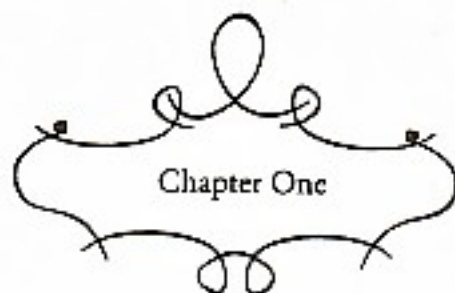


Can their friendship survive a revolution?

The
Lacemaker
and the
Princess

Kimberly Brubaker Bradley





Chapter One

*W*hen the Princess of Lamballe's lace was ready, Grand-mère decided that I should deliver it. Not because I was responsible—I was not, as she often reminded me. Not because she trusted me—she did not, as I well knew. It was because I was worthless, because Grand-mère had been more than usually unhappy about the lace I'd made the previous day, and because one of the very minor nobles had ordered ten yards of lace—a vast amount—that was to be picked up today, and it wasn't finished. "Stop for George. He'll point you to Her Majesty's rooms," Grand-mère said, stuffing me roughly into my one real dress. "He'll see you don't dawdle, or lose the lace."

George was my older brother. He worked in the stables at the palace of Versailles, caring for the Marquis de Lafayette's carriage horses. Our father had also been a servant of the Marquis. Papa was dead; I never knew him.

"Heaven forbid, lose the lace," murmured Maman, sitting up in her bed in the corner of the room, and crossing herself. Grand-mère was large and fat and mean; Maman was small and crippled and sad. "Take care, Isabelle, will you?" She glanced at Grand-mère. "Perhaps—"

"I don't have a moment to spare, not one moment, not with us so behind," Grand-mère said. She looked at Maman. She did not say it was Maman's fault we were behind with our lacemaking, but she thought it, and Maman and I both knew she was thinking it. Some days Maman's knees and hands hurt so bad that she had to drink laudanum before she could sleep. The medicine made her groggy all the next day, and it made her hands shake, too, which was not good in a lacemaker.

Grand-mère thought that Maman only pretended to be in pain, despite the evidence of her swollen fingers and knees. Grand-mère never believed in any pain she didn't feel herself.

Grand-mère was an evil old goat. She made our house a misery.

Now she poked me with Maman's cane. "Don't you think for a moment that you're off the hook. If it weren't for your shoddy work yesterday, we wouldn't be in such a rush."

This was a lie. The lace I'd ruined yesterday—and I had made a mess of it, the pattern was complicated and I'd gotten confused—was not the lace that was supposed to be ready today. I wasn't trusted to make important lace. But I knew better than to contradict Grand-mère.

"It won't take her long," Maman said. "You, Isabelle, remember you have work waiting when you get home."

I jumped, trying to see myself in the tiny mirror that hung high above the bureau. "Come here," Maman said. She pulled my hair back and powdered it with the hare's foot and powder from the table beside her bed.

"George will be working," I said. He slept at the stables. He was rarely home.

"He can take a moment to help you," Maman said.

Grand-mère grabbed my shoulder and hauled me back to the center of the room. "Hold still." She gathered a handful of lace around the neckline of my dress and quickly sewed it into place. Her needle flashed near my throat. I held still. The lace was not ornate, but all lace was precious. If I moved and Grand-mère stabbed me and I bled on the lace, it would be my fault.

"Some at her wrists, too," suggested Maman.

"She'll ruin it," Grand-mère said. "Foolish girl. She'll fall in a mud puddle or slip on the stairs."

I held my breath. I loved to dress up, and I almost never got to wear the lace we made.


"She'll be careful," said Maman. "Consider that it's the palace, after all. Someone might notice her."

Grand-mère considered. She looked at me the way a hawk might look at a mouse. "Hold up your arms," she commanded at last.

I held them up. "What shall I do?" I said, while Grand-mère whipstitched lace around my sleeves. I tried not to sound excited, in case they changed their minds. "What do I say to the princess?"

I never got to deliver lace, not even when it was only a bourgeoisie who'd ordered it, someone who lived and worked right in town. I never got to go to the Château, either, the great palace of Versailles, nor was I allowed to play in the parkland that surrounded it, nor go to the stables and bother my brother, even though he said he didn't mind.

I was a lacemaker, the daughter of a lacemaker, and the granddaughter of one. I had had a needle put into my hands when I was less than five years old. I made lace every day. Also I went to market for our bread and beer, and for the thread and linen



ISABELLE IS A LACEMAKER IN THE TOWN OF VERSAILLES. As she is delivering lace to the palace one day, she is almost trampled by a crowd of courtiers—only to be rescued by Marie Antoinette, the queen. Suddenly Isabelle is transformed from commoner to companion of the queen's daughter, complete with a new name, wardrobe, and lavish lifestyle.

Isabelle is living a fairy-tale life, but soon she hears whispers of starvation and revolution. Can these terrible rumors about the royal family be true? And which side is Isabelle on?

Inspired by actual events, Kimberly Brubaker Bradley's novel is a vivid picture of life behind the gilded walls of Versailles—and a wonderful story of friendship that blossomed during the chaos of the French Revolution.

— PRAISE FOR *THE LACEMAKER AND THE PRINCESS* —

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