

Excerpt

THE DRESSMAKER OF PARIS - GEORGIA KAUFMANN

1991

Is that the time, ma chère? I'm going to be late. I am, for once, floored. No, it's not the weather – New York is never inspiring in November, even at the best of times. Nor is it that this winter's collections are so boxy and drab. It's that I can't think of anything appropriate to wear. Don't look so surprised, ma chère. I might know what to wear to a White House dinner or a fashion show or a board meeting, but such events pale in comparison to the importance of my engagement tonight.

Please stay, ma chère. It will calm me – and this meeting will affect you too. It may change our lives. But there are some things I need to sort out first. Leave those papers, please. It's my will, I was just checking it. I'm only sixty-three – it is not in my fiveyear plan to die! – but as you know, I like to be prepared. As I said, this appointment is important.

You know the story of this house, don't you? The one thing we didn't change when we reorganised the living arrangements was this bathroom. I've never met a businessman who did not count the pennies. Frivolous spending is not the habit of people who have earned their wealth. Any choice I make is informed by style, of course, but more so by understanding structure, materials and function. In designing clothes or a room or indeed anything, the material is a primary choice. In all things the craft is to understand the fabric and materials first, to know their strengths and weaknesses. The choices I made in this bathroom create the atmosphere.

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