be more suitable, mademoiselle.”

A diamond tiara? I did not bother stifling my grin. “A tiara, I like that.”

The sparkling tiara tucked in front of my homely bun. Estelle fixed it in place with pearl pins. Too bad this was a dream. I looked good.

“Diamond earrings for mademoiselle,” another maid said. She helped me attach the small earrings.

“And now for your make-up.”

Estelle draped a cloth around my gown and began creating exotic eyes and blush cheeks. “Your pale coloring is perfect, mademoiselle. No need for powder.”

Thank goodness.

Estelle handed me a small opera purse. “For smelling salts and a hanky.”

Smelling salts. Let me guess, for when I felt faint because my bodice was too tight.

“The night air is chilly, mademoiselle,” Estelle said. She draped a hooded cloak of the same burgundy around my shoulders. “Be taking the cloak off the moment you enter the building.” She dabbed perfume behind my ears, then stood back and admired her creation. “Now you are ready, mademoiselle.”

Ready for what?

#

Paris, 1875

Despite the hotel being across the street from the opera house, my prune-faced chaperone insisted we take a carriage for appearances sake. The coachman dropped us at the entrance to the Opera Garnier. Though she said not a word, the chaperone’s thoughts directed toward me were not flattering as I ascended the steps to the opera.

Dozens of women wearing *haute couture* and men dressed in black tuxedos streamed through the massive building’s entrance. None paid me the slightest attention, but their inner thoughts battered my mind. To see and be seen appeared the main purpose for their evening out.

Inside the opera house, a grand staircase of purest white marble split into two stairways on the second level. Gold, onyx, bronze, and marble sculptures and friezes covered every inch of the

house's walls and floors. Dozens of chandeliers lit the stunning frescoes covering the dome's ceiling. I recognized *The Triumph of Apollo* paintings.

"The Paris Opera Garnier. I'm inside the opera house," I murmured to the bronze female *torchères* standing on either side of the staircase. Now the elaborate dress and fashion rules made sense.

The staircase beckoned, but my cumbersome gown proved a challenge. I stubbed my big toe on the first step. My small pumps fit poorly, and I was gaping at my surroundings rather than watching my feet. I struggled to maintain my balance while I unclasped my cloak. A woman dressed in layers of green silk brocade tittered behind her fan. At my hair or my lack of grace?

An attendant hurried over and took the cloak from me. "*Merci.*"

"*Gran, are you getting any of this?*"

Still nothing.

My chaperone tsked beside me, her prudish lips pursed even tighter. Enough. "You are dismissed, madame."

She frowned, smacked her lips, then frowned again. "But mademoiselle, it is most unseemly for an unmarried woman to attend the opera alone."

"I'll risk it."

She sniffed and flounced away.

An older, dashing man dressed in a navy and red military uniform stood at the top of the left staircase. He beckoned to me. Was this the mysterious monsieur my ladies referred to?

"Well, here goes."

I lifted my gown's flowing skirt a couple inches and slowly walked up the stairs, my eyes trained on his hypnotic gaze. Close up, he was even more imposing. His piercing blue-gray eyes peered into my soul, and not even the long, bushy beard and the slight stoop to his shoulders lessened his magnetism.

He reached out to take my hand, but the man and the opera house faded away, and I was back in our suite. The heavy gown was gone, and my hair hung down my back in loose waves. Ryan was thanking the concierge.

"Ryan!"

He closed the door and turned to me. "What's wrong, Ari?"

"I-I just had the strangest dream or vision or whatever. I was in the opera house across the street but in another time. A man in a military uniform seemed to know me."

Ryan laughed and pulled me into his arms. "You, my darling, have the wildest imagination." He kissed my nose.

Why was he dismissing me? I tapped his forehead. "I didn't imagine it, boyo. I was right in the moment, part of it, not just an observer."

"Well, you're here now," he said.

"*Gran?*"

"*Ari ...*"

"*What just happened to me?*"

"*Time ... mission ...*"

I had a mission? In another time? “*But I’m a telepathic empath, not a time traveller.*”

Silence.

Ryan kissed me again, this time with a passion that set my heart racing. I pushed the disturbing vision away and concentrated on my new husband. “So what do newlyweds do on their honeymoon?” I whispered as I nuzzled his ear.

He swept me into his arms and carried me over to our bed. “Let me show you.” He slowly rolled my mini skirt down my legs and pulled my t-shirt over my head.

“Hmm, I seem to be in a condition of undress. But not you.” I stood and unbuckled his shorts. They dropped to the floor. “A good start.” Next, off came his shirt. “Now we’re equal.”

“Oh no, you’re still wearing far too many clothes,” Ryan said. He unstrapped my bra and tossed it. Then he rolled down my panties, stopping for a long minute as his tongue pressed into me.

I moaned and parted my legs for more. Ryan complied. My need built, but Ryan stopped.

“Slowly, Ari.”

We fell onto the bed. His touch sent waves of desire racing through me, and I arched my back to meet him. “Ryan ...”

Our lovemaking was slow and gentle until I disappeared.

#

The mystery man took my hand and kissed it. An electric thrill passed through my body, and my heart beat a little faster.

“Mademoiselle Benoit, thank you for joining me. Your beauty and grace have not diminished over the years.”

What did that mean?

I was back in the opera house and this man knew me. What must Ryan think? I left him while we were making love. “T-thank you, monsieur.” I imitated a weak curtsy.

He led me into the Grand Foyer. The gleaming gold, so bright it hurt my eyes, and the chandeliers dripping with gold and glass took my breath away. Guests milled in the room and greeted each other. A few of the women looked me up and down, an expression of disbelief or maybe disdain on their faces, but none approached us. Strange.

“Mademoiselle, the emperor’s box awaits us,” the man said.

Emperor’s box? Was this man royalty?

He slipped a program from the hands of an attendant who blinked and looked about, a confused expression on his face. The heading on the program announced *The Palais Garnier, Opera national de Paris présente Giselle*. The date in the corner of the program was 1875. A cold chill wrapped around me, and I shivered. What was I doing in the nineteenth century? And who was this man?

He led me to a luxurious box close to the stage. Black drapery hung above and below the box. We sat far back, out of the audience’s view. His mesmerizing eyes never left my face, and he held my gloved hand to his heart. “I have missed you. Even after all these years, you captivate me and fill my heart with longing, *chère*.”

Quite the sweet talker, but his words were confusing. “W-who are you, monsieur?”

He stroked his beard and frowned. "Of course, for you this is the first time," he murmured. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Charles-Louis Napoléon Bonaparte III." He bowed slightly.

My heart jumped. I was in the company of Emperor Napoléon III. What kind of vision was this, and how did he know me?

Aristocrats overflowed the balconies and main floor, but the emperor's box remained empty of all but us. I leaned over to ask Napoléon why, but the ballet began, and the beauty of *Giselle* swept me away to a time of love and betrayal, death and heartache.

As the last encore ended and the curtain dropped, I turned to Napoléon III. "The ballet was beautiful, Your Majesty. Thank you."

"No, it is I who should thank you for all that you have done."

He spoke in riddles. "What have I done, Your Majesty?"

Napoléon opened his mouth to reply, but the scene blurred, and I was once again in bed beside my sleeping husband. I cuddled close to him.

"Gran?"

"Here ..."

"Can you tell me more ..."

Silence.

"Gran? I met Napoléon III. Why?"

The women of The Tree sighed and moaned, but Gran's whispers rose above them. *"All for a reason ..."*

Chapter Two

A Time Travelling Empath

Paris, 2025

The vision or whatever haunted me through the night. The next morning, Ryan went to visit an old school chum, but I used a headache as an excuse to stay behind. Once he left, I sought out the concierge.

“Bonjour, madame, how may I assist you?”

“Bonjour, Pierre. Do you have an historical archive or a computer where I can research Napoléon III?”

“But, of course, madame. Napoléon III requisitioned *le Palais Garnier*. He is most famous with us.” He held out his hand. “Follow me, s’il vous 16lait.”

Pierre led me into a cozy library lined with scores of ancient books and records. I breathed in the mustiness of old leather and old paper. Pierre pulled down a leather volume and handed the thick book to me. “Everything we know about Emperor Charles-Louis Napoléon III is in these records.”

The hours flew by and at last I closed the book. My hands shook a little. Emperor Charles-Louis Napoléon III died on January 9, 1873. The Napoléon III who charmed me at the Opera Garnier in 1875 was a ghost.

#

The walk back to our suite passed without my notice. I was in the middle of another paranormal mystery. Even on my honeymoon, ghosts of the past would not leave me alone. And the mystery confounded me. I sat in the emperor’s box at the opera, yet no one noticed me. I was sitting quite far back at Napoléon’s behest. The black drapery, was it in honor of Napoléon’s death?

“Okay, Gran, Napoléon III was a ghost. But I still don’t know why he summoned me, nor what I’m supposed to do.”

“All in good time ...”

“But I’m on my honeymoon!”

“Love ...”

I sighed. *“I love you, too.”*

And I did. Next to Ryan, Gran was the most important person in my world. She invited me to her farm on the Canadian prairies two summers ago and changed my life. Gran pulled me out of my shell and taught me how to dress, have fun, and love myself. I discovered the women of The House that summer. They whispered their tragic stories from the walls of an abandoned farmhouse, and I wrote a book about their lives that became a bestseller. Best of all, I met and fell in love with

Ryan. All because of Gran. Then she died. I was bereft until I found she had joined the whispering women, now in The Tree.

"I love you, Gran, but I need your help. This is too weird even for me."

"Yes ..."

Well, at least she admitted it.

The suite seemed eerily quiet and empty when I entered. "Ryan?"

No answer. He was not back from visiting his college chum. Good thing because the room blurred, and I was swept away.

A slim, wiry maid hurried into my chamber waving a perfumed card. "Mademoiselle, the emperor has sent you an invitation to the grand ball tonight."

I was back in Napoléon III's era, but in a different bedchamber. "Thank you, and you are?"

The little maid frowned and skidded to a stop. "Why I am Estelle, mademoiselle, don't you remember?" She curtsied, but her brown eyes remained wary.

Of course, just a much younger Estelle. I clutched her hands. "I'm pleased to see you, Estelle—"

"But—"

"I need your help."

She wrinkled her pert nose. "My help? Oui, mademoiselle, I am at your service."

"I-I've forgotten the date."

The little maid glanced at the door. I clasped her hands tighter. "Please, Estelle, I'm counting on you to set me straight."

"Why, it's August 25 of the Lord's year 1855."

That explained her youthful appearance. I'd gone back in time twenty years. Napoléon III was alive in 1855. "Thank you. One last question."

Estelle arched an eyebrow. "Oui, mademoiselle?"

"Where am I?"

That did it. She backed away. "Mademoiselle, you are scaring me. I fear a demon has taken possession of your wits."

Oh oh. "I'm not possessed, but I suffer from blackouts at times. I need you to keep me focused." Talk about an understatement.

Estelle puckered her lips but nodded. "You be in a guest chamber in *le palais Versailles*."

Versailles, the most famous palace of all time, on August 25, 1855. I searched my memory for the significance of this date. Estelle must have seen the confusion on my face.

"Queen Victoria has come to Versailles for a visit. Our emperor is giving a ball tonight in her honor." She waved the card. "You are invited. The emperor is most taken with you."

Oh oh. "What about Empress Eugénie? Won't she be at the ball? I don't want to cause any trouble."

Estelle pressed her lips together. "The empress looks the other way from the emperor's *petites distractions*."

Petite distraction? Is that what I had become? Or rather Mademoiselle Benoit? Had the emperor and Mademoiselle Benoit been intimate? What would I do if he propositioned me?

Napoléon III had invited me to the ball, but we first met in 1875. Now all that would change. The time travel paradox was giving me a headache. “If I must attend a ball, what shall I wear?”

Estelle opened her mouth to answer, but a knock on the door interrupted her. In marched a regiment of maids and manservants, the latter once again carrying steaming pails of water for my bath.

I sighed. How did women of the time endure the constant fussing and primping?

Two hours later, I stood before a gold-gilded mirror and gazed at their creation. The dazzling ballgown draped to the floor in soft folds of blue silk. Gray ribbons hung from every flounce. Off the shoulders cap sleeves, and a plunging bodice completed the nineteenth century picture of an aristocrat’s alluring evening gown. What would Ryan think if he could see me?

Dress up was fun and all, but meeting Napoléon III in this time filled me with butterflies, and my purpose still remained a mystery.

An army of maids tackled my hair. “We shall create the most modern do,” one of them said.

I knew what that meant. More rabbit ear braids.

“No, I want my hair up in a loose bun and make it messy. Let strands fall along my cheek bones. No braids.”

The maids gasped, but Estelle shushed them. “Do as mademoiselle orders.”

The updo was close. I pulled a few strands and messed up the bun a bit. The maids muttered to themselves, and their inner thoughts bordered on insolence.

Estelle placed a diamond and blue sapphire tiara on my head. “You are beautiful, mademoiselle, and your hair is perfect for your face.” She sniffed at the perturbed hair stylists.

I shifted on my chair and made to stand up. Estelle stopped me. “This is a grand ball, mademoiselle. You must look the part.”

She attached diamond earrings that dripped from my ears almost to my shoulders and strung a simple diamond choker around my neck. I was a walking fortune.

“Where did this jewelry come from?”

Estelle blushed. “Your benefactor, mademoiselle.”

Napoléon III?

She patted my arm. “You shall dazzle the emperor when he catches sight of you.” She frowned as she slipped blue dancing slippers on my feet. “Be careful, mademoiselle, the emperor does love the ladies, but only for a short time.”

What could I say?

I twirled in a circle and practiced moving in the voluminous skirt. *Gran?*

Nothing. I was on my own.

“It is time, mademoiselle,” Estelle said.

A servant waited at the door to my chambers. “Thank you, Estelle, for helping me with ... everything. I shall not forget it.”

Estelle preened and curtsied. “My pleasure, mademoiselle.”

Would this be the last time I met Estelle? “Live a good life, *mon chère*.”

My quarters in the palace were a lengthy distance from the fabled ballroom. Eugénie's doing or Napoléon's? "My kingdom for a chariot," I muttered as I traipsed the never-ending corridors behind a bored manservant with extra long legs.

If not for my nervousness and confusion about why I was swept back in time, I would have bathed in the beauty of Versailles. At times I stopped and gazed at the rich tapestries hanging on the walls or guarding an archway into another room, but then I had to scurry to catch up to my escort.

My toe caught in a petticoat just as I reached the entrance to the ballroom. "Drat, this dress."

The usher at the door stifled a grin as I handed him my card. He announced me. "Mademoiselle Benoit."

Hardly a person looked my way. Why would they? They did not know me. I did not know me.

Light and life glowed in the ballroom. Countless chandeliers hung from the ceiling and hundreds of candles and torches reflected off the polished golden mirrors hanging on every wall. Garlands of flowers and plants hanging from the ceiling draped to the floor. Known for his extravagance, Napoléon III had commissioned four orchestras, one for each corner of the ballroom. One orchestra played softly as I entered the ballroom. "Oh, it's magnificent," I murmured.

The usher smiled and handed back my card. "That it is, mademoiselle."

Emperor Charles-Louis Napoléon III stood in a receiving line across from the entrance. A much younger and robust version of himself than the one who met me in 1875, he was wearing his navy military uniform. He turned from conversing with an elderly statesman and fixed his piercing blue-gray eyes on me. His moustache twitched and he twirled it between his gloved fingers. What did that mean?

Was I supposed to greet him? I curtsied just in case. Empress Eugénie, her hair flaming red, scowled when she caught sight of me. That was not good.

A servant approached. "Allow me to show you to your position, mademoiselle."

My position? Royal protocol was becoming tiresome, and my feet hurt. I followed the servant to a chair beside the other unattached females on display.

The young woman beside me fanned the air. "Don't look so put out, chère," she said. "You are lucky to be here."

"You're right. Sorry, but my feet hurt."

She giggled behind her fan and friendly thoughts flowed my way. "Mine, too. I'm Félicité."

I hesitated a moment too long. What was my first name? I surreptitiously glanced at my card. Thank goodness the usher had returned it. "My name is Liselle."

"That's a pretty name. Why haven't I seen you around court, Liselle?"

"I-I've been living abroad."

My response satisfied Félicité, but not the young woman on the other side of me. She wore an unbecoming sneer that disfigured her mouth. I did not need to read her thoughts to know she took an instant disliking to me. She waved her fan hard enough to disturb my hair. "My name is Joëlle. From what family do you hail?"

Oh oh. Family standing was everything in French society, but I had no idea of my family's station. "Benoit."

She squinted at me, then sniffed. "I see. Well, that explains it."

The hidden meanings in her words were not reassuring.

Trumpets blared and Queen Victoria entered the ballroom wearing a dazzling silver gown. Prince Albert walked by her side in a sharp red uniform. Despite bearing eight children by 1855, Victoria struck a youthful, attractive figure, and she clearly adored Albert. How sad that he would die in a few years, and her life would never be the same.

"Her Majesty, Queen Victoria and His Royal Highness Prince Albert," the usher said, loud enough for everyone in the ballroom to hear.

The audience rose to their feet. One of the orchestras struck up *God Save the Queen*. Emperor Napoléon III bowed, and Empress Eugénie curtsied. The thousand plus guests in the ballroom followed suit.

Félicité sighed and waved her fan harder. "He's so handsome."

"Who?"

"Prince Albert."

A different orchestra struck up a lively waltz. Napoléon III held out his hand to Queen Victoria and Prince Albert bowed before Eugénie. They danced around the ballroom. A wave of Napoléon's hand and many in the crowd joined in.

Napoléon gazed at me as he waltzed by. His eyes held a hidden message. Gran was right. I had to be careful.

Joëlle cast a spiteful glance in my direction and sniffed again.

A flash of light caught my eye. A man behind the heavy flower garlands shifted on his feet and the light flashed again. "Do either of you have opera glasses?"

Félicité dug in her clutch purse. "Here."

I trained the glasses on the man. He was holding a rifle of sorts and watching Napoléon III. "Excuse me, ladies, I must pay my respects to the emperor."

"How uncouth," Joëlle said. "You have not been recognized."

Napoléon recognized me twenty years in the future. "Wanna bet?"

I stood and as gracefully as my tortured feet allowed and made my way around the ballroom until I stood behind Napoléon. He was speaking to Eugénie and Queen Victoria. "Excuse me, Your Majesty," I whispered to his back. "I do not wish to frighten your guests or your wife, but a marksman is stationed behind the garlands, and he is aiming at you."

Napoléon stiffened.

"No, Your Majesty, do not look up. You'll spook the assassin. Perhaps if you walk beside me, my voluminous gown will shield you. I believe we should leave the ballroom and wait for the culprit to be apprehended."

He glanced to his side and frowned. "Who is this?"

"Mademoiselle Benoit," I whispered.

Napoléon turned his head slightly and whispered back, "Is this a trick, mademoiselle? I did not take you as a spy the last time we met."

I'll bet. But that was Liselle Benoit, not me. How confusing. "Not on my part, monsieur. I merely want to save your life." I spread my gown to its fullest width. "We must not appear in a hurry, Your Majesty, lest the assassin realizes we are on to him."

Napoléon bowed to the queen and his wife. "Please excuse me for a moment."

We headed for the exit, Napoléon on my far side. "I do not often hide behind a woman's skirt," he muttered.

"An emergency, Your Majesty."

He signalled the guards standing outside the ballroom. "An assassin is hiding among the plants. Arrest him and send him to the gallows this instant."

The guards hurried to do his bidding.

Napoléon turned to me. "Mademoiselle Benoit, I see I have chosen well for my new paramour. You saved me from those radical republicans." He took my hand and kissed it. "May I escort you into the ballroom. I believe I owe you a dance."

A dance for a rescue? I curtsied. "My pleasure, Your Majesty."

At Napoléon's signal, the orchestra struck up a Viennese waltz, and we danced around the ballroom as twelve hundred guests looked on, including Eugénie, who did not appear pleased. She might despise being Napoléon's wife, but she loved being empress of France. No one would edge her out.

"Mademoiselle, you are a beautiful bundle of contradictions, and I must confess I'm a bit puzzled. I found you most agreeable during our first assignation, but now you appear more spirited. I did not expect a woman of your station to be so forthright."

"Your life was in danger, Your Majesty. I took drastic measures to stop your untimely death."

He chuckled. "You approached me without leave, which was dangerous, and you warned me of an assassination attempt as if this was your sole purpose." He hesitated and a frown creased his high forehead. "Most perplexing, I feel I know you, yet I don't."

Future memory? I curtsied. "I'm at your service, Your Majesty. I was sent to this time and place to save you."

His high brow wrinkled. "By whom?"

"You."

He stumbled for a moment, then grinned. "Ah, the mystery thickens. I would have you ensconced in chambers closer to me so that we might speak at length."

"I have chambers in the far wing, but I accept your generous offer to stay a while longer in more comfortable chambers, Your Majesty, but ..."

He shook his head. "I do not accept refusals, mademoiselle. Accept my offer or off with your head."

He grinned but I was uncertain if he joked. I curtsied as the waltz ended. "Then I accept your kind offer."

A guard approached. "The assassin escaped, Your Majesty."

Of course he did or the history books would mention the hanging of a would-be assassin.

"Keep looking," Napoléon said.

He took his leave of me and mingled with his guests, but Empress Eugénie's sharp blue eyes often strayed to mine. Did she know I was Napoléon's new paramour?

A young woman with a bald spot on the top of her head had taken my place among the unmarried women. She lifted her sharp nose in the air as I passed. No matter. If I was lucky, I would return to Ryan at any moment. Liselle could deal with the snobbish women. I moved to the back row and sat beside an elderly matriarch.

She squinted at me through her monocle. "So you are the new one."

"Excuse me?"

"Napoléon's new favorite."

I held my peace and waited for a clue as to how this conversation would play out.

She patted my arm. "Never mind, my dear. Once he tires of you, he will broker a good match with a lesser noble."

Good grief. What an uncivilized era for women. My feminism surfaced, and I could not resist a bit of fun at the pompous matriarch's expense. "That won't be necessary, madame. I don't plan to marry."

Her monocle dropped. "Not marry? How absurd. You are a woman. Of course, you'll marry."

"Nope. I'm heading to Africa to explore the continent and join an archaeological dig at the pyramids. I hear it's quite exciting."

Her mouth hung open, and she fanned her flushed face.

With perfect timing, Napoléon signalled his guests, and we retired to the Royal Opera House near Versailles for a lavish dinner. More walking for my bruised and battered feet. I held back as the crowd streamed into the theatre. Why was I still in the nineteenth century? I had saved Napoléon. Wasn't my mission over?

My eyes scanned the crowd and the hidden recesses in the royal boxes, but I spotted nothing untoward.

An explosion boomed through the opera house. I hurried to a portico overlooking the vast gardens. Fireworks lit up the dark sky and shook the air. The moon shone down on the garden. The same moon that shone down on Paris nearly two centuries later. Loneliness took hold of me. I was a stranger in a strange time, and I wanted to go home.

Félicité and her entourage joined me. "The fireworks are magnificent, don't you think, Liselle?" Joëlle said. Her friendly words belied the animosity and envy in her eyes. Now what?

She read my mind. "Oh, did you think we would welcome an upstart such as yourself into our inner circle just because you danced with the emperor?"

"I did not think—"

"You broke royal protocol, and you had the audacity to coax the emperor into dancing with you. Such impudence."

A sigh slipped out. "Joëlle, the situation is more complicated than you imagine."

She tittered behind her lace fan. "Oh, we have imagined a great deal. The emperor shall bed you, then cast you aside like so many before. You'll be ruined." She laughed and headed for a table laden with food. Her friends followed, all laughing in my face.

Except for Félicité. She held back. “I’m sorry for Joëlle’s rudeness, Liselle. She has a jealous streak.” She smiled softly. “I wish you well.”

All these people were long dead in my time. That hit me hard. “Thank you, Félicité. I hope you enjoy a wonderful life.”

I left her standing in the moonlight, a puzzled expression on her face.

The dancing began soon after dinner, but I was done. I waylaid a servant. “Excuse me, monsieur, but has the emperor identified my new chambers?”

The self-important servant sniffed. “Our emperor does not lower himself to such domestic ideals. Empress Eugénie appointed a chamber in the far wing.”

I already had a chamber far from the royal apartments. That suited me fine. “I shall retire, then. Please lead the way.”

The servant frowned. “Do you not wish to attend the ball?”

My feet were killing me, and the tight whalebone corset chafed in unseemly places. “I find myself a bit fatigued. I wish to rest.”

An hour later, after Estelle and her maids left me in peace, I curled up on the undersized bed and tried to sleep. I missed Ryan. This was my honeymoon, and I was separated from my husband by a hundred and seventy years. What if I could not return to him? I cried into my pillow.

A soft knock woke me from a restless sleep. I pulled on a dressing gown much too heavy for the late summer heat and peeked around the door. Napoléon III stood in the corridor, obviously inebriated. A cloud of cigar smoke surrounded him.

“Mademoiselle, may I join you?”

Oh gawd. What should I do? “Your Majesty, I am with my courses, and I am very tired. Would you excuse me?”

He frowned, weaved on his feet, then nodded. “I understand. Perhaps another time.”

Not if I could help it.

I closed the door and leaned against it. My luxurious Versailles bedchamber blurred, and I was back in the hotel suite with Ryan.

Chapter Three

Secrets and Dalliances

Paris, 2025

“Gran, I don’t understand what’s happening. I’ve had visions before, but I was always a bystander. In these visions, I’m in the nineteenth century with Napoléon III, and I’m the center of attention—in someone else’s body.”

“Happens ...”

“Not to me it doesn’t.”

“Mission ... vital ...”

If I ever needed my ghostly grandmother to speak in full sentences, now was the time.

“Gran, please help me. I saved Napoléon III from an assassination attempt, but I remained there for hours more. Why?”

Silence.

“Please Gran.”

“Save France ...”

“Save France? How? From what?”

Silence.

I knocked on the bathroom door. “Ryan, I’m going out for a bit.” I left our suite and headed for the library before he could ask me any questions. I was loathe to leave him when I might be swept back to the nineteenth century at any moment, but I had to find out what was happening and why.

According to the records, Napoléon III changed the face of Paris and France. He built a grand railway network that joined Paris to other parts of France. The beautiful boulevards Ryan and I strolled were his doing, as were the public buildings and parks. Bottom line, Napoléon III made Paris what it is today.

I leaned back in my chair. If the assassin had succeeded, Paris would be a very different city. But something was amiss. Gran said I must save France. Napoléon was also a champion of the poor, and he promoted French exports and enhanced France’s economic fortunes. Was that what Gran meant about saving not just Paris, but France.¹ And what more could I do?

Ryan was waiting for me when I returned to our suite, his brow furrowed. “Where have you been, Ari? I was worried.”

Time to come clean. “I’m sorry, sweetheart, but I had to find out.”

“Find out what?”

“Remember a few days ago when I told you I’d gone back to the time of Napoléon III?”

He laughed. “Yes.”

“Don’t laugh, it’s happened again. I was gone for days, and I can’t stop it.”

“But you’ve been here with me.”

I shrugged. “Time dilation? Maybe the days I spend in the nineteenth century are only a few minutes in this time.”

Ryan flopped down on a sofa. “Okay, I’ve heard enough strange things from you. This is no worse. Have you figured out why you go back to Napoléon III’s time?”

I took a deep breath. “I first met Napoléon III in 1875, but he died in 1873.”

He sat up. “What?”

“I met Napoléon’s ghost, and he thanked me for what I had done.”

Ryan stood and paced our suite. “What did you do?” He stopped and grinned. “Or should I be afraid to ask?”

Good point. “The second time, I went back to 1855 during a ball for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Versailles. Ryan, you should have seen it. Victoria was stunning and—”

He held up his hand. “You can tell me all about it another time. Right now I need some assurance you’re not in trouble.” He nuzzled my neck. “What did my beautiful, empathic wife do?”

“I saved Napoléon from an assassination attempt. A guy was hiding behind huge flower garlands. He had a gun, and it was aimed at Napoléon.”

Ryan whistled.

“If he had died that night, Paris would not be the same as it is today.” My head throbbed and I rubbed my temples. “I think that’s what he thanked me for, but I don’t think it’s over yet. Gran keeps telling me I have a mission.”

“Kate’s in on this caper, too?”

Caper. Is that what we were calling it? “She knows what’s happening to me. And she knows a lot more than she’s saying.”

Ryan sat down again. Good. At least he was listening. I sat down beside him.

He massaged my back. “You saved Napoléon III?”

I nodded. “I saved him then, but ...”

“And now you’re back.”

He wrapped his arms around me and kissed my neck. Tingles ran up and down my body, but no, we had more to discuss. I gently pushed him away. “I don’t know whether I’m back to stay, Ryan. I thwarted one assassination attempt on Napoléon, but I remained at Versailles for some time afterward. I was afraid I couldn’t come back to you. Then I did.”

“And you can’t stop it?”

I shook my head. “I might have more to do.”

“Ari, this could be dangerous. What if that assassin had fired and hit you?”

I sank into his arms. His safe, loving arms wrapped around me. “Maybe I’m done. I hope so.”

Ryan kissed me and I forgot about Versailles and Napoléon.

#

A flowered canopy hung over my bed. Versailles again. But what year? I shuddered. The back and forth was wearing on me. I sat up and slid to the floor. The beds were short but high, and the

stepping stool had mysteriously walked away. No help for it, I needed to use the nineteenth century loo.

Estelle was waiting when I half fell out of the revolting water closet. “Good morning, Estelle.”

She curtsied and smiled. “Mademoiselle, would you like to dress?”

“Yes, please, but just a day dress.”

“Oui, mademoiselle. Today, you may roam the gardens if you wish.”

“Only today?”

“The empress likes the gardens to herself, but she be busy today,” Estelle said.

And what day might today be?

Estelle was getting good at reading my mind. “The day is August 31st, the year of our Lord 1856.”

What awaited me in 1856?

Flowers in the vast gardens were in full bloom even this late in the summer. I strolled a well-worn path and stopped at times to admire the pink and yellow roses. The heady smell of a dozen perfumes left me a bit giddy. Marble statues of nymphs and tritons lined the path. According to tourist pamphlets I’d read in our suite, Versailles boasted more than eight hundred statues.

“Mademoiselle Benoit!”

Napoléon strolled up the path, a grin on his face. “Ah, Liselle, I was hoping to find you in good spirits.”

I curtsied. “Good morrow, Your Majesty. You are enjoying the warm air?”

“*Mais oui*, the day is truly magnificent now that you are with me.”

His tone, and the way he gazed at me foretold what must have happened after I slipped back into my time. Mademoiselle Benoit was no longer a virgin.

I blushed and looked down as a shy damsel should. How long could I keep up this charade before I was caught out?

Napoléon took my hands. “I have a surprise for you.”

Oh, I’ll bet.

“Come, this way.”

He led me into an isolated alcove among the orange trees. A coarse wool blanket and a picnic basket waited for us.

“I thought we should enjoy a picnic lunch today. What do you think?”

He was like an eager young man. “A lovely idea, Your Majesty.”

He pulled me close and whispered in my ear. “Please, after last night, call me Louis when we are alone. I prefer my given name over Napoléon.” He kissed my neck.

Shivers ran up my back. The man knew what he was doing. “Oui, Louis.”

“Come, let us enjoy our repast.”

He produced crystal glasses and poured a heavy merlot. Not my kind of picnic, but what the heck.

A platter of cheese, bread, and fruits followed the wine out of the basket.

Napoléon leaned over and kissed my neck again. In one swift movement, he pinned me on the blanket and kissed me with such passion that I panicked. “Louis, no, not here. I cannot.”

He sighed and leaned back. “Then later. I will have you on this day.”

The gleam in his eye sent shivers up my spine. Mademoiselle Benoit had better surface tonight, or I would be unfaithful to my husband.

“Now eat your lunch for tomorrow is a big day.”

“Why, what’s happening tomorrow?”

“The court is moving to Villa Eugénie. Our favorite place to spend September.”

#

September 1, 1856

The royal caravan rumbled through the tiny hamlet of Biarritz huddled on the chilly shores of the Atlantic Ocean. Crowds lined both sides of the street and cheered as hundreds of carriages and carts loaded with courtiers, servants, and goods rolled down the muddy road.

“They must have come from miles around,” I said to no one in particular.

A *hobereaux* sitting across from me sniffed his perfumed handkerchief. “Nasty, vile creatures. Don’t they ever wash?”

The snobbish aristocrat was not smelling so good himself. I refrained from a comeback and turned to the window. A little girl holding a bouquet of yellow daisies waved, and I waved back. Estelle, my official chaperone, leaned forward and whispered, “The flowers are for the empress, but I fear she won’t be having a chance to gift them.”

The caravan was a mirror of the rigid class system within French court. Napoléon and Eugénie rode in the first carriage, surrounded by guards. Wet nurses, nannies, and physicians cared for baby Prince Imperial, six months old now, in the second carriage. Next came the peer nobility and courtiers. My carriage was positioned amid the lesser nobility and landed gentry. Not that I cared. My fondest wish was to slip into my own time and away from the unwashed bodies and farting horses I had endured on this trek.

At last my carriage stopped in front of the luxurious villa shaped like a giant E. Empress Eugénie had smugly informed me the night before that Napoléon built the villa for her in 1854. For a moment, she forgot Liselle Benoit had been Napoléon’s mistress for more than a year and whispered, “We shall enjoy magnificent balls, fireworks, and long walks on the beach. All of Europe’s royalty shall wish an invitation to attend us.” Her dull, bored eyes sparkled, and I almost warmed to her.

“Sounds wonderful, Your Majesty,” I said with a curtsy.

The empress then realized who I was and flounced away.

The footman gave me his hand, and I climbed out of the carriage without tripping in the mud despite the efforts of my day dress. Estelle had insisted I wear a frumpy navy gown so as not to outshine Eugénie or the other female aristocrats. I bit my tongue when she placed a frilly white bonnet on my head.

The line of carriages holding those farther down the hierarchy stretched far into the distance, but the villagers lost interest once the royal family entered the villa. The catty side of me loved that Joëlle and her minions, ranked far back. They would not reach the villa for another half day.

Félicité had not returned from her parent's country home, but she would join us soon. She and Liselle had struck up a close relationship. I liked to think because of my overtures during the ball for Queen Victoria.

The villa loomed over a long sandy beach. Waves crashed up the shore in the brisk winds. Just what I needed, a stroll in the fresh air. The servants began unloading carts overflowing with furniture, baggage, and food. No one took notice of me in the bedlam. "Cover for me, Estelle."

I hurried down a winding footpath for a walk on the beach. Only fate had other plans and before I dipped my toes into the Atlantic, I slipped away.

#

Paris, 2025

Ryan and I strolled hand in hand along the Seine riverbank as the sun settled behind the Parisian buildings. A *bateau* sailed by full of happy, sunburned tourists. They waved and we waved back. I sighed. "My favorite part of Paris."

Ryan squeezed my hand. "Mine, too. I'm glad you're relaxing."

How could I not relax in Paris? But the spectre of Napoléon III haunted me every time I caught a glimpse of Opera Garnier. "All this is because of Napoléon. He built the beautiful Paris we see today. The parks, the magnificent buildings lining these streets, it's all because of Napoléon III, and somehow this is all in danger."

"If your vision holds true, you saved him from assassination or none of this would be here."

"But he's still in danger and so is Paris. I feel it, but I can't figure out what danger or when."

We passed a hole-in-the-wall bookshop. "Wait, Ryan, Gran stopped at a small bookshop along the Seine when she came to Paris with Grandpa Henry. Perhaps this is the same bookstore." I peeked inside. No one was around. "Can I?"

Ryan laughed. "Since when do you ask my permission to do anything?"

"Well, it is our honeymoon."

"Go on, I'll watch the ducks."

I squeezed through the narrow entrance and strolled by stacks of books on every table, heaps of books on every shelf, and piles of musty old books on the floor. The entire store was a bibliophile's dream come true.

"Madame?"

I jumped and I dropped the book I was holding. "Oh, you scared me."

The little man hunched over as if his back could not straighten, and long, greasy hair hung in strings down the side of his face. "May I help you?"

He stared at me with an intensity I found disturbing, and his voice reeked of oiliness. "Uh, just looking, thanks."

"Perhaps I can interest you in our special collection."

He led me to a glass case full of ancient books. I opened the case and pulled out *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole. "Surely not the original?" A tingling spark ran up my fingers and overwhelming terror struck me.

"No madame, a copy. But a most interesting copy."

I already knew, but I asked anyway. “How so?”

“Demons hide within the pages. Demons that will set your heart racing and take you to a faraway place.”

Last thing I needed. I dropped the book. “Thank you, but I’ll be going now.”

“Oh, but you cannot hide from your destiny, madame. You know of what I am referring to,” he said as I walked out the door. “Fair thee well, for a time.” His cackled shattered the quiet night and jarred my nerves.

“What happened?” Ryan said. “You’re white as a ghost. Pardon the pun.”

“A scary, creepy man knew too much about me.” I looked back. The man was standing in the doorway, a smirk on his greasy face.

Ryan led me to a cute Parisian cafe. An older man playing an accordion serenaded me as I sipped the champagne Ryan ordered. “This is better.”

Over a candlelight dinner, I forgot about the oily man.

“Ari ... remember ...”

“Remember what, Gran?”

“Your mission ...”

My appetite gone, I leaned back in my chair. My mission should be over. Napoléon was safe. At least for now.

#

Villa Eugénie, 1856

Napoléon took my hand, and we walked along the beach below Villa Eugénie. Here I was, back in Napoléon’s time. Why? What was I supposed to do?

“Is the empress joining us for a walk?”

“Not this afternoon. She has an ache in her head.” He sighed. “She’s had an ache somewhere or other ever since our son was born. We do not share a bed.” He turned to me and twirled his moustache. “But that is of no import.”

No, not if he shared a bed with many other willing women. Their son, Louis, Prince Imperial was born on March 16, 1856. Napoléon’s history book stated flat out Eugénie did not enjoy sex, at least not with Napoléon, and she refused him from then on.

“Tell me more about women’s rights,” Napoléon said. “I confess I do not understand the vagaries of the female sex, but I do admire them.”

Time for twenty-first century Ariana Nightley-Levin to work her magic. “If you provide women and young girls with a useful education, they will do much to improve the quality of life in your country. Being a world leader in woman’s rights could increase and enhance France’s standing in world politics.”

“Hmm, an interesting concept, but of course, I would be going against the Catholic Church. They do not approve of educating or increasing the standing of women. The church holds that women are for producing children and keeping the home, nothing more.”

An unladylike snort slipped out of me. “The Catholic Church has always been against improving the lot of anyone, especially women. Education makes people think and question.

Religious leaders do not like people thinking because they often walk away from religion and stop paying tithes.”

Napoléon laughed, a great belly laugh. “Especially the tithes.” He became serious. “I would like to encourage the teaching of history and geography to my people. They should know who they are and about the world around them.”

“And libraries, Your Majesty. Libraries open peoples’ minds.”

Napoléon stopped walking and kissed my hand. “I’ve said it before, Mademoiselle Benoit, you are a joyous bundle of contradictions. Beautiful and smart one minute, coy and seductive the next.”

His blue-gray eyes mesmerized me. Liselle Benoit was falling in love with a married man, an emperor no less. Even more worrisome, the waves of love and lust flooding my mind warned that Napoléon was falling in love with me. That must not happen. Eugénie must remain his empress. I stepped away from his magnetic eyes. I was Ariana Nightley-Levin, a telepathic empath, and a married woman very much in love with her husband. “Your Majesty, the hour grows late. Perhaps we should retire?”

He kissed my hand. “Just what I was thinking.”

He mistook my meaning. Despite his attractiveness, I hoped with all my heart that Ariana was gone before Charles-Louis Napoléon visited Liselle Benoit’s bedchamber.

#

Paris, 2025

A French television show hummed in the background and a loaded food tray waited on the dining table. I was back in the twenty-first century. “Oh, thank goodness.”

Ryan looked up from his tablet. “Excuse me?”

“I-I’m back, safe and sound.”

He frowned. “You were gone? But we were just talking a few minutes ago. We ordered food.”

I curtsied. “Oui, monsieur, I was at the beautiful Villa Eugénie with the most charming Louis, I mean Napoléon.”

Ryan gazed at me, a strange look in his eyes. “He isn’t making any moves on you, is he? Should I be jealous?”

The devil in me popped out. “But of course, he’s making smooth moves on Mademoiselle Liselle Benoit, my delightful doppelganger, but I have escaped thus far.”

“*Ari ...*”

“*Sorry, Gran. Couldn’t help it.*”

Ryan tossed his tablet on the sofa and stood up. “Okay, that’s not gonna happen again.”

I blinked. “And how do you propose we stop my time travelling dalliances?”

He pulled me into his arms. “How about if we make our own dalliance? Don’t know if I can compete with a French emperor, but I’ll do my best.”

He kissed me and I forgot about Napoléon.

“*Yes ... Ari ...*”

“*Gran, go away, I’m busy ...*”

Giggles.

A long while later, I dressed and headed for the library and Napoléon's book. I was still returning to the nineteenth century. Why? The answer had to be in the book.

An hour later, I had my answer.

On January 14, 1858, Republican Felice Orsini and three associates attempted to assassinate Charles-Louis Napoléon. They threw three bombs at his carriage when he and Empress Eugénie were on their way to the opera at *Théâtre Impérial de l'Opéra* to see Rossini's *William Tell*. Eight people were killed, and many others were hurt from the explosions, but miraculously Napoléon and Eugénie escaped with minor injuries.ⁱⁱ How did that happen?

Deep down, I knew the answer.

Chapter Four

La Grande Évasion

Paris, 2025

Ryan met me as I left the library. “Well, what did you find out?”

“Rogue republicans attempted to assassinate Napoléon and Eugénie in 1858. Lots of people were killed or hurt in the bombing, but Napoléon and Eugénie escaped with minor injuries.”

“You saved them, didn’t you?”

I shrugged. “We’ll see.”

Ryan sighed and ran his hand through his curls. “I knew you were a telepathic empath when I married you. I accepted the things you could do even though I never understood them. But time travel and thwarting assassinations that happened hundreds of years ago is a whole new ball game.” He pulled me into his arms. “I’m afraid for you, Ari. History tells us you were successful, but there’s nothing in the history books about what happened to you.”

I kissed his chin. “I’ll be careful. I promise. I just want this over so we can enjoy our honeymoon. It’s been two days in this time. Two days of worrying. I want this caper, as you call it, done.”

He chuckled. “Something tells me being done with paranormal mysteries is not gonna be part of our future.”

We made love as if it might be the last time. I curled in his arms and held him tight. “I love you, Ryan Levin.”

He kissed me. “I love you, Ariana Levin,” he said as his body faded, then disappeared, and I was alone in a cold, spartan bed. A worn blanket the color of dirt covered me. “W-where am I?”

“Why in Paris, mademoiselle. You are my beautiful hostage,” a voice eerily reminiscent of the oily man at the bookstore said from a dark corner. An ancestor?

My head throbbed. I touched a sore spot on the side of my head, and my hand came away covered in blood. “W-who are you?”

The man stood and walked toward me. His balding head gleamed in light from the lone window, but most of his features were lost under a bushy black beard.

“My name is Felice Orsini.”

I swallowed a gasp. The assassin. “Monsieur, what is the date?”

“The second of January, the year of our Lord 1858.”

Twelve days before the assassination attempt. “Why did you kidnap me?”

“A little birdie told me you are the mighty emperor’s favorite plaything.” He cackled. “Wouldn’t want you hurt in the commotion, now would we?”

“Hurt?”

“You ask a lot of questions. Stay put and all will be well, my pretty damsel. A day of great import for my country’s future is coming soon.” He bowed. “I bid you adieu.”

Orsini opened the lone door. “Mademoiselle is awake. Bring some bread and cheese and water.”

An elderly man hurried into the room carrying a tray. He set it down in front of me, bowed, and scurried out of the room keeping a safe distance from Orsini’s hand.

“Eat up, mademoiselle, for there won’t be more until the morrow.” Orsini scowled. “And don’t be trying anything foolish, my man will be joining you.”

He left, but a tall, scruffy man came in and took a seat in the lone chair. He stared at me in a way that made me uncomfortable. Would anyone hear if I screamed?

That evening, while I dozed on the bed, he crawled in with me. “A little comfort, pretty one?”

He covered me with his sweaty, foul-smelling body. I fought not to gag from his fetid breath. “Get off me, you big oaf.”

He laughed and pulled on my skirt. Bad move. Once he raised my skirt high enough, I kneed him.

He screeched and rolled off the bed and lay in a fetal position. “Stay away from me or I’ll do worse.”

Course that meant I had to keep one eye open instead of sleeping well, and my head still ached. Late in the night, a whisper jarred me out of a near-doze. “*Liselle ... Liselle ... be brave ...*”

Napoléon’s ghost floated above me. “*Napoléon ...*”

“*Oui, mademoiselle, you shall prevail ...*”

His ghost slowly disappeared, and I lay back, oddly soothed. He said I would succeed.

For days, I only slept when the would-be rapist left the room, still limping. He cast angry looks in my direction but stayed away from my ready knee. Was he one of Orsini’s fellow assassins? What would they do to me when the deed was done? I had a sick feeling I knew the answer.

The elderly man who brought me food was of no danger to me. His name was Jerome. “Wake me when the oaf returns, Jerome.”

“Aye, mademoiselle.”

The days stretched long and lonely. Lack of sleep and a poor diet were wrecking havoc on my strength and mood. Was Ryan missing me?

On January 14th, the day of the assassination attempt, the oaf left early in the morning without a word. My head had stopped throbbing, and I was no longer dizzy when I stood. Now or never, this was my chance.

Jerome toddled into the room, muttering to himself. “Jerome, I’m so hungry. Could you please bring me some food, maybe some fruit?”

He shrugged and bent his head. “No money, mademoiselle.”

That was a wasted effort. Time to get tough. “I need to go home.”

Jerome cackled. “Ain’t gonna happen. Me master wants you kept away from the emperor.”

His jumbled thoughts seeped into my mind. Reasoning with a mind as messed up as his was likely a mistake, but I had to try. “I must warn Napoléon of his danger or all of France will suffer.”

Just as I thought, my outburst did not resonate with the old man. He shrugged and huddled on the chair.

I bided my time. When Jerone's head drooped and he fell asleep, I made my move. Tiptoeing across the room, I plonked a pewter water pitcher on Jerome's head. "I'm sorry," I whispered as I shielded his fall to the dirt floor.

Whispers filled the room. Napoléon's ghost nodded and smiled at me then disappeared. Part of me wondered why his ghost did not warn him of the assassination attempt. Why bring me into the intrigue? But how would a nineteenth century man, even an emperor as open-minded as Napoléon III, respond to a ghost?

I jumped up and searched for a way out. I had to warn Napoléon. From the feet walking by the window, I was trapped in a cellar. A table under the window did not give me enough reach. I set a rickety chair on the table and climbed onto it. The chair wobbled but held, and the grimy window opened with a slight tug. "Help, somebody help me!"

People kept walking. I shouted louder. "Help!"

A passerby stopped, leaned over, and peeked at me. "Do you require assistance, mademoiselle?"

I grasped the wooden window well and pulled myself out of the window as far as my battered crinoline allowed. If only I had managed to unlock the pesky thing, I would be free by now. "Oui, monsieur, I appear unable to extricate myself from this window."

The young man grinned, and merriment flickered in his oddly familiar blue eyes. "But why would you want to do such a thing?"

I had no time for a jokester. "Because someone kidnapped me, you lout, and I'm being held against my will! Now, are you going to help me or not?"

"Oui, mademoiselle. I am at your service."

He grasped my arms and pulled. My gown tore on the window ledge. Two snaps and the crinoline folded in on itself, and the man pulled me free. I stood and reassembled my raggedy gown. Metal from the crinoline fell to the ground in pieces. Good riddance. I curtsied as best I could in the collapsing day dress. "Thank you, monsieur. I am in your debt."

He bowed. "My pleasure." His eyes crinkled at the sides. "Rescuing a damsel in distress has always been on my bucket list."

Bucket list was not a nineteenth century term. I squinted at the man. "Who are you, sir?"

He tipped his hat and blond curls trickled down his neck. "Someone like you, Madame Levin, intent on righting wrongs of the past. My name, for future reference, is Timothy Levin." With that, he sauntered down the street and disappeared.

A time-traveling descendent of mine or a ghost? I desperately wanted to run after him, but I could not afford the time. Would I meet him again? The crazy paranormal mystery I found myself in thickened even more.

I hurried along the right bank of the Seine River. Hawkers peddled their wares while women carrying baskets picked their way through the mud and water puddles to shop for the day's food. Dogs barked, babies cried, and naughty little boys scampered between stalls looking for a handout.

Yet my dress and unkempt hair is what attracted the most attention. I ignored the horrified glances and gasps from those I passed. I had a mission.

A guard stopped me outside Tuileries Palace. He gazed at my torn and battered clothing and scowled. "Halt! You do not have passage onto the palace grounds, wench."

I stamped my foot and glared at the man. "I am Mademoiselle Benoit, close friend of the emperor. I have met with foul play, you cad. Now let me pass. I must warn the emperor of deadly deeds about to take place." My command of the quaint language of the day would have amused me if the situation had not been so dire.

The guard gulped and backed away from my fury. "Mademoiselle Benoit, the emperor and his wife be preparing for an evening at the opera."

"I'm aware, but I must speak with His Majesty before they leave. My message is of the utmost importance to their well-being."

The guard frowned, then nodded to the gatekeeper. A carriage waited nearby. I was not about to traipse all the way to Napoléon's private entrance in my torn and shredded slippers. Besides, time was short. I climbed into the carriage and ordered the surprised coachman. "Take me to His Majesty's quarters and hurry."

Napoléon's suite of rooms was on the ground floor of the south wing. The doorman let me in without question though he raised an eyebrow at my dishevelled appearance. I ran down the long corridor and skidded to a stop outside Napoléon's private chambers.

"Mademoiselle?" the guard said.

"I must speak to His Majesty immediately."

"But you are no longer his favorite—"

"No buts, Jacques, his life is in danger."

Jacques opened the door.

Napoléon was stepping out of his water closet still wearing his favorite red lounging clothes. He frowned. "Liselle, this is most unexpected and indiscreet. And why are you dressed like a scullery maiden?"

Monarchs and their protocol. Liselle slept with the man for pity's sake, and everyone knew it. Liselle may no longer be his favorite after so many years, but I would make him listen. I waved away the thick cigarette smoke forever lingering in his rooms. "Your Majesty, I apologize for arriving unannounced and in disarray, but I have learned another attempt will be made on your life as you drive to the opera."

Napoléon frowned. "You seem most versed in attempts on my life, mademoiselle. Why is that? And where have you been? I expect all my paramours to be in attendance." He drew closer. "I have missed you. Perhaps I was too hasty in casting you aside."

The time had come. "Your Majesty, I have a confession, and you must listen closely. I am not Liselle Benoit." I held up my hand at his attempt to speak.

"I am in Liselle's body, true, but my name is Ariana Nightley-Levin. I come from the twenty-first century where I am a telepathic empath. I see and hear things others do not. But for the past few days of my time, I have been travelling back in time to save you from assassination attempts."

Napoléon crossed his arms and glared at me. “I do not believe in such nonsense. This is treasonous sorcery you speak. A demon has taken possession of your soul.”

“Louis, I saved you at Versailles in 1855 because I had knowledge from the future.” Not entirely true, but good enough.

He hesitated. “Very well, suppose I indulge you for a moment. Why?”

“Remember when you asked who sent me, and I said you?”

He waved his hand in dismissal. “Oui, a flirtatious joke, nothing more.”

“No, Your Majesty, not a joke. Your ghost asked me to save you and save Paris’s future.”

That shut him up for a time.

He sat down on a red and gold settee. “May I ask in what year my ghost approached you?”

“No, you may not, Your Majesty. The time of our death should remain a secret until the moment.”

He sighed. “Perhaps you’re right.”

He might not believe I came from another time, but he was taking the assassination threat seriously. “Now about the attempt on your life tonight.”

“We shall not go to the opera tonight. Eugénie will understand.”

“No, Your Majesty, that will only delay the attempt to another day. History states you go to the opera, and we should not change history.”

“What then?”

“Is it possible to fortify your carriage, perhaps with a steel bottom?”

“We are short of time, but yes, fortifying the carriage might be possible.” He strode to the door. “Jacques, send for the court’s head blacksmith.”

“Your Majesty?”

“Just do it, man, and hurry.”

I curled up on Napoléon’s bed and rested my sore feet. The winter air was chilly despite the roaring fire in the fireplace. A servant covered me with a silk and brocade blanket.

The blacksmith arrived and stood in the entrance to Napoléon’s quarters, hat in hand. His worn face mirrored his worry and fear.

Napoléon greeted him and got right to the point. “I need the exterior bottom of my carriage fortified with heavy steel.”

The blacksmith blinked, and his rigid body relaxed. “Your Majesty?”

“No time to waste, man. We leave for the opera in two hours.”

“I’ll see it’s done, Your Majesty,” the blacksmith said. He hurried away, no doubt relieved he’d kept his head.

Napoléon turned to me, a determined gleam in his eyes. “Who will attempt the assassination, Liselle, er Ariana?”

“I beg your pardon, Your Majesty, but I cannot say for fear I change history.”

“But aren’t you changing history by saving me?”

“Yes, but no, it already happened this way.”

“Because you change it.”

He was giving me a headache. “I do not know all the answers, Your Majesty. I just know you asked me to save you, and when I checked the history books you lived through this night.”

“And the empress?”

“She survived, as well.”

Napoléon plopped down on the bed beside me. “I’m curious, if what you say is true, who have I made love to?”

His hypnotic eyes pulled me in. “Liselle,” I said softly.

“Pity, for I feel Ariana is the one I love.” He moved closer and twirled his moustache. “Perhaps, this once?”

“I’m a married woman, Your Majesty, and faithful to my husband,” I said barely above a whisper. Those eyes.

He sighed and nodded. “A commendable manner.”

I clasped his hands. “Your Majesty, this may be the last time we meet. I want to thank you. The Paris of my time is magnificent, and it’s all because of you.”

He kissed my hand. “Then I have lived a worthy life. Fare thee well, beautiful sorceress.”

Emperor Charles-Louis Napoléon III faded away, and I was back in our suite. Relief and a bit of regret tinged my heart.

Ryan was pacing the room wearing a hole in the expensive carpet.

“Ryan ...”

He whirled around. “Ari, you’re back? You’ve been gone for hours.”

“Try two weeks.”

His high brow wrinkled in a frown. “Did you save him?”

“I hope so. Look outside.”

“At what?”

“Is the opera house still there, the wide streets and beautiful buildings?”

He peered through the window. “Yes. In all its glory.”

“Then I saved him.”

A heavy cloak lifted from my mind. My mission was over. Then why did I feel so bereft?

#

I curled up on an overstuffed leather sofa in the library and opened the book to its final pages.

Napoléon lived to see much of Paris transformed into the beautiful city that has stood the test of time. In that, he succeeded beyond even his dreams. But his dismal failure in a war against Prussia overshadowed all his creative and economic successes. On September 1, 1870, he was captured at Sedan, Ardennes and sent to Wilhelmshöhe Castle in Germany where he remained until March 1871. Upon his release, Napoléon retired to England and lived a quiet life in a country home in Chislehurst with his wife and son. He died on January 9, 1873, and is buried at St. Michael’s Abby near London, England alongside his wife and son.ⁱⁱⁱ

Of Mademoiselle Liselle Benoit and what became of her, I found not a mention. So much for saving history.

I closed the massive volume and leaned back on the sofa.

The room shimmered and a ghostly apparition appeared. Napoléon as an older, regal man. My heart fluttered. “*Louis?*”

He smiled and bowed. “*Mademoiselle Ariana, I thank you on behalf of France.*”

He slowly disappeared.

The hotel concierge found me in the library, deep in thought. “Madame Levin, is everything all right?”

“Yes, I think it finally is.”

He arched an eyebrow, but refrained from asking questions I could not answer. My mental block kept his thoughts from coming through, and that was probably a good thing.

Ryan dashed into the library. “Well? Is it over?”

I stood and took his hand. “Let’s go for a walk, and I’ll tell you all about it.”

We hurried out of the stuffy library and into the streets of Paris. Napoléon’s streets.

“*Ari ... all is well ...*”

“*Gran, I’m curious. Why was a long-dead emperor of interest to you? You were not even French.*”

Silence.

No, she was not getting away with the silent treatment. *Gran? Do you ...*” How could I phrase my silly question? “*Do you know Napoléon III?*”

“*All in good time, what was meant to be ...*”

Author's Note

Thank you for reading *A Sweep in Time*, a spin-off from [*Whispering Tree*](#). If you enjoyed this novelette, consider reading [*Whispering Walls*](#), the first book in the *Whispers* trilogy and [*Whispering Tree*](#), book 2. To learn more about the *Whispers* series and upcoming series and spin-offs, or to ask me questions and make comments, check out my author website, <https://www.shirleybearfedorakauthor.com> and join my twice-monthly newsletter.

If you enjoy speculative fiction, you may like the YA post-apocalyptic climate survival series, [*Rainbow Warriors*](#). The box set, Rainbow Warriors [*The Complete Post-Apocalyptic Survival Series*](#) is now available on Amazon. Be sure to read [*The Caretaker's Quest*](#), prequel to the Rainbow Warriors series first. Please avail yourself of *Willow* and *Warrior Scout*, two free spin-offs from the Rainbow Warrior series available on my website. You may also enjoy the YA dystopian adventure series, *Farmcorp*: [*Farmcorp and the Secret Book*](#), [*Farmcorp and the Secret Trail*](#), and [*Farmcorp and the Secret Dream*](#). Or avail yourself of the YA sci-fi [*Spare Parts*](#).

All the best to you, my wonderful readers.

Shirley Bear Fedorak 2022

shirley.fedorak5@gmail.com

Excerpt from *Whispering Dreamers* (Whispers #3)

Prologue

The Tree, June 2087

Four long years had come and gone since I last drove into the old yard. More of the gnarled trees in the shelter belt had collapsed, and two of the outhouses were little more than wooden rubble, but the dead apple tree stood tall and proud.

I stepped out of the car in the warm glow of the morning sun and gazed at the gigantic tree. The whispering tree, my mother called it.

My mother. Gone now for four years but losing her still hurt. And my poor father. Ryan's heart broke at Ariana's passing, and he soon followed. But they lived long and happy lives. No one should mourn when a long life ends. Except I did.

Amy pulled me out of my reminisces. "Why are we here, mom? You said we were exploring your old stomping grounds."

A stretch of the truth but for a good reason. "The Tree is part of my old stomping grounds. A very important part. Please, Amy, be patient."

Amy scowled and shuffled her feet, but she followed me to The Tree. A super telepathic empath, she resented her abilities and pretended they did not exist. I secretly hoped visiting The Tree would help her understand the magic inside her and maybe pull her out of the thick shell she built around her mind to keep out the voices.

"Well, I think it's great," Melody said. "Our grandmother and great-grandmother's spirits are in The Tree. We can talk to them whenever we want. That's just epic."

I held back a grin. Melody's ability was much weaker than Amy's, but she embraced it. When she was a little girl, she loved listening to the voices around her. I had to explain over and over again that listening in on someone's thoughts was rude.

When I discovered my mother's spirit was in The Tree with all the women of The House and Gran, I was thrilled at first. Then worried. The women of The Tree were restless spirits. Was my mother a restless spirit, too? Why? Did she have a story to tell, or was she lingering in this world to help us, like Gran before her? Why did we need help?

The answers scared me. So I stayed away. Until now.

A cool wind blew through the old yard and swirled around me. I wrapped my shawl closer to my body and strolled across the dead patch of ground where The House once stood. Hallowed ground, Grandpa Henry called it.

Melody took my hand. "Do you think Nana Ari will talk to us?"

"I hope so."

Taking a deep breath to slow my racing heart and mind, I moved closer to The Tree. Would the women of The House still be inside The Tree? What about Gran and Mom?

“Mom, Gran, it’s Katie. I’ve come to visit, and I’ve brought the girls.”

Whispers swirled around me, some soft and meek, others loud and demanding. “Wait, what are you saying? I can’t—”

“*Katie ... danger ...*”

“Danger? What kind of danger? For whom?”

I wrapped my arms around the tree, and the darkness took me.

Whispering Dreamers is coming in late fall 2023.

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A very special thank-you to fellow authors and fans who have read my books and offered support.

About the Author

Shirley Bear Fedorak has always been passionate about storytelling and began writing when she was a little girl growing up on a farm in southern Saskatchewan, Canada. She taught anthropology and archaeology at the University of Saskatchewan for many years, and is the author of numerous academic books, including the bestselling *Anthropology Matters*.

Shirley Bear Fedorak has traveled extensively and lived in Canada, Egypt, Mexico, Lebanon, and Malaysia. She has three grown children and two adorable granddaughters, and lives in Phuket, Thailand with her husband, Robert.

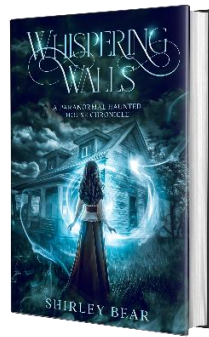
She is now focusing on a career in genre fiction, in particular speculative fiction. She has written several series, including the post-apocalyptic climate survival series, *Rainbow Warriors*, a YA dystopian *Farmcorp* trilogy, *Spare Parts*, a YA sci-fi story, and her new adult paranormal suspense trilogy, *Whispers*. An adult prehistoric action-adventure series, *Trace Riker*, will soon make its first appearance.

Other Books by the Author

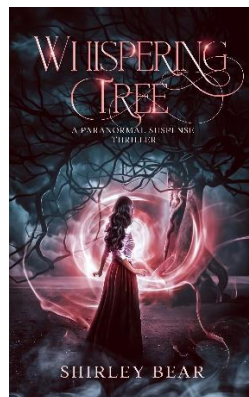
Adult series by Shirley Bear

Whispers

Empath Ariana Nightley explores an abandoned house and listens to five generations of women whisper their tragic stories from the walls. Little does she know that danger lurks outside the walls.



Ariana Nightley is living her dream on a Canadian prairie farm. She is a bestselling author, she's marrying the man she loves, and the dangerous psychopath who stalked her is gone. Then the women of The Tree start whispering again. They warn her of danger. Michael is back.



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In the year 2128, Earth's climate has collapsed, and millions are dying, but the First Peoples have a secret plan to save their children.



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Spare Parts

Two sixteen-year-old boys, one a clone and the other a normal, join forces to bring down the Mexican cartel that controls cloning in New North America. Jalan and Jalan-C, with the help of their friend Bree and the street boojees, rescue the Hive and free the clone kids. But normal society may not be ready for clone society, and the cartel may not be ready to give up their empire.



i

ii The Attempted Assassination of the Emperor of the French. (January 21, 1858). *NY Times*. [78528596.pdf](#)
[\(nytimes.com\)](#)

iii [Napoleon III | Palace of Versailles \(chateauversailles.fr\)](#)