



THE SONG AT THE SCAFFOLD

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A 10-WEEK BOOK STUDY



SESSION TWO: CHAPTER 2, PAGES 8-14

Introductory questions:

What do you know about the Carmelite order?

People to know:

Louis XVI – King of France at the dawn of the Revolution [1789], executed in 1793, the year the Reign of Terror began. His queen: Marie Antoinette.

Robespierre – the leader of the Reign of Terror and its victim in 1794

Jean-Jacques Rousseau – “noble savage” – his political theory was to throw off all law, Church and State, and revert to the natural state.

Voltaire – Frenchman living in and writing essays on England – made Reason his god, Enlightenment thinking – freedom from Church dogma and the tyranny of the King.

Pope Pius VI – decried the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, an attempt to subordinate the Roman Catholic Church to the secular French government. Many Catholics turned against the Revolution when this decree came out in 1790.

CHAPTER TWO: _____

(HOW WOULD YOU TITLE THIS CHAPTER?)

The images of the Infant King of Glory and the balustrade greet us as we begin this chapter. How is this image emblematic of what will unfold in this chapter?



Blanche's spiritual progress develops:

- ❁ She is exhorted to place her trust in the Infant King of Glory and in King Louis XVI.
 - ✚ She found solace in prayers, devotions, and obedience. Is this true spiritual progress or a way to sublimate her fears?
 - ✚ Did Christian piety drive out her fears?
- ❁ The very staircase which had always frightened her collapses. Does this foreshadow the collapse of the monarchy, in which she had been told to place her hope?
- ❁ Wings and birds are mentioned several times in connection to Blanche:
 - ✚ “Her tremulous glances resembled flocks of restless birds.”
 - ✚ “The little frightened birds in Blanche's eyes fluttered.”
 - ✚ “She began to repose her anxious little heart beneath the infinite power of God.”
 - ✚ What do you see in the bird images in connection with Blanche?
 - ✚ How does Scripture speak of birds?
- ❁ Madame de Chalais wore a whalebone bodice which cracked when she saw Blanche's terror of the collapsing balustrade. What does the tightness of her bodice imply? What is implied in the slight cracking of the bodice?
 - ✚ Spelling her name a bit differently as *chalet*, her name means “Mother of the House.” Mary is Mother of the Church. Are there parallels between the two? Or are there contrasts?
 - ✚ She “constrained Blanche in a bodice as tight as her own.” Does this point to more than physical constriction?
- ❁ Consider Blanche's father's reaction to her desire to enter Carmel:
 - ✚ As a bridge to escape the world
 - ✚ As safety within definite boundaries
 - ✚ As a place with no challenges or violence
 - ✚ As a safe harbor where the rules, the obedience, and the structure keep one safe
 - ✚ As a window onto “a pleasant illusion of heaven”
 - ✚ What do you think of these characterizations? What do they tell you of the views and character of the Marquis?
- ❁ In Carmel, Blanche was happy, grateful, and obedient:
 - ✚ Although she found it “far from easy to live up to the strict demands of the rule,” she did live up to the standards.
 - ✚ What does she mean when she exclaims: “Truly, there are other things more to be feared than these slight sacrifices!”
 - ✚ While she so jubilantly opined “We are safe here!” when news of the world broke into the quiet of the cloister, “her behavior proves that she was truly devout.” What do you make of this juxtaposition?
 - ✚ The rapidly evolving events of the Revolution led the bishop to advise all satisfactory postulants to be admitted to the novitiate and to take the name *Jesus in the Garden of Agony*. How does this name embody the vocation of a Carmelite?