

**Patricia M. Muhammad  
presents**

# *Stolen Grace*

## **Places**

France, it is a country known for its ability to produce some of the most alluring speakers of love. In 18<sup>th</sup> century Versailles, it is home to the king's court. This place was filled with speakers of titillating tales, some of which were likely true, others exaggerated and plenty of them false. Many of the ennobled were acquainted with those who hailed from the most esteemed Houses. It would be they who would oft-times become the unwitting targets of the lesser known aristocrats. They were crabs who crawled with their sharp extensions reaching to hurl anyone who sat in a higher station or who was perceived to have a greater rank. They used slander and idle talk to loosen the firm reputation that those labored with their time and effort in not only bring forth a matter of value from their own hands, but to also maintain the history and integrity of their forbears who performed the same with integrity. One prominent House became the focus of such envious eyes. Its members were of Creole descent. Their name was the House of Moreau.

The Moreaus lived in a beautiful mansion. Its family was not great in number, yet some feared their growing popularity amongst the king's court. The Crown had already recognized their nobility from their ancestral evidence. Yet for some this was not enough. This could never be enough because they still, at least in this jealous onlookers' eyes were not "French" enough. Nevertheless, the Moreaus were a handsome family. Penelope was of great beauty balanced with a sharp intellect. The House of Moreau was a place of tradition. She set forth her daily routine with care. The Moreau manor felt the absence of two prominent members, that of her mother and father. Yet it acknowledge another, less seemingly aware member of the Moreau family, a gentleman by the name of Armand Moreau, Penelope's brother. He was quick-witted, but oblivious to certain matters which now became his burden. Penelope had already begun her investigation. She placed a piece of paper in a drawer with a clue, a name of the potential suspect in the royal theft. The house did not breathe any hint for her to remember where she placed it. The drapes which adorned its windows were the lids that closed its eyes to her desperate search. Its windows were shut, not allowing air to flow within to breathe relief or a respite to the determined Moreau family member.

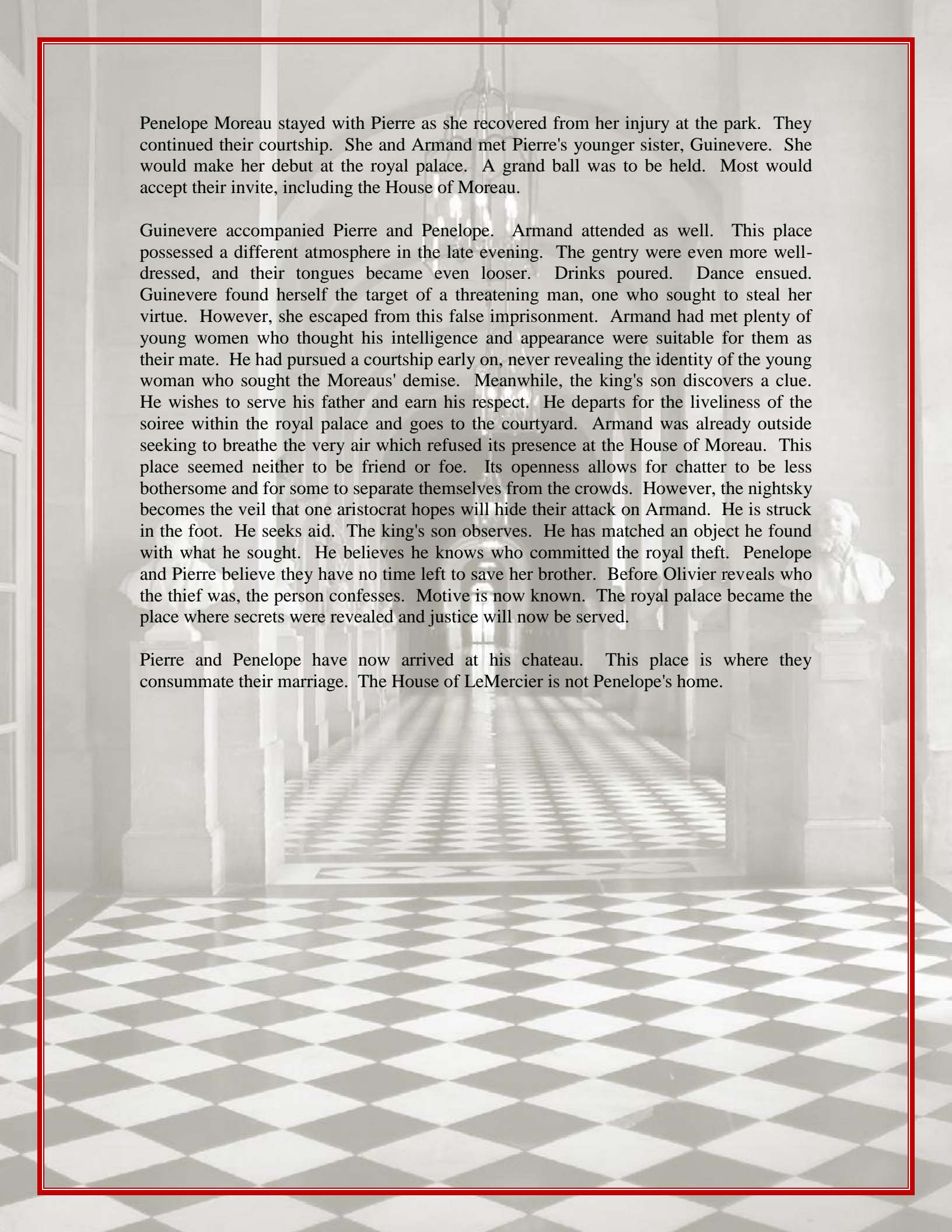
Penelope Moreau would leave this place and venture to another, the nearest bakery. This is where she would find Armand. This is where she would first encounter her suitor, a handsome gentleman. His name was Pierre LeMercier. Pierre was captivated by

Penelope's beauty at the onset. She quickly noticed his physique, but securing her brother from the public was her immediate priority. They return home. The House of Moreau had always been this place where they could have their leisure, sport or serious talk of the day unencumbered by the ill-intent of other members of the gentry. Its shelves upheld books of great philosophers. These were the men that Armand preferred to listen and learn from. He believed words transcended time and that had the ability to take the form as they, would not care whether they were Creole or not. Their house did the same, yet this inanimate House of Moreau could not walk amongst the king's court and act as an example of civility for the other ennobled to take as a proper example.

The House of Moreau was not only the intellectual heart for one of its residents, it was also where Penelope invited Count Montegeau, a friend of her father and mother to discuss their predicament. He vowed to assist her and exonerate Armand. Yet Penelope would not remain in the Moreau home for long after. She encountered Pierre once more. He spoke a kind word or two. Penelope could not deny her attraction to him. Soon they began a courtship. They dined at a restaurant. Pierre and Penelope walked throughout a park. This place of trees, grass, leaves and benches appeared to be a serene, romantic place. Yet from the other side of the gate was an attack. A vagabond who wished not to see anyone content, especially the well-dressed courtiers. Pierre attempted to pull her from harm, but it was not soon enough. She was injured. Monsigneur LeMercier took her to her home. Penelope has now entered a new place where Pierre must now be the center of her attention inasmuch he is the center of hers. The House of LeMercier had become the place where Penelope expressed the most heartfelt sentiment to her beau. She look to the gentleman who would become her husband with genuine reach, not wanting for him to leave her side for even a second. Penelope, however, need not concern herself, Pierre was to stand, sit and lie next to her as much as he deem necessary for both of their sakes.

The investigation, however, must continue. Though Penelope could no longer be actively engaged in recovering more evidence, Count Montegeau was able to secure some of his own. He hired someone who knew of a place, quite different than Versailles, where people gathered to share news, whether gossip, politics or even philosophy. Gustav would travel to Paris to learn all he could about the possible conspiracy against the House of Moreau. He returned to Versailles with evidence in a sealed envelope. Penelope was still secure with Pierre. Destiny was placing all that was necessary into its proper place. Penelope was now in Pierre's arms and watchful care. Count Montegeau now had additional evidence that he only needed to share with Penelope, and seemingly Armand would maintain his freedom. The only matter left was for the culprit(s) to have their due.

The royal palace was the primary residence of the king and queen. Some rationally argued that the person who stole the jewel had to be a high ranking member of the gentry; and someone with unusual access to the inner chambers of the palace. Most thinking members of the ennobled easily deduced that the thief could not be Armand nor any member of his family. Yet the identity of the thief had yet to be proven.



Penelope Moreau stayed with Pierre as she recovered from her injury at the park. They continued their courtship. She and Armand met Pierre's younger sister, Guinevere. She would make her debut at the royal palace. A grand ball was to be held. Most would accept their invite, including the House of Moreau.

Guinevere accompanied Pierre and Penelope. Armand attended as well. This place possessed a different atmosphere in the late evening. The gentry were even more well-dressed, and their tongues became even looser. Drinks poured. Dance ensued. Guinevere found herself the target of a threatening man, one who sought to steal her virtue. However, she escaped from this false imprisonment. Armand had met plenty of young women who thought his intelligence and appearance were suitable for them as their mate. He had pursued a courtship early on, never revealing the identity of the young woman who sought the Moreaus' demise. Meanwhile, the king's son discovers a clue. He wishes to serve his father and earn his respect. He departs for the liveliness of the soiree within the royal palace and goes to the courtyard. Armand was already outside seeking to breathe the very air which refused its presence at the House of Moreau. This place seemed neither to be friend or foe. Its openness allows for chatter to be less bothersome and for some to separate themselves from the crowds. However, the night sky becomes the veil that one aristocrat hopes will hide their attack on Armand. He is struck in the foot. He seeks aid. The king's son observes. He has matched an object he found with what he sought. He believes he knows who committed the royal theft. Penelope and Pierre believe they have no time left to save her brother. Before Olivier reveals who the thief was, the person confesses. Motive is now known. The royal palace became the place where secrets were revealed and justice will now be served.

Pierre and Penelope have now arrived at his chateau. This place is where they consummate their marriage. The House of LeMercier is not Penelope's home.