

# Chapter XV

Chapter XV begins on the tranquil and snow-covered landscape of The Cotswolds, England, on the eve of the 20th century. Addie, seeking peace in the isolation of a remote cottage, finds solace in the quiet stillness that envelops her. Unlike her previous years filled with the lively festivities of London, Paris, Edinburgh, and Amsterdam, this winter night in the Cotswolds represents a rare moment of solitude. Though the cottage is not truly hers by ownership, it has become a temporary sanctuary—a place where she has learned to find comfort in its modest surroundings over the seasons. Addie has long since adapted to the simplicity of the cottage, but tonight, as she gazes out over the freshly fallen snow, the pure, untouched landscape beckons her to step into the cold night. It's a rare moment when she feels the allure of the world outside, as the quiet, blanketed landscape offers a sense of renewal and clarity.

Clad in a cloak, Addie steps into the snow-covered night, her presence leaving only the faintest trace upon the pristine surface. The cool, crisp air fills her lungs as she walks through the fresh snow, and the sight of the untouched landscape stirs memories from her childhood in Villon. She marvels at how little has changed in the years since—how the snow remains as pure and unmoved as it once was, even though her life has been anything but static. For a brief moment, she is able to put aside the weight of her centuries-long existence and simply revel in the beauty of the snow-covered world before her. The simplicity of the scene tempts her to forget the burdens of time, to embrace the fleeting joy that the snow offers. But as she steps further into the snow, she loses her footing, tumbling to the ground. A burst of laughter escapes her lips, but the mirth quickly fades as she lies still in the snow, contemplating the deep quiet around her. The peace of the night settles over her, and she becomes lost in the serenity, only to be reminded of her own solitude and the years that stretch endlessly behind her.

Her reflective moment is interrupted when Luc unexpectedly appears, finding her lying in the snow. His presence, as always, is a complex mix of familiarity and mystery. There is a weight to his arrival, a reminder of the pact they share, one that binds them in ways both comforting and unsettling. Luc's ability to find her in such a remote place speaks to the depth of their connection, which stretches across time and space. He effortlessly guides her back into the warmth of the cottage, and with a subtle wave of his hand, rekindles the fire in the hearth. Their conversation begins in the quiet warmth of the room, full of unspoken understanding and the comfortable silence that comes with years of shared history. Luc, as always, stirs something in Addie—a mix of yearning and resistance, a feeling of being pulled between two worlds. He reminds her of the vibrant, endless life she could have if she chose to leave her solitude and once again step into the broader world. But Addie, ever defiant, insists that the contentment she has found in her solitude is enough. She chooses peace over the thrill of the unknown, preferring the quiet moments she has carved out for herself to the allure of adventure.

Luc, however, stays, as if there's no hurry, and their interaction shifts into something deeper. They share more than just words; it's a moment of understanding, a pause in time where the weight of their centuries-long relationship hangs in the air. As they sit by the fire, Addie allows herself to listen, not to argue or resist but to simply be present in his company. Luc speaks of the world beyond her cottage, of the places and people she could once again touch, and she finds herself intrigued despite herself. For a moment, she is content to sit and absorb his stories, the warmth of the fire contrasting with the cold, snowy night outside. But as dawn approaches, and she wakes up alone, there is a strange emptiness in the room. The comfort of the fire is gone, replaced by a quiet unease. Luc's visit, though soothing in its familiarity, leaves her with more questions than answers. The snow outside, still fresh and unspoiled, offers no clarity, only a continuation of the same endless cycle. She wonders if this brief encounter with Luc was truly a moment of peace or merely another reminder of the passage of time, a reminder that no matter how much she tries to carve out meaning in her life, the forces that bind her are always just beneath the surface.

The chapter encapsulates a timeless moment between Addie and Luc, a fleeting pause in an otherwise eternal existence. Their shared history is rich with complexity, filled with both comfort and tension. This chapter speaks to the paradox of their relationship—Addie’s deep yearning for both freedom and connection, and Luc’s presence, which both anchors her to the past and reminds her of the possibilities of the future. Despite her refusal to leave her chosen solitude, Addie’s interaction with Luc challenges her understanding of time and connection. It raises questions about her choices, her desires, and her struggle to define her place in a world that moves forward while she remains suspended in time. The snow, once a symbol of purity and peace, now feels like a reminder of the transience of moments, the fragility of human experience, and the eternal dance between Addie and Luc, where nothing remains static, and everything is continually in flux. The night they share, though brief, becomes another layer in their complex relationship, a moment that will linger in Addie’s mind as she continues her journey through time.