

## CHAPTER ONE

*September 1900*

*Tokyo*

*Marcelle*

Noon bells rang out along Tokyo's Ginza Boulevard followed by cheers from the fashionables lined up outside Koide Department Store. As one of the city's foremost fashionables, Marcelle naturally stood among them.

Cheer, she did not.

She tapped her boot against the brick sidewalk in a jig of impatience. At any moment, Koide's footmen would open Tokyo's first department store to the public, and Marcelle would get a glimpse inside the glass and stone colossus that would one day bankrupt *La France Boutique*.

The cheering grew louder as liveried footmen stepped aside and pulled open the gilded doors. Men brandishing notebooks and sketchpads rushed to the entrance, cutting off Marcelle's view of the interior.

She turned to her assistant, Yumi-*chan*. "Didn't the newspapermen get their tour days ago?" she asked in their peculiar mix of French and Japanese.

Yumi-*chan* tucked a strand of hair back into her stylishly low chignon. "According to the papers, only a select few were allowed in the store. No drawings or photography were permitted. Monsieur Koide wanted to whet the newspapermen's appetites, not give them the main dish outright."

“So, our monsieur is a tease.” Marcelle added the tidbit to her mental list of things known about the cutthroat capitalist.

From the day construction began on his colossus, gossip about the monsieur had been rife among Ginza Boulevard’s proprietors. Marcelle had gathered he was an “overseas Japanese” with the necessary combination of wealth, influence, and ambition to import *le grand magasin* from the avenues of Paris to the streets of Tokyo.

Men like Monsieur Koide weren’t satisfied until they’d ravaged the competition. They also had innumerable resources at their disposal. It would cost him so little to lure her customers to his store.

It would cost her everything.

Keeping step with the procession into Koide’s, Marcelle and Yumi-*chan* finally arrived at the entranceway. Marcelle closed her square-shaped parasol—a trend she’d pioneered in Tokyo—then marched, head held high, into the beginning of the end of *La France Boutique*.

In the time it took to walk through the gilded doors, Koide Department Store transported her across oceans and continents to the ground floor of Paris’s *Le Bon Marché*. The vaulted lobby belonged in a cathedral. Mirrors in gilded frames and glass display cases reflected sunlight streaming through tall windows. Everywhere she turned, an abundance of goods women desired sat on every shelf: gloves, hats, parasols, furs, jewels, perfumes, luggage.

Monsieur Koide had brought a piece of Paris to Tokyo. It was the piece she liked best.

Marcelle led them through the crowd of fashionables, past jewelry displays, and alongside a table of hats topped with lace, flowers, plumes, and ribbons. More than half of the vertiginous creations had already been claimed.

“Monsieur Koide will have nothing left at the end of the day,” Marcelle remarked above the atrium’s din.

“Newness is the attraction. Before long, everyone will tire of the place,” Yumi-*chan* replied in the soothing manner of a mother applying ointment to a child’s scraped knee.

Marcelle bristled. Yumi-*chan* meant well, but they both knew she was being more than a tad insincere. Monsieur Koide’s department store was an extraordinary accomplishment, unlike anything in Tokyo.

With a single room for designing, cutting, sewing, fittings, and repairs—albeit with two wax mannequins, a luxury she could only afford because of her benefactor Jiro’s generosity—*La France Boutique* couldn’t hold a candle to Koide’s.

As they neared the staircase to the upper floors, the crush of patrons ceased moving. Marcelle followed their gazes to a man of formidable proportions holding court on the red-carpeted stairs. Tall and robust, he filled his elegant black suit with a commanding presence.

*It couldn’t be.*

Newspaper reporters assembled around him called out questions. “Koide-*san*,” one of them shouted over the others.

It most certainly was: Koide, in the flesh, and seeming for all the world like a theatre star addressing his admirers.

“What was your inspiration for the department store?” the reporter finished.

Monsieur Koide shifted toward the man, giving Marcelle a view of his impressive profile. He had a smooth, regal brow, bold jaw, and the hooked nose of samurai warriors she'd seen in woodblock paintings. His black hair had been cut short and shaped with a light pomade. Rough and refined, he appeared impervious to—and master of—the carnival of glamor surrounding him. “My father, and grandfather before him, spent a great deal of their careers abroad, learning foreign customs ...”

Marcelle leaned forward to make out the cut of Monsieur Koide's suit. An expert tailor had sewn the jacket to emphasize the length and breadth of the monsieur's torso. Indeed, there was no sign of suspenders. The tapering of his jacket at the waist suggested the presence of a belt beneath. Only a man daring in his haberdashery would employ belt loops on his trousers. Monsieur Koide knew fashion.

She stretched farther for a better view of his lapels. Round. Another nod to present-day trends.

“*Mon Dieu,*” she cried and grabbed her nape as a searing pain struck the muscle between her neck and shoulder.

Monsieur Koide paused in the middle of whatever he was saying and gazed upon the crowd. Marcelle's heart stopped, and she ducked behind Yumi-*chan*, which was no easy feat since Yumi-*chan* only reached the top of her chest. The movement sent pain straight

into her fingertips. Biting the inside of her cheek, she suppressed a whimper and gave her muscle a furtive massage.

Yumi-*chan* peered back at her. “Have you hurt yourself?”

“Don’t look at me,” Marcelle hissed. “Look at Monsieur Koide. Pretend I’m not here.”

Yumi-*chan* faced forward. “But he’s looking this way.”

“I know that. Ignore me.” Marcelle drove her fingertips deeper into the muscle, inflicting enough pain to overcome her embarrassment. Nervous excitement tended to result in painful moments of clumsiness. A scar on her right index finger would forever remind her of the Imperial Hotel’s delicious champagne *and* its crystal glass.

After what felt like hours, Monsieur Koide finally carried on with a tale about his elite family’s life abroad. Marcelle rose steadily. The fashionables behind her responded with grumbles about foreign women being unreasonably tall. That was all the encouragement she needed to lengthen her posture.

“My education culminated at the University of Oxford in the country of England.” Monsieur Koide paused for the newspapermen to finish their scribbles. “During those years, I visited the great department stores of London and Paris. In the famed Harrods department store of London, I had the pleasure of ascending to the upper floors on a moving staircase.”

Murmurs of disbelief passed through the crowd.

“You may have heard it’s a frightening experience. The London women who rode it alongside me needed a spot of brandy when they reached the top. Personally, I found it quite enjoyable.”

A reporter raised his arm. “Koide-*san*, will you install a moving staircase at Koide’s?”