Serpent & Dove

Serpent & Dove is a **YA fantasy romance** set in a richly imagined, witch-filled version of 19th-century France (*Belle Époque* inspired). The story follows:

- **Louise "Lou" Le Blanc**: A snarky, irreverent witch hiding from her past and the Church's witch hunters.
- **Reid Diggory**: A rigid, devout *Chasseur* (witch hunter) sworn to eradicate magic.

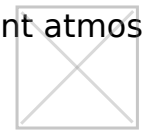
After a chaotic encounter, Lou and Reid are forced into a **marriage of convenience**, sparking fiery banter, slow-burn romance, and dangerous secrets. As their worlds collide, they must confront their prejudices—Lou's distrust of the Church and Reid's hatred of witches—while a larger conspiracy threatens both factions.

The book blends **enemies-to-lovers tropes**, **Gothic atmosphere**, and **witchy lore** with humor and high stakes. Its themes of **identity, freedom, and love vs. duty** resonate strongly, making it a standout in YA fantasy.

The Bellerose: Lou

The chapter opens with a chilling description of bodies marked by magic in Belterra, noting their unnatural sweetness and lingering aura—signs that hint at supernatural involvement. The Church attempts to suppress these mysteries, but thirteen such deaths in a year, including aristocrats like Filippa Tremblay, spark fear and rumors. Filippa's grotesque transformation into a hag before her murder suggests a witch's vengeance, likely tied to her father Pierre's illicit trade in magical artifacts. The narrative sets a dark tone, blending intrigue with the ever-present threat of witch hunts and violent retribution.

Lou and Coco, disguised as men to avoid suspicion, observe Pierre Tremblay in a brothel, where he waits uncomfortably amid courtesans. Their banter reveals Tremblay’s arrogance and wealth, juxtaposed with his daughter’s tragic fate. The scene underscores the hypocrisy of the aristocracy and the dangers of exploiting witches. Lou’s sharp wit and Coco’s wariness highlight their dynamic as they prepare to meet Babette, a courtesan with scars hinting at her own hidden ties to magic. The brothel’s decadent atmosphere contrasts with the underlying tension of betrayal and hidden agendas.



Babette arrives, flirting and negotiating for payment while feigning ignorance of Lou and Coco’s true identities. Her coy demeanor masks a calculating nature, as she jokingly inflates her fee. The exchange reveals the precarious trust between them, with Lou and Coco aware that Babette could turn on them for profit. The dialogue crackles with tension, blending humor and menace as they discuss the Church’s brutality toward women—especially suspected witches. Babette’s offer of sanctuary under her mistress’s roof feels like a veiled threat, hinting at deeper alliances and dangers.

The chapter culminates in a standoff over payment, with Babette demanding double the agreed sum and Coco refusing to yield. Their confrontation mirrors the broader stakes: Tremblay’s presence suggests he carries a magical object, and the women’s mission hinges on securing it. The brothel, a haven for secrets and sin, becomes a battleground of wits and wills. Lou’s final quip about the Church’s brutality underscores the peril of their world, where trust is fleeting and survival demands both cunning and ruthlessness.

The Chasseur: Lou

Lou, Bas, and Coco meet in a patisserie to discuss a heist targeting an aristocrat’s vault, specifically a magic ring that grants immunity to enchantment. Lou insists the ring is their priority, while Bas, a skilled swindler with aristocratic connections, questions her sudden interest in magic despite her past renouncement of it. Their banter reveals a history of romantic tension, with Lou recalling their passionate past but dismissing Bas as unreliable in serious matters. The dynamic between them is playful yet strained, hinting at unresolved feelings and mutual frustration.

Bas, who straddles the line between aristocracy and outsider due to his distant noble ties, outlines the challenges of robbing Tremblay’s heavily guarded vault. He mentions increased security after Tremblay’s daughter was kidnapped by witches, a detail that irritates Lou. Meanwhile, Coco joins them, bringing sticky buns and teasing Lou about her debts. The group’s camaraderie is evident, but their focus wavers as Bas and Coco bicker, forcing Lou to refocus them on the urgency of their mission—the ring must be stolen that very night.

Lou’s dual identity as Mademoiselle Lucida Bretton, a blonde persona she uses to manipulate the patisserie owner Pan, adds a layer of deception to her character. She reveals her disdain for Bas’s empty promises of protection, acknowledging his charm but doubting his loyalty. The ring’s significance becomes clearer as Lou explains its power to counter enchantments, a crucial tool against threats like the mysterious “she” who seems to be pursuing Lou. Bas’s playful demeanor shifts to concern when he touches Lou’s hidden scar, hinting at a deeper, unresolved danger.

The chapter blends humor, tension, and intrigue as the trio navigates personal dynamics while planning their risky heist. Lou’s determination to secure the ring underscores her pragmatism and self-reliance, contrasting with Bas’s cavalier attitude. The playful exchanges mask underlying tensions, particularly Lou’s fear of being found

by an unnamed enemy. The scene sets the stage for a high-stakes operation, leaving readers curious about the ring’s true importance and the unresolved threats looming over Lou and her companions.



Wicked Are the Ways of Women: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid, a former holy man turned Chasseur, detecting the acrid scent of magic in the air—a smell he associates with witches and loathes deeply. Armed with his Balisarda knife, he and his comrade Jean Luc discreetly blend into a crowd of revelers, anticipating an attack. The witches' growing restlessness has prompted the Chasseurs to station both uniformed and undercover agents throughout the area. Reid's tension is palpable as he scans the crowd, knowing the danger is imminent but unseen by the oblivious civilians around him.

A father and his young daughter approach Reid, seeking reassurance as the girl complains of a headache—a subtle sign of the witches' influence. Reid's sharp warning to evacuate is interrupted by a piercing scream, triggering panic. The crowd erupts into chaos as people flee, colliding in their desperation. Reid assists an elderly woman, only to realize too late that she is a witch in disguise, leaving behind a charred odor. The scene underscores the witches' deceptive nature and the insidious threat they pose, even in plain sight.

The witches reveal themselves, gliding through the chaos with eerie calm, using their magic to manipulate bystanders like puppets. Reid watches in horror as they advance toward the royal family's carriage, protected by a human shield of ensnared victims. The witches' uncharacteristically bold display suggests a larger, more sinister plan at work. Reid climbs a building for a better vantage point, his physical exertion mirroring his mental struggle to grasp the witches' strategy. The chapter highlights the witches' terrifying power and the Chasseurs' desperate race to counter it.

As Reid reaches the rooftop, he spots a mischievous girl who flees with a taunting gesture, momentarily distracting him. Below, the streets descend into further chaos, with shopkeepers barricading doors and trampled victims screaming for help. The witches' laughter echoes amid the pandemonium, their cruelty on full display. The

chapter ends with Reid grappling with the scale of the threat, realizing the Chasseurs may have underestimated the witches’ cunning. The tension builds toward a climactic confrontation, leaving the reader anticipating the next twist in this deadly game of cat and mouse.



The Heist: Lou

Lou, Bas, and Coco prepare for a high-stakes heist at Tremblay's heavily guarded townhouse, disguising themselves as aristocrats using costumes from their theater attic. Lou and Bas play a couple in love, while Coco acts as their escort. Their banter reveals Bas's mercenary motives—he's driven by gold, not goodwill. The group has spent the afternoon scouting Tremblay's defenses, which include rotating guards, attack dogs, and an uncertain number of staff inside. The challenge of locating the vault within a tight timeframe adds to the tension.

As they approach Tremblay's street, Lou's anxiety grows, and Coco reassures her that the magical Brindelle trees will mask their presence. These ancient trees, once a sacred grove, resisted destruction by the Church and still radiate powerful magic. Coco's cryptic warning about an unknown, potentially malevolent force waiting at Tremblay's unsettles Lou. Coco explains her limited vision, tied to the blood she's drawn from the group, but insists the presence is powerful yet unlikely to harm Lou directly. Bas reacts with skepticism, suggesting they should have recruited another blood witch, Babette, but Lou and Coco dismiss the idea due to trust issues.

The group's dynamic is fraught with tension as Bas and Coco trade barbs. Coco's blood magic, which she used to prick their fingers for divination, becomes a point of contention. Bas is frustrated by her vague predictions, while Coco dismisses his complaints, emphasizing the unpredictable nature of her visions. Lou intervenes to defuse the conflict, but the underlying mistrust and Bas's sarcastic remarks about witch persecution highlight the group's fragile alliance. Despite the bickering, they press forward, aware of the risks ahead.

The chapter ends with unresolved tension as Coco teases Bas about the secrets his blood might reveal, further irritating him. Her nonchalant attitude and Bas's outrage underscore their clashing personalities. Lou, caught between them, remains focused

on the heist but is unnerved by Coco’s warning. The group’s camaraderie is superficial, masking deeper uncertainties about loyalty and the unknown dangers awaiting them at Tremblay’s. The stage is set for a perilous mission, with magic, mistrust, and hidden threats looming large.



A Man’s Name: Reid

The chapter opens with Captain Reid Diggory arriving at Tremblay’s townhouse, which is saturated with the lingering scent of magic. He observes Madame Labelle, a notorious courtesan, assisting Tremblay with unconscious guards, while Tremblay’s wife watches with visible disdain. The tension escalates as Célie Tremblay, clad in mourning attire, greets Reid with strained politeness. Their interaction is fraught with unspoken emotions, hinting at a shared history of loss. Reid’s professional demeanor clashes with his personal concern for Célie, even as he asserts his duty to investigate potential witchcraft.

Madame Tremblay insists their home is free of witchcraft, blaming the nearby park for the strange odors, while Reid and his fellow Chasseur, Jean Luc, debate the necessity of their presence. Madame Labelle’s arrival further complicates the scene, as her cryptic remarks and exchanged glances with Tremblay suggest hidden agendas. The confrontation between Madame Tremblay and Labelle reveals underlying tensions, with Célie caught in the middle. Reid’s suspicion grows as he notices the Tremblays’ unease and the gathering crowd of onlookers.

Reid’s attention is drawn to an upstairs window, where he spots two figures—one of whom he recognizes from a previous encounter. The woman’s disguised appearance and panicked reaction fuel his determination to uncover the truth. Despite Jean Luc’s eagerness to label her a witch, Reid hesitates, recalling her lack of magical aura during their earlier meeting. His internal conflict reflects the broader theme of justice versus prejudice, as he grapples with the Archbishop’s teachings and his own observations.

The chapter culminates in Reid’s resolve to pursue the suspects, driven by a mix of duty and personal conviction. His fleeting doubt about the woman’s guilt contrasts with Jean Luc’s unwavering zeal, setting the stage for a moral and tactical clash. The scene underscores the pervasive fear of witchcraft and the complexities of discerning

truth in a world where appearances deceive. Reid’s final thoughts echo a biblical call for justice, hinting at the deeper ideological struggles that will shape his actions moving forward.



Angelica’s Ring: Lou

Lou narrowly escapes the Chasseurs by using Angelica’s Ring, a magical artifact that renders her invisible when placed in her mouth. Despite the physical strain of climbing down a townhouse with broken fingers and the constant fear of being discovered, she manages to evade capture. The ring’s power confirms the Chasseurs’ suspicions of her witchcraft, forcing her into hiding. As she regains her visibility, she encounters Coco, a fellow witch, who reveals that the Chasseurs are still searching for her but are distracted by ransacking the townhouse.

The conversation shifts to the significance of Angelica’s Ring, which Lou explains is a revered relic among witches. She recounts the tragic legend of Angelica, a witch whose grief over her knight’s death created the Wistful Waters. The ring, infused with magic after her suicide, symbolizes both love and sorrow. Coco, a Dame Rouge, expresses skepticism about the ring’s importance compared to other magical objects, highlighting the cultural divide between their witch factions. Lou’s reverence for the ring contrasts with Coco’s pragmatic view, underscoring their differing backgrounds.

Their discussion is interrupted by passing men, prompting them to hide. Lou then questions Coco about her escape, learning that the constabulary saw her, confirming her identity as a witch. This revelation heightens the danger for both of them, as the Chasseurs will now hunt them relentlessly. Lou urges Coco to flee the city immediately, but Coco insists Lou accompany her to seek protection from her aunt. Lou hesitates, fearing betrayal from Coco’s coven or the Dames Blanches, who view her as a threat.

The chapter ends with tension as Lou grapples with her limited options. While Angelica’s Ring offers some advantage, she recognizes the need for allies. Coco’s insistence on joining her aunt’s protection presents a risky but potential lifeline. Lou’s internal conflict reflects her precarious position—caught between the Chasseurs, rival

witch factions, and her own survival instincts. The chapter leaves their fate uncertain, emphasizing the high stakes of their choices in a world where magic and danger intertwine.



Two Named Wrath and Envy: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid, a Chasseur captain, training rigorously in the yard, his frustration evident as he reflects on his recent failure to capture a witch. His shirt remains on, a self-imposed punishment, while his comrades train shirtless. The memory of Célie's disappointment and the escaped witch weighs heavily on him, fueling his anger. His longtime friend and fellow Chasseur, Jean Luc, provokes him with taunts about the incident and Reid's interactions with a thief, testing Reid's patience and highlighting the tension between them.

Reid and Jean Luc's relationship is revealed to be strained, their once-close bond eroded by Reid's promotion and Jean Luc's envy. Their sparring session becomes a metaphor for their conflict, with Reid's physical strikes mirroring his emotional turmoil. Jean Luc's jabs about Reid's failures and the Archbishop's disapproval escalate the tension, while Ansel, another Chasseur, attempts to mediate. Reid struggles to control his anger, counting silently to regain composure, a technique taught by the Archbishop.

The Archbishop's arrival shifts the focus, as he reassures Reid of his trust and assigns him to accompany him to a theater matinee, despite Reid's reluctance. Jean Luc's resentment simmers in the background, his envy of Reid's position and favor with the Archbishop becoming increasingly apparent. The chapter underscores the growing rift between the two friends, with Reid acknowledging the shift in their dynamic—once rooted in mutual respect, now tainted by jealousy.

In the final moments, Reid reflects on the bitterness of their fractured friendship, recognizing Jean Luc's envy as the source of their discord. The chapter closes with Reid in a carriage, contemplating the sting of regret and the irreversible change in their relationship. The themes of duty, failure, and the corrosive effects of envy are central, painting a vivid picture of Reid's internal and external conflicts.

A Mutually Beneficial Arrangement: Lou

Lou wakes in the attic of the Soleil et Lune theater, disoriented and in pain from her injuries—a broken nose and swollen fingers—sustained the previous night. The noise from the matinee performance below reminds her of the urgency to relieve herself, but her bloodstained dress and battered face complicate her plans. She attempts to disguise herself with a hat and spectacles from the costume racks, though her injuries make changing impossible. Concern for her friend Coco lingers, but Lou focuses on her immediate need to navigate the crowded theater unnoticed.

Descending to the lobby, Lou draws unwanted attention from a haughty actress who questions her injuries and bloodstained clothing. Lou brushes off the concern with a hasty excuse, but the encounter leaves her uneasy. The bustling lobby, filled with nobles and merchants, proves challenging to navigate, though the crowd’s preoccupation with gossip works in her favor. Lou overhears rumors of the Archbishop’s attendance, heightening her anxiety, as she knows his reputation for ruthlessly hunting witches like herself.

In the restroom, Lou confronts her reflection, horrified by the extent of her bruises and bloodstains. She scrubs her face raw but fails to fully conceal the damage. A knock at the door forces her to feign illness, buying time to wait out the crowd. As the performance begins, the lobby empties, allowing Lou to slip out unnoticed—until a familiar voice freezes her in her tracks. The copper-haired man from her past, whose presence she dreads, spots her, leaving her with a chilling sense of impending danger.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger as Lou locks eyes with the man, whose identity and connection to her remain ominously unresolved. Her instinct to flee wars with her curiosity, but the encounter suggests her troubles are far from over. The tension underscores Lou’s precarious existence, caught between hiding her true nature and the ever-present threat of discovery in a world hostile to witches.

The Ceremony: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid, a disciplined and conflicted protagonist, struggling to maintain composure amid escalating chaos outside a theater. His heightened senses focus on the footsteps of a mysterious woman—light yet erratic—as the crowd demands justice. Despite the Archbishop’s attempts to calm the situation, Reid’s internal turmoil is palpable, his body reacting with a mix of heat and cold. The woman’s presence, marked by her broken fingers and hidden scars, unsettles him further, especially as memories of Célie, a pure and unblemished figure from his past, flood his mind.

Reid’s internal conflict deepens as the Archbishop presents the woman to the crowd, framing her as a wayward heathen in need of salvation. The woman clings to Reid’s arm, her fear evident, but he resists acknowledging her fully, torn between duty and disdain. The Archbishop’s sermon condemns her rebellious nature, urging the crowd to see her as a lesson in obedience. Meanwhile, Reid grapples with guilt over Célie’s rejection, her words haunting him: *“Give [your heart] to your brotherhood.”* The crowd’s mixed reactions—some sympathetic, others vicious—highlight the tension between societal expectations and individual morality.

The scene takes a darkly comedic turn when the Archbishop is suddenly afflicted by an inexplicable bout of flatulence, disrupting his solemn address. Reid suspects magic at play, but the woman’s laughter and the absence of magical scent on her leave him baffled. Her irreverent amusement contrasts sharply with Reid’s rigid demeanor, underscoring their ideological clash. The Archbishop’s humiliation forces him to retreat, leaving Reid and the woman to continue their journey to the Doleur for her baptism—a task Reid resents but cannot refuse.

As they walk, the woman’s defiance and wit continue to irk Reid, her mocking commentary on the Archbishop’s misfortune revealing her rebellious spirit. Despite his

disgust, Reid is forced to play the role of her husband, a charade that grates against his sense of duty. The chapter closes with their uneasy dynamic unresolved, setting the stage for further conflict. The woman’s laughter lingers as a symbol of resistance, while Reid’s internal struggle between faith, duty, and suppressed emotions remains central to the narrative.



Consummation: Lou

Lou arrives at Cathédral Saint-Cécile d’Cesarine with her new husband, Captain Diggory, a Chasseur whose tense demeanor reveals his discomfort with their marriage. The cathedral’s imposing architecture and the Chasseurs’ shocked reactions to Lou’s presence set the stage for the chapter’s tension. When questioned about her identity, Diggory reluctantly introduces her as his wife, his clenched teeth hinting at his inner conflict. Lou, ever mischievous, winks at a Chasseur, provoking her husband’s irritation and underscoring their strained dynamic.

As they enter the cathedral, a group of Chasseurs arrives carrying a mysterious body covered in vines and bark, sparking Lou’s curiosity. She attempts to investigate, but Diggory dismisses her questions, further emphasizing the secrecy and hostility of the Chasseurs’ world. The Archbishop greets them with disdain, criticizing Lou’s disheveled appearance and arranging for their marriage certificate. Lou’s sarcastic remarks about her newfound “God-fearing” status provoke Diggory to drag her away, highlighting their combative relationship.

Diggory leads Lou through the cathedral’s restricted areas, including a spiral staircase that piques her interest. He warns her against exploring forbidden zones, but Lou’s internal monologue suggests she plans to defy him. They arrive at the Chasseur Tower, marked by the ominous inscription, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” which sends a chill down Lou’s spine. Despite her dread, she steps inside, fully aware of the danger she’s entering.

The chapter concludes with Lou’s dismay at Diggory’s barren, impersonal living quarters, which reflect his rigid and austere lifestyle. The sparse room, devoid of warmth or personal touches, symbolizes the stark contrast between their worlds. Lou’s internal resolve to resist her circumstances—particularly the impending consummation of their marriage—hints at the ongoing struggle between her rebellious spirit and the

oppressive forces surrounding her.



The Interrogation: Reid

Reid awakens sore and exhausted after a night spent on the floor, having offered his injured wife the bed despite her stubbornness. His discomfort is compounded when he enters the training yard, where his fellow soldiers—once comrades—now regard him with hostility and suspicion. They taunt him about his marriage to a woman they view as a criminal and a witch sympathizer, provoking Reid into violent confrontations. Jean Luc, in particular, revels in Reid's turmoil, mocking him while hinting at the impending interrogation of Reid's wife for information about witches.

The tension escalates as Reid defends his wife against the soldiers' insults, physically retaliating against their slurs. Jean Luc continues to needle him, questioning Reid's loyalty and innocence, while the other soldiers whisper and stare. Reid's internal struggle is evident as he grapples with his new reality: his marriage has alienated him from his brethren, and his wife's reputation casts a shadow over his standing. Despite his exhaustion, Reid refuses to back down, determined to maintain his authority and protect his wife, even as Jean Luc's provocations grow more personal.

Reid's emotional turmoil deepens when Jean Luc brings up Célie, the woman Reid once loved, forcing him to confront the finality of his marriage. The mention of Célie stirs guilt and pain, as Reid has already sent her a farewell letter. Jean Luc's insinuations that Reid may not be as innocent as he claims further fuel Reid's anger, though he struggles to contain it. The chapter highlights Reid's isolation, caught between his duty, his past love, and his contentious marriage, all while facing the scorn of his peers.

The chapter concludes with the Archbishop's arrival, who confirms Reid's role in interrogating his wife about the witches. The Archbishop's tone is both commanding and paternalistic, warning Reid to remain vigilant against his wife's potential influence. This interaction underscores the precariousness of Reid's position—balancing loyalty to

the Church with the complexities of his marriage, all under the watchful eyes of his distrustful brethren. The chapter leaves Reid at a crossroads, torn between duty and personal turmoil.



The Forbidden Infirmary: Lou

Lou recounts her recent ordeal to her husband, carefully omitting key details about Angelica’s Ring and Madame Labelle’s involvement to avoid further suspicion. She strategically emphasizes the danger she faced from Andre and Grue, knowing her husband’s protective instincts will work in her favor. Despite their strained relationship, she notes his unexpected defense of her in the dungeon, which momentarily overshadows his usual arrogance. Lou’s cunning nature shines as she manipulates the situation to her advantage, confident that Tremblay’s status will shield her from repercussions.

Back in their room, Lou’s mind races with plans to explore the Tower’s forbidden upper floors, suspecting a hidden infirmary or laboratory where the Chasseurs dispose of witch victims. She reflects on the hypocrisy of their justification for killing witches, contrasting it with her own survival instincts. The possibility of a magic-laden location excites her, as it could provide the perfect cover for her clandestine activities. Her determination to uncover the truth is palpable, even as she feigns nonchalance about her husband’s impending restrictions.

Their conversation takes a tense turn as her husband announces a new chaperone, Ansel, to monitor her movements. Lou immediately seizes the opportunity to provoke him, teasingly suggesting she might seduce the young guard. Her playful yet calculated remarks about Ansel’s age and inexperience visibly unsettle her husband, revealing his possessiveness despite his disdain for her. The dynamic between them oscillates between animosity and an unspoken tension, with Lou expertly exploiting his vulnerabilities to maintain control.

The chapter concludes with Lou further antagonizing her husband by reading aloud from a journal containing love letters to Célie Tremblay, his former flame. Her mockery of his romantic idealism sends him into a rage, culminating in a physical chase as she

locks herself in the washroom. This final act of defiance underscores Lou’s rebellious spirit and her refusal to be subdued, setting the stage for her next move. The interplay of power, wit, and unresolved tension between the two characters leaves the reader anticipating their next confrontation.



The Escape: Lou

Lou, the protagonist, is enjoying a lavender-scented bath when her husband returns home. Anticipating his reaction, she deliberately leaves the washroom door removed, exposing herself to humiliate him. The scene is playful yet tense, as her husband is visibly flustered and angry, chastising Ansel for not fixing the door in time. Lou taunts him, reveling in his discomfort, while he struggles to maintain composure. Their dynamic is marked by a mix of antagonism and underlying tension, with Lou clearly enjoying the upper hand in this interaction.

The conversation shifts to the failed pursuit of Andre and Grue, two individuals Lou's husband, a Chasseur, is hunting. He explains that they are monitoring the East End to apprehend the fugitives, who are wanted for assault and for information on a witch—Lou's friend. Lou is skeptical but resigned, knowing the men's incompetence might lead to their capture. The exchange reveals the ongoing conflict between Lou's loyalties and her husband's duty, highlighting the strained trust between them.

Lou's husband notices her scars and asks about their origins. She dismissively recounts various violent encounters, including one with Andre, but becomes uneasy when he focuses on her throat. The moment is charged with unspoken vulnerability, as Lou deflects with humor while her husband expresses regret for not catching her attackers. Their interaction softens slightly, showing glimpses of concern beneath their usual antagonism, but Lou quickly regains her defiant demeanor.

The tension escalates when Lou learns that Bastien St. Pierre, a thief and likely her ally, has been arrested and faces execution. Panicked, she demands to see him, but her husband refuses. The chapter ends with Lou contemplating using magic to intervene, despite the risks. This revelation underscores her desperation and the deepening stakes of her predicament, setting the stage for further conflict between her secretive past and her husband's rigid authority.

Lord, Have Mercy: Lou

The chapter opens with Lou and her husband attending evening Mass at Saint-Cécile, where the stifling atmosphere and tedious rituals test her patience. The Archbishop reminisces about his youthful archery skills, prompting a polite but strained exchange. Lou, bored and drowsy in her heavy wool gown, muses that staying awake would be a miracle. Her irreverent attitude contrasts sharply with the solemnity of the setting, highlighting her discomfort with religious formalities.

Earlier in the day, Lou had reluctantly agreed to memorize scripture after a confrontation in the library. Her husband, still irritated, quotes proverbs while Lou responds with sarcastic retorts, turning the lesson into a battle of wits. Their banter reveals her rebellious nature and his frustration, though the invitation to Mass offers a temporary truce. The Archbishop’s cryptic warning to her husband about keeping "a closer eye" sparks Lou’s curiosity, but he deflects her questions, further straining their dynamic.

Inside the sanctuary, the opulence of the wealthy congregants contrasts with the humble attire of the poor, emphasizing the social divide. Lou’s discomfort grows as she realizes they must stand for the entire service. Her husband’s insistence on joining the Chasseurs—including Jean Luc—forces her into an unfamiliar role. When the congregation begins chanting, Lou improvises irreverent lyrics, amusing Jean Luc but irritating her husband, underscoring her outsider status.

The chapter culminates as the Archbishop begins the Mass, with Lou observing the rituals with detached amusement. Her husband’s stern reactions and Jean Luc’s suppressed laughter hint at the tension between Lou’s defiance and the rigid expectations of the Church. The scene sets the stage for further conflict, as Lou’s presence in this devout environment remains a source of friction and unspoken secrets.

Madame Labelle: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid observing the first snowfall of the year, using physical exercise to alleviate his frustration. Lou, his companion, has claimed the bed, leaving him to sleep on the floor. Their dynamic is tense yet playful, as Lou dismisses a religious book from the library as "drivel," mocking its pastoral themes. Reid, in response, reveals a hidden compartment in his room where he keeps a cherished book, *La Vie Éphémère*, a love story about warring kingdoms. Lou initially teases him, assuming it’s a "bodice-ripper," but Reid defends its deeper themes of love, war, and hope.

Reid’s emotional attachment to the book becomes evident as he describes its tragic yet hopeful ending, where the lovers die but their kingdoms unite. Lou, skeptical of the story’s merit, questions the value of a narrative that ends in death, but Reid insists on its underlying message of reconciliation. Their banter reveals a growing camaraderie, with Lou eventually agreeing to read the book, albeit with sarcastic reluctance. The exchange ends on a lighthearted note as Reid admits the book does contain a love scene, prompting Lou’s laughter and his own smile.

Their moment is interrupted by a knock from Ansel, who announces the arrival of Madame Labelle, demanding to speak with Lou. Lou, engrossed in the book, is annoyed by the disruption but prepares to meet the visitor. Reid, halfway through washing up, is teased by Lou for his odor, adding a touch of humor to the scene. Ansel’s discomfort hints at the tension surrounding Madame Labelle’s unexpected visit, leaving the reader curious about her intentions.

The chapter concludes with Lou’s characteristic wit as she reluctantly postpones her reading to address Madame Labelle. The interaction between Reid and Lou showcases their evolving relationship, blending conflict, humor, and mutual understanding. The arrival of Madame Labelle introduces a new layer of intrigue, setting the stage for

further developments in the story. The chapter effectively balances character development with plot progression, maintaining a engaging and dynamic tone throughout.



Chill in My Bones: Lou

The chapter opens with Lou experiencing a visceral nightmare where her throat is bleeding profusely, symbolizing deep trauma and fear. She is pursued by an ominous female figure whose taunting voice echoes through the pines, heightening her panic. The imagery of blood and gold flickering in the environment underscores her desperation to escape, as she believes returning home or encountering her pursuer will lead to her death. Lou’s frantic attempt to cleanse herself in the river mirrors her desire to erase her past and evade the looming threat.

Awakening abruptly, Lou is consumed by residual terror from the dream, exacerbated by the cold snow drifting through her open window. The warning from Madame Labelle—"She is coming"—haunts her, reinforcing her sense of impending doom. Lou reflects on her naivety in thinking she could hide from her past, especially after marrying a Chasseur, a decision that now feels like a dangerous illusion. The chilling realization that her mother will inevitably find her leaves her feeling exposed and vulnerable.

Determined to survive, Lou resolves to train harder and arm herself, recognizing that physical strength and a weapon might be her only defenses. Her husband’s peaceful sleep contrasts sharply with her turmoil, highlighting her isolation in this struggle. Seeking solace, she presses close to him, drawing temporary comfort from his warmth. Yet, even this moment of respite is tinged with unease, as his breathing falters slightly, hinting at underlying tensions or foreshadowing future disruptions.

The chapter closes with Lou postponing her fears until morning, a fragile attempt to delay confronting her inevitable confrontation. Her fleeting calm is fragile, overshadowed by the knowledge that her past will soon catch up to her. The recurring motif of cold—both literal and emotional—emphasizes her isolation and the relentless dread that permeates her existence. Lou’s story is one of survival, but the chapter

leaves the reader questioning whether she can outrun her fate.



A Clever Little Witch: Lou

Lou wakes up feeling physically and emotionally drained, haunted by nightmares and the memory of her near-death experience on her sixteenth birthday. As a witch destined to die for her people, she had accepted her fate—until a last-minute change spared her life. Now, she grapples with lingering trauma, evident in her swollen eyes and the scar at her throat. Her husband, Reid, and his friend Ansel check on her, but Lou brushes off their concern, masking her vulnerability with sarcasm and irritation.

Reid attempts to lift Lou’s spirits by inviting her to a show, *La Vie Éphémère*, which ironically mirrors her own existential struggles. Lou reflects on the tragic love story she read the night before, finding parallels in its themes of fleeting hope and inevitable death. Despite her reluctance, she agrees to go, craving an escape from her oppressive surroundings. Reid senses her distress and tries to connect, but Lou pushes him away, unwilling to reveal her inner turmoil. His persistence only frustrates her further, though she feels a pang of regret when he leaves.

Lou’s agitation escalates as she searches for a hidden weapon, convinced she needs protection from potential threats like Madame Labelle. Ansel watches nervously, confused by her erratic behavior. Her desperation leads her to scour the room, even crawling under the bed to inspect the floorboards, but her efforts prove futile. Ansel’s attempts to reason with her only provoke her anger, especially when he mistakenly calls her “Louise,” a name she vehemently rejects.

The chapter highlights Lou’s internal conflict—her struggle to reconcile her past as a sacrificial witch with her present life, where she resists vulnerability and connection. Her sharp wit and defiance mask deep-seated fear and loneliness, making her interactions with Reid and Ansel tense and emotionally charged. The unresolved tension between her hardened exterior and hidden fragility sets the stage for further exploration of her character and relationships.

La Vie Éphémère: Lou

The chapter opens with Lou and her husband arriving at the theater, where the affluent crowd engages in a social spectacle rather than focusing on the performance. Lou reflects on the irony of their attendance, as she and her husband are dressed impeccably—she in a gold embroidered gown and he in his finest Chasseur coat—yet their presence unsettles the elite. Despite their polished appearance, Lou retains her guarded demeanor, keeping her hood up and a ribbon to conceal her scar, while her husband's possessive nature begins to surface as they navigate the crowd.

Inside the theater, tensions rise when a charming stranger kisses Lou's hand, provoking her husband's jealousy. The interaction highlights their contrasting personalities: Lou finds amusement in the situation, while her husband asserts his territorial claim over her. The scene underscores the complexities of their relationship, blending humor with underlying tension. As the performance begins, Lou's attention shifts to a chorus member, Hook-Nose, whose demeanor stirs a vague sense of familiarity, though she cannot place why.

During the performance, Lou and her husband engage in a whispered argument about her request for a knife, revealing her lingering fear of Madame Labelle. Her husband insists she is protected by both him and the Archbishop, but Lou dismisses their assurances, highlighting her distrust of authority figures. Their exchange exposes the fragility of their trust and the secrets Lou harbors, particularly her true identity as a witch, which her husband remains unaware of.

The chapter closes with Lou and her husband locked in a silent standoff, their unresolved conflict simmering beneath the surface. Despite the tension, Lou finds a twisted satisfaction in her husband's frustration, knowing his propriety prevents him from escalating the argument in public. The scene leaves their relationship at a crossroads, with Lou's defiance and her husband's protectiveness clashing against the

backdrop of the theatrical performance, hinting at deeper struggles to come.



Witch Killer: Lou

The chapter opens with Lou consumed by guilt as Reid carries Estelle’s unconscious body back to Chasseur Tower, refusing to speak to her. The Chasseurs eagerly prepare a mysterious injection, which Reid administers to Estelle without hesitation, leaving her lifeless on the ground. Lou watches in horror as Estelle is dragged away in chains, her self-loathing intensifying with each moment. The weight of her betrayal is underscored by the repeated mantra of "witch killer," echoing in her mind as she breaks down in tears.

The next morning, the world seems to mirror Lou’s despair with a dark, stormy sky. Estelle is publicly humiliated by the Archbishop, who presents her to a hostile crowd. Lou, watching from her window, locks eyes with Estelle and sees the accusation in her gaze. Reid stands at the forefront as Estelle is tied to a stake, her white gown stained with blood. Lou is paralyzed by guilt, realizing her cowardice has led to her sister’s impending execution, and she struggles to convey the injustice of the situation to Ansel, who remains stubbornly prejudiced against witches.

As the execution begins, Lou forces herself to witness every agonizing moment, from the ignition of the pyre to Estelle’s screams. The crowd’s cruelty and Reid’s participation amplify her torment, and she grapples with the realization that witches are not the monsters they’re made out to be. Her emotional breakdown culminates in a visceral, physical reaction as she collapses, overwhelmed by the pain of Estelle’s suffering and her own complicity in it.

In the chapter’s climax, Lou’s anguish manifests as a supernatural outburst, her body convulsing as if consumed by invisible flames. Ansel tries to restrain her, but her agony is beyond physical control. The chapter ends with Lou’s desperate scream, symbolizing both her internal devastation and a potential turning point in her resolve. The imagery of fire ties her suffering directly to Estelle’s fate, leaving readers with a

sense of impending reckoning for her choices.



Soul Ache: Lou

Lou awakens to find Reid, her witch hunter husband, watching over her after she collapsed from an unexplained illness. The moonlight reveals his exhaustion, and she notices he had been holding her hand while she slept. Despite this tender moment, Lou is conflicted, recalling how Reid burned Estelle, a witch, at the stake—a death she indirectly caused. Disgusted with herself and Reid, she remembers their irreconcilable roles: a witch and a witch hunter bound in a marriage that can only end in tragedy.

Reid explains that Lou was unconscious for three days, screaming and unresponsive until he arrived. He cared for her diligently, feeding her ice chips and ensuring her comfort. When Lou asks why he did this, Reid avoids emotional vulnerability, focusing instead on her physical recovery. Their conversation grows tense as Lou confronts him about Estelle’s burning, emphasizing that the witch was a person with a name, not just a demon to be executed. Reid dismisses her empathy, insisting witches are inherently evil and deserve their fate.

The tension escalates when Lou provocatively asks Reid if he would burn her at the stake if she were a witch. His hesitant "yes" hangs heavily between them, creating an unspoken question about her true identity. Lou challenges him to ask directly, but Reid avoids the confrontation, leaving the air thick with unresolved tension. She finally tells him to leave, needing space to grapple with her guilt and the moral cost of her survival.

Alone in the bath, Lou reflects on the consequences of her actions. She remembers Estelle’s death and the countless other witches executed by persecution. Though she acted in self-preservation, Lou is haunted by the realization that she betrayed her own kind. The chapter ends with her questioning the price of survival and the inevitability of her conflict with Reid, foreshadowing the tragic path their relationship must take.

A Time for Moving on: Reid

The chapter opens with Lou suggesting an outing to Reid, who has been observing her unusual behavior since her return from the infirmary. She appears distracted, her eyes flickering as if watching something unseen, and her fingers twitching nervously. Reid worries about the influence of a troubled patient, Monsieur Bernard, who is kept sedated and chained to prevent self-harm. Hoping a change of scenery might help, Reid agrees to accompany Lou, though he remains cautious about her unpredictable nature.

Lou proposes visiting the patisserie where they first met, reminiscing about her past visits before their complicated relationship began. Reid hesitates, questioning if she will behave, to which Lou teasingly responds that she has no intention of doing so. Despite his reservations, Reid notices a spark of vitality in her that had been missing since their traumatic experiences. This glimpse of her former self gives him hope that she may be recovering from her recent emotional turmoil.

As they venture out into the cold, Lou revels in the weather while Reid struggles without a cloak. Their playful banter leads to Lou sharing her cloak, resulting in an awkward but endearing attempt to stay warm together. Their laughter and eventual tumble into the snow mark a rare moment of lightness for Reid, who finds himself genuinely enjoying her company. The shared joy seems to lift Lou’s spirits further, transforming her demeanor entirely.

Upon arriving at the patisserie, Lou is warmly greeted by Pan, the shop owner, who expresses concern over her changed appearance and thin frame. Lou introduces Reid as "Bas," a name that surprises him but hints at a deeper backstory between them. Pan reacts with protective indignation, chastising Reid for his perceived mistreatment of Lou. The chapter ends on a humorous yet poignant note, underscoring the complexity of their relationship and the lingering questions about their past and future

together.



The Guest of Honor: Lou

The chapter opens with King Auguste hosting a grand ball to honor Reid for saving his family from a witch attack. Lou, the narrator, reflects on the irony of celebrating Reid's success, as his failure would have spared her from her own dire predicament. Despite her reservations, she acknowledges Reid's heroism, even as she grapples with her conflicted feelings about his actions. The scene sets a tone of tension and dark humor, with Lou's internal monologue revealing her sharp wit and underlying vulnerability.

Lou's interactions with Coco and Reid highlight her complex relationships. Reid departs to meet the Archbishop, leaving Lou with Coco, who insists on preparing her for the ball. Their banter is playful yet charged, as Coco aggressively styles Lou's hair despite her protests. Lou's reluctance to conform to societal norms—such as brushing her hair—showcases her rebellious nature, though she secretly enjoys Reid's attention to it. The dynamic between the two women blends camaraderie and mild antagonism, adding depth to their characters.

The chapter shifts focus to Lou and Coco's transformation for the ball. Lou admires her elegant gown and healed appearance in the mirror, though she envies Coco's more striking figure. Their conversation about courtesans and beauty reveals Lou's insecurities and pride. Ansel's arrival interrupts their preparations, and his flustered reaction to Coco's bold flirtation provides comic relief. Lou teases Ansel, enjoying his discomfort, while Coco revels in the attention, further emphasizing the playful yet charged atmosphere.

The final scene transitions to the group's journey to the castle, with Coco continuing to tease Ansel, much to the amusement of the guards and Lou. The grim, imposing castle contrasts with the lively interactions, underscoring the tension between the celebratory event and the darker undercurrents of the story. Lou's wry observations and the group's dynamic leave the reader anticipating the unfolding events at the ball,

blending humor, tension, and intrigue.



A Dangerous Game: Lou

Lou follows Reid and Célie through a crowd, observing their intimate interaction with growing irritation. When she attempts to trail them through a hidden door, the Archbishop intercepts her, warning against envy and blaming her for Reid’s unhappiness. He accuses Lou of corruption, claiming Célie is the ideal woman Reid should have married. Lou defiantly counters his hypocrisy, asserting his own moral failings, before storming off to continue her pursuit. The confrontation reveals the Archbishop’s disdain for Lou and his role in Reid’s forced marriage.

Entering a kitchen, Lou discovers an open door leading to a snow-covered garden where Reid and Célie are deep in conversation. She eavesdrops as Célie pleads with Reid to seek an annulment, insisting their love can still prevail. Reid resists, citing his marital vows, though his conflicted emotions are evident. Célie’s venomous remarks about Lou—calling her a thief and a whore—stir Lou’s anger, but Reid defends his wife, revealing a shift in his feelings despite his loyalty to Célie.

The tension escalates as Célie demands to know if Reid loves Lou. He hesitates, admitting he could grow to care for her, which devastates Célie. She recalls his past declarations of love for her and struggles to reconcile his changed feelings. Reid’s refusal to hurt Lou, even as he acknowledges his lingering attachment to Célie, underscores his internal struggle between duty and desire. Lou, hidden and heart pounding, grapples with the revelation of his potential affection for her.

The chapter ends with Lou’s emotional turmoil as she witnesses the raw confrontation between Reid and Célie. His unwillingness to betray Lou, despite Célie’s pleas, hints at his evolving loyalty. Lou’s initial jealousy gives way to a mix of hope and insecurity, leaving her questioning her place in Reid’s life. The scene sets the stage for further conflict, as unspoken feelings and unresolved tensions threaten to unravel the fragile bonds between the three characters.

A Question of Pride: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid and Lou sharing an uncomfortably intimate night in a cramped dormitory bed. The tension between them is palpable as Lou struggles to sleep, her movements and proximity driving Reid to distraction. Despite his restraint, Reid reluctantly joins her in bed after she insists, their forced closeness igniting a mix of irritation and unspoken attraction. The awkward silence between them underscores the unresolved tension, with Lou’s playful teasing and Reid’s guarded responses highlighting their complicated dynamic.

As the night progresses, Lou breaks the silence by asking Reid about his past, shifting the tone from physical tension to emotional vulnerability. Reid reveals his traumatic childhood—abandoned as a baby and raised by the Archbishop, who trained him to become a Chasseur. His matter-of-fact delivery contrasts with Lou’s horrified reaction, emphasizing his hardened exterior. The conversation then turns to the rigorous process of becoming a Chasseur, including the competitive tournaments for coveted Balisarda swords. Lou’s surprise at Ansel’s status as an initiate rather than a full Chasseur leads to a brief discussion about his open-minded nature, which Reid dismisses with defensive pride.

The dialogue deepens as Lou probes Reid about his past rivalry with Jean Luc, whom he defeated in a tournament to earn his position. Reid admits to the lingering resentment between them, hinting at the personal costs of his ambition. Lou’s playful teasing about his arrogance lightens the mood momentarily, but the conversation takes a darker turn when she asks about Célie, Reid’s former lover. His abrupt defensiveness and evasion suggest unresolved guilt or conflict, leaving Lou—and the reader—questioning the true nature of his past relationships and vows.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger as Lou presses Reid about why he continued his courtship with Célie despite his vows to the Chasseurs, a question that visibly

unsettles him. His tense reaction and the abrupt cutoff in the text leave the confrontation unresolved, foreshadowing deeper revelations about Reid’s loyalties and personal struggles. The interplay of physical tension, emotional vulnerability, and unresolved history paints a vivid portrait of Reid’s internal conflict and the growing complexity of his relationship with Lou.



Blood, Water, and Smoke: Lou

The chapter opens with Lou waking up in an intimate embrace with Reid, her husband, which flusters her as she realizes her nightgown has ridden up during the night. Their playful banter sets a lighthearted tone as Reid prepares for training, but Lou insists they attend the Saint Nicolas Day festival instead. She eagerly describes the festival's delights, particularly the food, and insists on buying Reid a gift despite his protests. Their dynamic is affectionate and teasing, showcasing their growing closeness.

Lou and Reid arrive at the East End festival, where the lively atmosphere is filled with the scents of cinnamon treats and the sights of decorated evergreens and bustling crowds. Lou's enthusiasm for the festivities contrasts with Reid's more reserved demeanor, especially when she eyes the desserts hungrily. Their playful disagreement over her appetite adds humor, while the festive setting—complete with snow and wreaths—paints a vivid picture of the holiday cheer in Cesarine.

Amid the celebrations, Lou notices flyers advertising a performance by the "Ye Olde Sisters" in honor of Archbishop Florin Cardinal Clément, Reid's middle name, which she mocks. The flyers hint at a larger plot or conflict, but Lou dismisses them and focuses on her mission to find a gift for Reid. She insists on splitting up to shop, despite Reid's reluctance, demonstrating her independent streak and determination to surprise him.

Lou visits the blacksmith Abe, hoping to purchase a copper-handled dagger for Reid, but the encounter turns tense when Abe accuses her of betraying East End's underworld to the constables. His hostility reveals the consequences of Lou's past actions, and her attempt to smooth things over with money fails as Abe condemns her marriage to Reid. The confrontation ends on a sour note, hinting at lingering tensions and challenges in Lou's new life.

Of My Home: Lou

Lou and Reid return to Chasseur Tower after a harrowing encounter, where Lou faces intense questioning from the constabulary about her injuries. Frustrated by their skepticism, she angrily displays her bruises, prompting Reid to expedite their departure. Lou reflects on recent losses—Andre, Grue, and likely Monsieur Bernard—while also grappling with her strained relationship with Coco. Despite the turmoil, she finds solace in Reid’s presence, savoring his comforting scent and the warmth of his hand in hers. Their bond, though complicated, offers a momentary reprieve from the chaos around them.

Lou attempts to lighten the mood by teasing Reid with a secret, but he reacts with suspicion, questioning its legality. Their banter escalates into a playful standoff, with Lou threatening to strip and dance in public—a bluff Reid calls by daring her to follow through. The tension between them is palpable, blending humor with underlying attraction. Though Lou initially feigns defiance, she ultimately backs down, revealing her vulnerability beneath the bravado. Their dynamic shifts as Reid’s smirk softens into genuine curiosity, and he persuades her to share her secret after all.

As they walk, Lou’s thoughts drift to the complexities of her relationship with Reid. She acknowledges his unwavering beliefs as a Chasseur and fears his reaction if he discovers her true identity. A flashback to Estelle’s fate—and Reid’s role in it—fills her with sudden dread, causing her to recoil from his touch. The moment passes, but the unease lingers, highlighting the fragility of their connection. Lou quickly masks her discomfort with nervous laughter, redirecting their focus to the secret she promised to reveal—a diversion from the deeper tensions neither is ready to confront.

Their destination, Soleil et Lune theater, surprises Reid, who expected something more illicit. Lou’s playful defiance resurfaces as she climbs onto a trash bin, hinting at her unconventional plans. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving Reid—and the

reader—intrigued by her next move. Their interactions throughout the chapter weave together humor, tension, and unspoken emotions, painting a vivid portrait of two characters navigating trust, attraction, and the shadows of their pasts.



Where You Go: Lou

Lou and Reid share a poignant moment on the rooftop of Soleil et Lune, the tallest building in Cesarine, where the night sky stretches endlessly above them. Despite Reid’s fear of heights, Lou coaxes him to open his eyes, revealing a breathtaking view of stars. The scene is intimate, with Lou reflecting on the sky’s beauty and her belief in a higher power, though not necessarily the one Reid worships. Their conversation turns philosophical as Lou challenges the patriarchal interpretations of religion, while Reid defends his faith, albeit with growing uncertainty.

Tensions arise as Lou confronts Reid about the Archbishop’s views on women, questioning whether Reid sees her as his property. Reid vehemently denies this, expressing his deep respect for her, even as he struggles to reconcile his loyalty to the Archbishop with his growing feelings for Lou. The emotional weight of their exchange is palpable, revealing the complexities of their relationship and the conflicting ideologies that shape their lives. Reid’s admission that the Archbishop “gave me you” sparks a tender moment, with Lou suggesting their union was orchestrated by a higher power.

The mood shifts as Reid presents Lou with a heartfelt gift—his mother’s wedding ring, a symbol of his love and commitment. Overwhelmed by emotion, Lou accepts the ring, realizing the depth of her feelings for him. The moment is charged with vulnerability as both characters grapple with the intensity of their connection. Lou’s internal monologue reveals her startling realization that she loves Reid, a revelation that both excites and terrifies her, marking a turning point in their relationship.

The chapter culminates in a passionate exchange, with Reid quoting biblical verses about devotion while Lou surrenders to her desires. Their physical and emotional intimacy reaches a crescendo as Lou acknowledges her longing for Reid, abandoning pretense and embracing their bond fully. The scene is electric with unspoken promises

and raw emotion, leaving readers anticipating the next steps in their tumultuous yet deeply affectionate relationship.



Monsieur Bernard: Lou

Lou and Reid enjoy a playful and intimate morning at the Saint Nicolas Festival, reveling in their newfound connection. Lou reflects on her last night in the attic and her decision to leave Soleil et Lune, embracing Reid as her new home. Their banter is lighthearted and flirtatious, with Lou teasing Reid about his past judgments of her, calling her a "heathen." The couple’s chemistry is palpable as they share sweet moments, like Lou licking icing off Reid’s fingers, showcasing their growing comfort and affection for each other.

Their playful dynamic is interrupted when Madame Labelle, the brothel madam, approaches them. Her attention is immediately drawn to Lou’s mother-of-pearl ring and Reid’s face, sparking curiosity and tension. Madame Labelle’s probing questions about Reid’s character and her intense gaze unsettle Lou, who begins to notice the striking resemblance between Reid and the madam. The realization dawns on Lou that Madame Labelle might be Reid’s mother, adding a layer of complexity to their encounter.

Madame Labelle’s behavior grows increasingly urgent as she warns Lou to keep the ring hidden, hinting at an unseen threat in the city. Her cryptic message—"Don’t let her see"—alarms Lou, who senses the gravity of the situation. Reid, oblivious to the underlying implications, becomes protective and forcibly removes Lou from the confrontation. The chapter ends with tension unresolved, leaving readers questioning Madame Labelle’s motives and the significance of the ring.

The chapter masterfully blends romance and suspense, deepening the emotional bond between Lou and Reid while introducing a mysterious new conflict. Lou’s internal struggle—balancing her happiness with Reid against the looming danger—sets the stage for future developments. The revelation of Madame Labelle’s potential connection to Reid adds a personal stake to the unfolding drama, ensuring readers are

left eager for the next chapter.



Ye Olde Sisters: Lou

Lou experiences a profound emotional shift upon hearing Reid’s declaration of love, which fills her with warmth and hope despite her fear as a witch. She believes his love will transcend her identity and protect her, but her moment of joy is interrupted by the Archbishop, who accuses her of deception. He dismisses her feelings as an act, insisting she cannot truly care for Reid. Tension rises as Lou edges toward a hidden knife, sensing danger, while the Archbishop quotes scripture, labeling her a serpent and vowing to end her influence over Reid.

Their confrontation is disrupted by a page boy announcing the start of a performance, forcing the Archbishop to delay his threats. Lou seizes the opportunity to urge him to leave, but he insists she accompany him, dragging her to the event against her will. The scene shifts to a bustling crowd gathered around a troupe of female performers, whose presence sparks murmurs of disapproval. The Archbishop condemns their profession as disgraceful, while Lou, amused, defends their talent. The youngest performer captivates the audience, setting the stage for a provocative play.

The performer introduces a darker twist on a familiar saint’s tale, hinting at a story involving an archbishop—a clear jab at Lou’s companion. As the crowd quiets in anticipation, a woman dressed in robes mimicking the Archbishop’s emerges, heightening the tension. The Archbishop stiffens, recognizing the mockery, while Lou watches with satisfaction. The performer’s mischievous grin and the troupe’s boldness underscore the chapter’s themes of defiance and subversion, challenging societal norms and religious authority.

The chapter culminates in a clash between tradition and rebellion, with Lou caught between the Archbishop’s hostility and the troupe’s audacious performance. Her internal conflict—balancing hope for Reid’s love with the reality of her precarious position—mirrors the external tension. The Sisters’ play promises to expose hypocrisy,

leaving the Archbishop visibly unsettled and Lou poised between danger and empowerment. The scene sets the stage for further confrontation, blending personal stakes with broader societal critique.



Secrets Revealed: Lou

The chapter opens with chaos as witches attack a panicked crowd, with Lou's mother standing ominously amid the turmoil. The Archbishop protects Lou while battling the witches, including Fate, who is wounded but not deterred. Reid emerges, killing a witch with his Balisarda, and pulls Lou to safety. Despite their efforts, more witches appear, and Lou loses sight of her mother. The Archbishop orders Lou and others to barricade themselves in the Tower, but Lou resists, demanding to fight. Reid and the Chasseurs forcibly drag her inside as the witches' assault intensifies.

Inside the church, Reid and Jean Luc secure the doors while Ansel questions Lou about the shocking revelation that the Archbishop may have a child with Morgane le Blanc. Jean Luc suggests it could be a diversion, but the group has no time to ponder as a witch breaks through a high window. Reid and Lou flee to their bedroom, where Reid attempts to ward off the witch with salt, but Lou admits it’s futile. Reid confronts her, demanding the truth about why the witches are targeting her, emphasizing he can’t protect her without honesty.

Before Lou can respond, a dun-haired witch enters through the window, overpowering Ansel and Reid with her magic. Lou reacts with fury as Reid is injured, and the witch accuses her of betraying her mother and the Dames Blanches. Lou defiantly rejects the witch’s claims, and a tense magical standoff ensues. The witch’s attacks fail due to Angelica’s Ring, which protects Lou. Seizing the opportunity, Lou turns the tables, using her own magic to hurl the witch against the ceiling, though the effort leaves her drained.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger as Lou, weakened but determined, faces the aftermath of her counterattack. The confrontation highlights her internal conflict between her loyalty to Reid and her ties to the witches, particularly her mother. The revelation of her true identity looms as Reid demands answers, setting the stage for

deeper revelations and escalating tensions in the ongoing battle between the Chasseurs and the witches.



Oblivion: Lou

Lou awakens disoriented, feeling the throbbing pain in her throat and the movement of the floor beneath her. Ansel’s voice cuts through her haze, urging her to wake as chaos erupts around them—a witch’s laughter, crashing debris, and Reid’s desperate struggle. Lou realizes Reid is losing the fight, weakened by an incomplete antidote. The room is in ruins, and the witch toys with Reid, exploiting his sluggish movements. Despite her own dizziness and weakness, Lou knows she must intervene to save him, even as her vision blurs and her body falters.

Lou attempts to fight back, but her magic is unreliable due to her drugged state. The witch mocks her loyalty to Reid, who has shown hatred toward witches, yet Lou refuses to abandon him. In a fleeting moment of clarity, Lou conjures a magical cord to strangle the witch, but her concentration wavers. The witch retaliates, blasting Lou into Reid’s arms. Ansel joins the fray but is quickly overpowered. Lou, barely conscious, admits her inability to defeat the witch alone, but Reid insists she use his strength to turn the tide.

In a desperate gamble, Lou taps into Reid’s body as a conduit for her magic, binding both him and the witch in a shared pattern. Despite her reluctance to control him, Lou recognizes their deep connection—nature itself acknowledging their bond. She seizes the opportunity, using Reid’s physical strength to immobilize the witch. Ansel retrieves Reid’s sword, Balisarda, and hands it to Lou, who stands poised to deliver the final blow. The witch, now terrified, struggles futilely against Lou’s magic.

With a decisive strike, Lou slits the witch’s throat, ending her life. The room falls silent as the witch’s body collapses, her blood pooling at Lou’s feet. The weight of the moment settles over Lou, who stares at the aftermath—the Balisarda dripping with blood, the stillness of death. The chapter closes with Lou grappling with the title "witch killer," a stark reminder of the brutal choices she has made to protect those she loves,

even as the cost of her actions lingers in the air.



Beating a Dead Witch: Reid

Reid stands in the aftermath of a violent confrontation, surrounded by the wreckage of his room and the corpse of a witch. The scene is marked by blood, destruction, and the lingering stench of magic. Despite his hatred for witches, Reid is haunted by thoughts of Lou, the witch he once loved, whose absence leaves him feeling empty. He struggles to reconcile his duty as a Chasseur—a witch hunter—with his unresolved emotions, refusing to acknowledge the depth of his attachment to her.

Ansel confronts Reid, demanding to know why he let Lou escape, especially given her vulnerable state and the threat posed by her mother, Morgane le Blanc. Ansel argues that Lou is in grave danger and needs their help, but Reid dismisses his concerns, insisting witches cannot be trusted. Reid's internal conflict is palpable; he resents Lou for her deception yet cannot fully extinguish his feelings for her. His refusal to act stems from both anger and self-loathing, as he grapples with the betrayal of his own emotions.

The tension between Reid and Ansel escalates as Ansel accuses Reid of cowardice for abandoning Lou. Reid's harsh words and bitter sarcasm mask his inner turmoil, but Ansel's persistence forces him to confront the reality of Lou's peril. Reid's memories of Lou—bruised, bloodied, and broken—torment him, revealing the depth of his regret for the pain he caused her. Despite his outward denial, Reid's actions and thoughts betray his lingering care for Lou, even as he clings to his identity as a Chasseur.

The chapter concludes with Reid's simmering rage and Ansel's desperation, highlighting the moral and emotional divide between them. Reid's refusal to help Lou underscores his internal struggle between duty and desire, while Ansel's defiance emphasizes the human cost of Reid's rigid beliefs. The unresolved tension sets the stage for further conflict, as Reid's hardened exterior begins to crack under the weight of his unacknowledged emotions.

Hell Hath No Fury: Reid

Reid returns to his destroyed room, determined to find Lou after her disappearance. Aware of her skills as a thief, he knows she could be anywhere, but the presence of Chasseurs in the city complicates his search. The lingering magic in his room distracts him, fueling his urgency as he fears for Lou’s safety. He considers her possible hiding places, including the theater and Pan’s patisserie, but worries she may have fled Cesarine altogether. Ansel, his companion, suggests seeking help from Mademoiselle Perrot, Lou’s close friend, as Reid grapples with his distrust of the Chasseurs and the Archbishop’s lies.

Before they can act, Mademoiselle Perrot bursts into the room, demanding to know Lou’s whereabouts. Reid reveals Lou’s identity as a witch, expecting shock, but she already knew. Ansel also admits his prior knowledge, explaining he remained silent because Lou had once taken a witch’s pain during a burning, proving she wasn’t evil. Reid is stunned by their betrayal but realizes he wouldn’t have harmed Lou regardless. The revelation leaves him emotionally drained as he confronts his conflicting loyalties and feelings for Lou.

The tension escalates as Mademoiselle Perrot presses for details about Lou’s disappearance. Reid recounts the witch’s attack and how Lou saved his life before fleeing. His frustration and fear are palpable as he struggles to reconcile his duty as a Chasseur with his desire to protect Lou. Mademoiselle Perrot’s aggressive demeanor and scars hint at her own dangerous capabilities, adding to the urgency of the situation. Reid’s desperation grows as he realizes time is running out to find Lou before the Chasseurs or witches do.

The chapter ends with Reid, Ansel, and Mademoiselle Perrot forming an uneasy alliance to locate Lou. Despite their shared goal, distrust lingers between them, particularly as Reid grapples with the weight of his emotions and the consequences of

his choices. The stakes are high, with Lou’s life hanging in the balance, and Reid’s internal conflict underscores the chapter’s tension. The group’s resolve to find Lou before it’s too late sets the stage for the next phase of their search, leaving readers eager to see how their alliance will unfold.



The Soul Remembers: Lou

The chapter opens with Lou waking paralyzed in her mother Morgane’s arms, trapped in a troupe wagon. The scent of eucalyptus triggers traumatic memories as Morgane reveals she has drugged Lou with a paralytic, mocking her helplessness. Lou realizes they’ve left the city, and Morgane taunts her with plans to burn Lou’s husband, Reid, during Modraniht—a sacred holiday involving sacrificial rituals. Lou’s fear intensifies as Morgane hints at her role in the ceremony, emphasizing her inevitable fate as a tool for her mother’s dark purposes.

Lou’s desperation grows when she notices Morgane wearing Angelica’s Ring, a crucial artifact that could nullify her mother’s magic. Without it, Lou cannot prevent the sacrificial ritual or save innocent lives. Despite her frantic efforts, the drug renders her powerless, crushing her hope. Morgane smugly asserts her dominance, claiming Lou can neither outsmart nor escape her. The ring’s presence symbolizes Lou’s failed rebellion, leaving her trapped in a nightmarish scenario with no apparent escape.

Morgane’s monologue shifts between mockery and twisted affection as she reminisces about Lou’s past defiance. She coldly rationalizes Lou’s impending death as a noble sacrifice for their people, dismissing her daughter’s terror. Lou, though physically immobilized, clings to fleeting sensations of the drug wearing off, plotting a last-ditch attempt to seize the ring. The tension escalates as Morgane’s predatory gaze underscores the psychological torment, leaving Lou grappling with despair and unresolved rage.

The chapter closes with Lou enduring physical and emotional agony, her body battered from previous attacks. Morgane probes Lou’s injuries with faux concern, further highlighting her cruelty. Lou focuses on the faint return of sensation in her limbs, clinging to a sliver of hope for action. The unresolved confrontation and Lou’s internal struggle set the stage for a climactic confrontation, leaving readers anticipating

whether she can defy her mother’s control or succumb to her grim destiny.



Harbinger: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid and his companions—Beau, Ansel, Coco, and Madame Labelle—camped in the freezing, fog-laden La Forêt des Yeux. The group suffers from the bitter cold, with Beau complaining incessantly while Coco consumes rabbit blood for her magic. Ansel’s curiosity about her practices leads to a discussion about blood witches, their unique enchantments, and the scars that mark their craft. The tension is palpable as the group huddles together, their discomfort compounded by hunger and the eerie presence of a black cat, a harbinger of misfortune.

Madame Labelle insists on avoiding fires to evade detection, emphasizing the dangers of the forest. The group’s morale is low, with Beau’s grumbling and Ansel’s quiet admiration for Coco adding layers of interpersonal dynamics. Reid, though reluctant, agrees with Madame Labelle’s cautious approach, aware of the lurking threats. The arrival of Modraniht—a significant event—looms, adding urgency to their journey. The chapter highlights the group’s strained camaraderie and the underlying unease as they navigate both the physical and supernatural challenges of their environment.

The tension escalates when Coco senses an approaching threat. Reid and Coco stealthily investigate, discovering a squadron of Chasseurs led by Jean Luc, Reid’s former comrade. The group’s fear of detection is immediate, as Jean Luc’s presence signifies a direct threat to their mission. Reid grapples with the moral dilemma of confronting his former brothers-in-arms, unsure whether to fight or flee. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Jean Luc’s squad closing in and Reid poised for action, leaving the reader in suspense about the impending confrontation.

Throughout the chapter, the themes of loyalty, survival, and the supernatural intertwine. The cold, hostile setting mirrors the group’s internal struggles and external threats. Reid’s internal conflict—balancing his past allegiances with his current mission—adds depth to his character. The chapter effectively builds tension, blending

action with introspection, and sets the stage for a high-stakes conflict in the narrative’s progression.



Drifting: Lou

Lou awakens to Manon tending to her in a room adorned with magical metallic blooms, a gift from Morgane. Weak and immobilized, Lou struggles with nausea and dizziness, likely due to prolonged exposure to a poisonous "medicine." Despite Manon's attempts to care for her—offering food and soothing her pain—Lou remains hostile, refusing to engage with her childhood friend. The chapter establishes Lou's physical and emotional vulnerability, as well as her resentment toward Morgane and the witches' manipulations.

Lou's thoughts drift to Reid, her husband, and her inability to protect him or others without Angelica’s Ring. She resigns herself to her impending death, having made peace with her fate the night before. The prospect of harming Reid fills her with disgust, and she reflects on her exhaustion from running and hiding. Lou’s internal monologue reveals her despair and acceptance of her doomed situation, even as Manon tries to alleviate her pain and reconnect with her.

The tension between Lou and Manon escalates as Lou sarcastically recounts her harsh life as a thief after fleeing the Chateau, deliberately provoking Manon with bitter remarks. When Lou cruelly mentions Manon’s sister, Fleur, she learns the devastating truth: Fleur was burned alive by the Chasseurs at just eleven years old. This revelation shocks Lou, momentarily piercing her anger with guilt and sorrow. Manon’s grief underscores the brutal persecution of witches, framing Lou’s suffering within a larger cycle of violence and loss.

Manon implores Lou to see her potential role in avenging these injustices, but Lou coldly retorts that Manon still expects her to die for the cause. The chapter ends with Manon’s raw declaration that she would sacrifice everything to bring her sister back, leaving Lou—and the reader—to grapple with the weight of their shared trauma and the impossible choices they face. The scene highlights the moral complexities of

revenge, loyalty, and survival in a world where both sides are scarred by cruelty.



Consorting With the Enemy: Reid

The chapter opens with Madame Labelle guiding the group toward Chateau le Blanc, a hidden fortress only visible to her kind. Despite skepticism from Beau, she explains the enchantment concealing the chateau, hinting at the magical bridge that grants access. Reid, the narrator, drifts away from the conversation, sensing Lou's presence in the forest. The natural elements—sunlight, wind, and water—seem infused with her essence, evoking a deep emotional connection and unspoken promises between them.

Coco joins Reid, sharing her conflicted feelings about Lou, whom she's known since childhood. She reveals their secret friendship, strained by Lou's disappearance and the hidden agendas of the Dames Blanches. Coco's frustration stems from Lou's silence about her past and the trauma she endured, leaving Coco feeling helpless and guilty for not protecting her. The emotional weight of their conversation underscores the complexity of their bond and the mysteries surrounding Lou's actions.

The tension escalates as Coco admits her initial desire to either kill or kiss Lou upon their reunion in Cesarine. She confesses their argument at Reid's ball, where she warned Lou against falling in love with him, fearing the dangers posed by his Chasseur background. Despite her distrust, Coco acknowledges Reid's efforts and their shared responsibility to rescue Lou from Morgane's clutches. Her urgency reflects the grim reality of the Dames Blanches' brutality and Lou's precarious situation.

The chapter closes with Coco outlining their rescue plan, emphasizing the need to prioritize Lou's escape while assisting the others. Reid's unease grows as he contemplates the risks, particularly for the younger and less experienced members of their group. The unresolved tension between Reid and Coco, coupled with their shared determination, sets the stage for a high-stakes confrontation at Chateau le Blanc. The emotional and physical stakes are laid bare, leaving the reader anticipating the challenges ahead.

Modraniht: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid, the protagonist, being swept into a chaotic gathering of witches in a snowy courtyard. The atmosphere is frenetic, filled with women of all ages celebrating the pagan goddess. Reid is overwhelmed by the crowd's energy and the pervasive scent of magic, feeling increasingly uneasy as he realizes these witches are here to celebrate Lou's impending death. His internal conflict is palpable—where he once would have condemned them, he now feels a hollow pit in his stomach at their joy.

As the witches move toward a grand feast, Reid is dragged along by Elaina and Elinor, who eagerly introduce him to others. The revelry becomes unbearable, and Reid attempts to excuse himself, but Elaina insists he stay. The scene shifts to a vast, ancient hall adorned with icy vines and flickering candles, where the witches gather in anticipation. At the far end, Morgane le Blanc sits on a throne, with Lou suspended lifelessly beside her, her emaciated form displayed like a macabre trophy.

Reid's rage erupts as he witnesses the mockery of Lou, his wife, but he forces himself to remain calm under Beau's warning. The witches' cruel remarks about Lou's appearance fuel his anger, yet he suppresses it, repeating "not yet" to himself. Morgane then begins a ritualistic blessing, inciting the crowd into a fervent, almost fanatical response. Reid watches in dread, his alarm growing as he searches for Madame Labelle, whose absence adds to his unease.

The chapter culminates in Morgane's dramatic descent from the dais, leading Lou's floating body behind her as she recites a series of blessings. The witches respond with ecstatic devotion, their collective energy heightening the tension. Reid remains frozen, his emotions a volatile mix of fury and dread, as the ritual progresses. The scene leaves readers on edge, anticipating the confrontation to come and questioning Lou's fate amidst the witches' celebration.

The Pattern: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid in a state of anguish as he witnesses the fatal wounding of a woman he deeply cares for, likely Lou. Despite his desperate attempts to save her, her life slips away, leaving him devastated. Their shared gaze in her final moments hints at unfulfilled possibilities and a profound connection. The tension escalates when Morgane, a powerful witch, threatens Reid with a blade, leading to a violent confrontation where he retaliates with brutal force, only to be subdued by her magic.

Morgane’s dominance is further demonstrated as she immobilizes Reid and targets his allies, Ansel and Beau, revealing her plan to execute Lou as part of a dark prophecy. The witches rally behind her, their bloodlust heightening the chaos. Reid struggles against his magical restraints, driven by desperation to save Lou, who remains defiant even in the face of death. Morgane’s chilling incantation underscores the ritualistic nature of the impending sacrifice, creating a sense of inevitability.

The scene takes a dramatic turn when Coco, another ally, attacks Morgane, momentarily disrupting her control and freeing Reid. Despite Lou’s plea for him to help Coco, Reid prioritizes Lou’s safety, only to witness Coco’s collapse. Beau’s unexpected and absurd intervention—singing a crude song—diverts the witches’ attention, providing Reid with an opportunity to seize Morgane. The absurdity of Beau’s actions contrasts sharply with the life-and-death stakes, adding a layer of dark humor.

In the climax, Reid holds Morgane at knifepoint, poised to end her, when the Archbishop’s voice interrupts him. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving Reid torn between his rage and the Archbishop’s urgent plea. The tension between revenge and duty remains unresolved, setting the stage for the next chapter. The emotional intensity, magical conflict, and moral dilemmas drive the narrative forward, keeping readers on edge.

La Forêt des Yeux: Reid

The chapter opens with Reid and his companions—Lou, Ansel, Beau, and the injured Coco—taking cover behind a temple altar as arrows rain down. Morgane, a powerful witch, deflects most attacks but is struck in the leg. Coco weakly directs the group toward a hidden exit, and Reid seizes the moment to retrieve Madame Labelle’s body amid the chaos. Despite being pursued by arrows and fire, Reid carries her into the temple, determined to save her, even as pain from his own wound flares. The group races through the temple’s inner sanctum, desperate to escape the battle outside.

As they reach the forest, Reid pleads with Coco to heal Madame Labelle, who is barely alive. Though weakened, Coco uses her blood magic to temporarily stabilize Madame Labelle’s wounds, shocking Beau with her abilities. The group presses onward, aware that Morgane’s forces and the Chasseurs are still hunting them. Coco’s magic buys them time, but her strength is fading, and the urgency to reach their camp grows. The tension escalates as screams from the temple suggest the witches are fighting back, using consorts as shields against the Chasseurs.

Upon reaching their abandoned camp, Coco administers a mixture of her blood and honey to Madame Labelle, reviving her further. Reid, relieved but still anxious, turns his attention to Lou, who remains unconscious despite earlier healing. Coco insists Lou will wake in time and prepares a protective ward using sage and her blood to shield the group from Morgane’s detection. Reid initially resists but relents when Ansel appeals to his concern for Lou. The makeshift ward is applied to everyone, though its effectiveness against Morgane’s power remains uncertain.

The chapter concludes with the group preparing to flee the camp, aware that both witches and Chasseurs prowl the forest. The mountainside offers no safety, and the danger is far from over. Reid’s determination to protect Lou and Madame Labelle drives him forward, even as exhaustion and uncertainty weigh on the group. The

chapter leaves their fate hanging in the balance, with the threat of Morgane’s pursuit looming large.



La Voisin: Lou

Lou grapples with physical and emotional turmoil after surviving a traumatic ordeal, marked by a disfiguring scar and lingering effects of her mother's poison. Despite her insistence that she's fine, her body betrays her weakness, and her mind reels from the revelation that Reid, her love interest, is a witch—a fact she overheard alongside his uncharacteristic swearing. Reid and Coco fuss over her, with Reid carrying her despite her protests, though she secretly relishes his closeness. The tension between them is palpable, but Lou's humor and Madame Labelle's timely exit lighten the mood momentarily.

Alone for the first time since their ordeal, Lou and Reid confront the weight of their shared history. Reid is visibly tormented by guilt, believing he failed to protect her, while Lou reassures him that she never blamed him for his past actions or beliefs. Their conversation reveals deep emotional wounds, with Reid struggling to reconcile his love for Lou with his self-loathing. Lou, however, refuses to let him wallow, reminding him of the complexity of their world and how he defied his own prejudices by choosing her.

Lou reflects on her childhood naivety, where she saw the world in stark binaries—huntsmen as enemies, witches as allies—until her mother's betrayal shattered that simplicity. Reid's arrival further complicated her worldview, as he, a Chasseur, defied her expectations by sparing her life. She acknowledges her own lies but emphasizes that their love transcends their past mistakes. Reid, overwhelmed by emotion, clings to her words, his guilt mingling with gratitude for her forgiveness.

The chapter culminates in a heartfelt confession from Reid, who pours out his love for Lou, admitting she has transformed his perspective on life. He vows never to be parted from her again, and Lou, moved to tears, reciprocates with a promise of unwavering devotion. Their emotional exchange underscores the chapter's central theme: love's

power to bridge divides and heal wounds, even in a world fraught with conflict and prejudice.

