

# Ann Vremont

## *Sacred Heart Diaries*

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# Sacred Heart Diaries

*(A Modern Translation)*

*Ann Vremont*

## Dedication

For the storytellers, and those who gather round the fire. And with love to Terry and Jared, who put up with tears at the dinner table from the crazy chick who talks to herself in the bathroom and pretty much everywhere else.

## Introduction

*Born in France in 1769, Candacis Vremont had a difficult childhood. Her mother died in childbirth and her father, when she was only sixteen years old, took his life after bankrupting his estate. Candacis was sent to a small convent in the French countryside. As the populace of France became more hostile to the French aristocracy, Candacis found herself surrounded by young noblewomen sent to the convent by their parents to ensure their safety. Having lived an isolated life, Candacis was fascinated and appalled by the whispered stories of these beautiful young women. In the spring of 1787, as France's troubles were worsening, Candacis wrote to her cousin, Philipe, with an unusual proposition. The letter is translated, below, from the original French.*

Dearest Cousin,

I read with joy the success of your new publishing venture. You are truly a self-made man—your father, like mine, having left his children to survive on their own wits. And how you flourish on yours!

Despite the knowledge that you are now a successful businessman, I have great trouble in accepting the allowance you are sending me. Here, at the Sacred Heart, I have grown accustomed to earning my way. The convent, in fact, insists on it for all their well-born charity cases. That is why, dear Philipe, I have a proposition for you. Enclosed is a half-fiction that I have penned. If you think it suitable—publish it.

The content might startle you, but please, Philipe, do not judge me too harshly for writing such a story. I am still the same chaste creature who worshipped you as a small child, dogging your every footstep whenever our fathers visited one another. But the things that I see and hear at the Sacred

Heart! Truly, the French people are right—the aristocracy has become too self indulgent, too sensual, too deluded to recognize its own hypocrisy.

“Base!” they scream when the common woman's desires are made known. “Whore,” they cry as they drag her through the street. And, too, all men are allowed their desires. Yet these same passions burn through the girls at the Sacred Heart. I have heard their whispered confessions, seen the pages of their diaries and smuggled love letters. Whether their escapades are wrong—I do not judge. Perhaps all God's creatures are entitled to such pleasures. I only wish to tell their story, to provide an inside glimpse at the so-called nobility that seeks to hold its common citizens to a higher standard than it holds itself.

As ever,  
Candacis

## Beatrice

*This is the first story that Candacis sent to her cousin, Philipe, and it is based on the diary entries of a young noblewoman named Beatrice.*

*March 12, 1787*

I have been home two days and already I have broken a cup, three bowls and one serving plate. Maria has said nothing to Mother. How I hate the two of them!

*March 13, 1787*

I spilled tea on Mother's favorite white lace tablecloth this afternoon but Mdm. Bilodeaux was taking tea with us and the ever efficient Maria had the stain removed before Mother could remember to punish me. How Maria conspires against me!

*March 15, 1787*

I told Mother that I lost my sapphire and diamond brooch. Again, Maria foiled my plans. How could she have found my hiding spot? I wish that I could send her away—but then I would lose *him*.

*March 18, 1787*

Finally! After services, Mother sent Maria to deliver a dinner invitation to Mdm. Bilodeaux. I had to serve our tea again and in the fine porcelain pot Mother purchased from Monsieur Henri. Oh, the worry in Maria's eyes as she dragged her cheap wool cloak onto her shoulders and headed into the rain! She

is in the kitchen now, sobbing as she cooks tonight's dinner. She knows, she must know. His smell covers me and I am moving through the house in a triumphant daze, the slightest shift of my gown causing ripples of pleasure that drive me into a maddened ecstasy.

How long I desired this day, I cannot remember. Certainly not the first time that Mother ordered Louis to take me into the pantry and punish me for having forgotten my parasol at church. I was furious that time, too angry to realize that he was trying to be gentle. Later, I would learn the force that he was capable of. But that first time, I fought in earnest. Over time, my struggling changed. Instead of fighting to be free from his blows, my exertions were aimed at pressing against him as hard as I could, rubbing myself against his bulging muscles in mock fight, forcing him to encircle my upper body with one arm while I ground against him with each blow.

And the thrill of the first time I felt him harden against me. "Soon, soon," I had prayed as a delicious wetness spread between my legs. But he'd pushed me away. And then she came. First, into the house as a serving maid, then between us as his wife. Only loathing and a fearful longing filled his face when he looked at me after that. Still, I would have him. She would not separate us. And today, I have made him mine.

I was sitting on the stool next to the pantry when he came home. Mother was upstairs, her rage at my clumsiness spiking through her head and sending her to her room with another one of her headaches. Maria was still out. Just me and him. Pieces of the broken pottery rested in my lap as I sat, eyes downcast, waiting for him to say something. But he remained silent, only the light twitching of his thigh muscles showing his agitation, his anger. Embarrassed, wanting him, I felt my cheeks flush.

Grabbing me by the elbow, he jerked me to my feet. The larger pieces of porcelain broke when they hit the ground and I stood there, mute, staring at them. Tears of frustration caused my vision to blur. Would he refuse? Mother would fire him. She would find another groom and send him away. He had threatened me with that the last time she had sent him to punish me. Pleaded



with me to stop provoking her, his voice alternating between hot passion and cold fury as I denied any willful wrongdoing.

Why was he waiting? I felt my body begin to sway. More tears welled up. "Louis?"

"Enough, Beatrice!" He pulled me into the pantry, his free hand slamming the door behind us and reaching for the wooden board in one fluid motion.

A crate rested against the opposite wall and he dragged me towards it as I reached for the door, moaning in protest. "No, Louis."

I could feel the heat building between my legs as he positioned my body over his legs. I tried to back up, but he used the board to block me. I pushed forward, the move pulling my bodice tight against my chest. The lace rubbed against my hardened nipples as my breasts threatened to escape. The rough scratch of cloth lace on my skin was a delicious torture and I strained forward, grinding my hips into him. "Please, Louis, do not do this," I cried, tears spilling down my cheeks as I turned to look up at him.

He pressed between my shoulder blades, forcing my head past the plane of his legs. My hips rose to meet the paddle as it bore down. "No," I gasped, sliding forward over his thighs until he had to bring one arm underneath me to hold me still.

The board fell again and I clenched my thighs, the inner muscles pulling tight and sending a wave of heat to flush my entire body. The hits became more frequent, my body falling into a rising rhythm of contractions.

"Stop. Louis. Do not. Stop." I was on fire. I had lost count of how many times he had hit me. Far more than he ever had, but I still felt no release, just a building wetness as I ground against him. "No, Louis," I pleaded with him. "Do not do this."

He raised my skirt and I gasped in real shock as the cool air hit my skin. The smell of my excitement filled the small room and I heard him groan as he brought the board down onto my bare flesh, my innermost recesses exposed to his view. All pretense flew from me. Legs parting, I collapsed against him, trembling in anticipation of the next blow.

Louis jumped to his feet, sending me sprawling across the pantry floor. Anger flooded into me as I stood up. He was still holding the board, his fist clenched around its slim handle. Lips slightly parted, he struggled for breath while he stared wildly at me. I took a step toward him and he grabbed me, spinning me around and pushing me against the pantry door. I started to speak, but he shoved the board's handle between my teeth as if he were inserting a bit into one of Mother's horses.

With his other hand, he raised my skirt again, forcing my legs apart with his feet. Cold air rushed up, licking at my heated thighs, cooling the syrup that coated the swollen folds of my lower lips. His thumbs, rough with calluses, parted the fleshy barrier and he thrust into me, flattening my body against the door. I screamed once in surprise against the board's handle as his swollen manhood broke the fragile layer of tissue that had so long separated us. Another stroke out, slower, seemingly longer than his intrusive thrust, erased the pain. I pushed against him, followed the thick retreat of his manhood, hungry for more, and he rammed back into me.

The door rattled on its hinges as he pumped my body, filling me with his meaty rod again and again, the tip almost leaving my body with each stroke, battering the already swollen flesh at the entrance to my womanhood. My nipples grew impossibly hard, aching for his rough touch as he slammed into me.

"Mine," I moaned against the handle, a hot tingle fanning out across my body as I began to shudder with the thrill of his touch. He pressed his face into my hair, murmuring my name over and over as triumph and his seed surged into me, our bodies locked in a deep grind as a final wave of ecstasy washed over us. "Mine at last."

*March 19, 1787*

That so much pleasure could be mine so suddenly! And at the expense and pain of that cow wife of his, no less. I had her draw a bath for me before dinner although I was loath to lose the smell of him from my skin. She came into my

room, carrying the water, her face puffy from the tears she had cried. I stripped in front of her as she filled the wash tub. I ran my hands over my bruised body, examining each thumb print he had left upon me. The smell of our lust still hung ripe in the air around me and I passed near her, giving her the last scent of her husband's perfume that she would ever have. I know I should have felt some pity, shame even, as more tears leaked from her eyes. But I couldn't. She was the usurper! I had only claimed what was always mine, what never should have been lost to station or wealth.

I made her stay as I stepped into the water, reading clearly that she wanted to flee. Let her touch me, I thought. Let her touch the flesh that he has touched, that still burns hot with the memory of him! And, meek cow that she is, she did.

She took the cloth lightly to my back and I turned to look at her, grabbing my breasts as I did so. "My breasts are so swollen, Maria," I said. "Why is that?" She only shook her head and stared down into the shallow water of the tub as her hands mindlessly moved over my back and arms.

I rolled my shoulders, trying to shrug the tension from them. "Everything is so *tight* today," I continued. "I do not understand."

She sobbed then and I could only imagine how she would have cried had she been on the other side of the door as Louis rode my body. How, hearing the banging and moaning, she might have opened the door. The idea of her watching brought my nipples to a peak and I leaned back against her touch, letting her see my excitement. Her attempt to avoid my gaze was miscalculated, taking her eyes to the very center of the issue!

Spreading my legs, I took the washcloth from her and wiped between my lower lips, letting my hand linger there, the strip of cloth providing no barrier to the pressure of my touch over that sensitive dangle of flesh that had throbbed with the molten pulse of the very earth with Louis inside me.

"I m-must s-set the t-table!" she stuttered and backed away from the tub. She stumbled from the room, her gaze frozen on me as my hands moved on to

explore my thighs, the soft swell of my stomach and then my heavy breasts with nipples that had beaded a dark salmon.

“By all means, Maria,” I said, cooing at her like the doves she watched outside the kitchen window. “I am unusually hungry tonight.”

Ah, but the hunger had nothing to do with food. I wanted Louis again. I couldn't wait. I wanted to see the passion in his face this time, not feel it from behind! And so I finished my bath and floated around the room, dressing myself, mismatching buttons because my fingers trembled with need—the need to be touched and to touch him, to wrap my hands around the marvelous circumference of his manhood, knowing that its swollen state was my doing and Maria's undoing.

At the dinner table, I was of no use in conversation...of no use at all. Maria hovered like a hawk, trying no doubt to avoid Mother sending me to Louis for another punishment. Poor thing, she didn't understand. The pretense was no longer needed. I could call to him directly, express my need to humble my body before him without the sham of disobedience. How could she not know that I only had to arch my back and spread my legs and he would answer in turn? Thrust for thrust!

When dessert was at last cleared from the table, I made my apologies and returned to my room, leaving Mother and Mdm. Bilodeaux to their prayer books. Locking my door, I stripped and crawled onto the bed, rolled on it, stretching my limbs this way and that, imagining him on top of me. Catching sight of my body in the cheval mirror, I jumped up and dragged it to the foot of my bed. Returning to the mattress, I rested on my knees and leaned back, examining the upward push of my breasts and the way my nipples pebbled with excitement.

My examination continued downward, and I parted my lower lips, letting my fingers play over the button of flesh at the top. I pulled and stroked at it until the light cream that dampened the folds of my womanhood thickened to a warm syrup that coated my fingers. Gently, I probed at the opening, tried to

gauge how many of my slick fingers were needed to equal his rod. Surely, the head had been bigger than all five of my fingertips pressed together!

I moaned at the thought, startling myself and releasing a flood of worry that Mother might be out in the hall, however unlikely. No, if Mdm. Bilodeaux had departed, Mother would already be in her chambers on the opposite side of the floor. Not once that I can remember has she entered my room since I turned twelve—the month after father died.

Sweet isolation! Once I had hated it, now it served a purpose. Quickly I tossed a light robe around myself. The sheer lace and chiffon were meant to cover more substantial cloth and I could see my body, every curve, every inch of impassioned flesh, through the fabric. Opening my door, I poked just my head into the hall outside. The way to the servants' stairs was clear and I dashed across to them, going up, not down.

At the top landing of the stairs, I opened the small window that looks onto the back courtyard. I could see that the lanterns were still lit in the stable despite the late hour. Was he avoiding Maria? Drinking? He did so, I knew, after my punishments. Was he doing so again?

From further down the stairwell, I could hear the sound of Maria doing the dishes and cleaning up the rest of the kitchen. It was a quiet, somber sound, and the plain, black livery mother demanded the servants wear since father's passing took on a new meaning in my imagination. I could see Maria in my mind's eye, clothed in the color of death—the death of her marriage, of his tolerance, of *my* tolerance, of her presence, of the barrier between us that she had been...but no longer would be.

Pressing my upper body against the window, I watched for Louis to leave the stables. Would he look up? He had to. Not just because it was his nature to look over the house before he entered for the evening, but because I willed him to. My heart began to beat faster, pounding against my ribcage when I saw him barring the stable doors for the night. In the low light of evening, I stared at his back, watched the ripple of muscles as he lifted the heavy slat of wood and set

it in place. He turned, his gaze going first to the kitchen entrance to the house and then traveling higher.

He stopped at the second floor, his attention focused on my bedroom window. So different the view must be now that he'd sunk his shaft deep into me, felt me squirming in delight along its length! Higher! I willed him, almost tapped at the window to make sure he would not miss me. But I didn't need to. His gaze caught mine a heartbeat later, his dark brows rising in inquiry. I brought my hands to the front edges of my robe in answer, parting them slowly to reveal my breasts to him.

Louis looked around at the yard—I imagine to make sure no one was watching our dirty little exchange. How I wanted someone to see it even though I feared the world's hypocrisy and retribution should they find out. I pulled the robe's edges farther apart and cupped my breasts, offering the tender tips to him like the rare delicacy that they are.

And then I backed away from the window and waited.

But it wasn't long that he made me wait. I heard the kitchen door open and close, heard Maria offer a tentative greeting, heard her voice falter as he moved past her to the staircase.

"Where are you going?" she asked him. He mumbled a reply, something too low, too slurred with liquor or passion for me to make out from where I waited two floors up. She offered to do it for him and his voice sharpened to a stern rejection of her help.

I counted his footsteps, realized he was taking the stairs two at a time, my heart pounding in time with each fall of his boot on the risers. Quickly, I pulled my robe back together as I decided to make him work for another glimpse of my bare skin.

"Beatrice..."

There was a question in his tone, in the way he said my name. I think it was my sanity—or his own—that he was unsure of.

"Louis," I answered, my voice rumbling with the need that had grown monstrous over the last few hours.

Below us, everything went quiet. My heart sang at the silence. It was as if the world had stopped for us and she would hear. Maria would hear my passionate moans, hear the slap of our bodies against one another, hear him call my name—my name, not hers.

But the silence did not thrill him as it thrilled me.

“Your mother—”

“You know her, Louis,” I answered, my voice shrilling at his possible retreat. “She is in bed, asleep or with a dozen pillows propped around her head. We might as well be the only two people in the world.”

I dropped my robe and moved to him. “We *are* the only two people in the world, Louis.”

“Saints! I want...” he started.

I rubbed my breasts against his broad chest, ran my hands up his arms. “What do you want, Louis?” When he only stood there, like a deer that had just caught the scent of a predator, I took his limp hand and shoved it between my legs.

“Is this what you want?” He nodded his head, his gaze awakening with lust. “Then tell me,” I said and started to move away.

He grabbed me, jerked my body closer and shoved his hands deeper into the pocket between my thighs. “I want you, Beatrice, this tight...”

“Tight what?” I urged him to answer, flexing the muscles that his fingertips only dared to graze against. I knew nothing of the vernacular that he used. There must be other names for these pleasures points, for the honey pot so wet from the mere anticipation of his touch. I wanted to know what they were, hear them roll off his tongue, watch the shock spread across his face as I repeated them in turn!

“This tight pussy,” he moaned and pushed a finger deep into me.

I leaned my head back, thrusting my breasts up as I stood on tiptoe to ease the penetration of his hand inside me. “Pussy,” I said, echoing all the passion his voice had held. “You are making it wet, so wet that it will need to be a very thick rod indeed to keep from slipping out.”

I pressed my palm against the front of his breeches. "And what is this to my pussy?" I asked, squeezing its firmness for extra emphasis.

"My cock." He panted his answer, his hand sliding over my button.

"Oh," I gasped. "And that?"

He gave the spindly tip a rough tug that had me panting in unison with his heavily drawn breaths.

"Your clit," he answered.

"Those are not nice words," I said, feigning indignation.

Pulling me closer, he shoved several of his thick fingers into me, his coarse evening beard scratching my throat and cheek as he nuzzled my ear. "Because you are a dirty little whore," he answered.

And he meant it! I could hear the hate in his voice, the shame. But nothing spoke as loudly as his lust. It rumbled in his chest, rushed out hot against my neck. He meant it, but he didn't mind because I was *his* dirty little whore.

"Yes," I moaned and pumped against his fingers, my pussy jealous for his cock. "A whore, a bad little whore. And what are you going to do to me?"

"Fuck you," he groaned, pushing me hard against the wall. He tugged at his pants, freeing his cock from its unbearable confinement. Its tip bulged with excitement, the soft twilight that filtered through the window giving just enough illumination to reveal the translucent beads of his desire pearling in the slit. My own slit was already a flood of need and I arched my body, trying to raise my pussy high enough that he could spear me with his cock.

I felt his hands curve beneath my bottom and he lifted me, my back sliding up against the wall. I spread my legs, wrapped them around his waist and he brought me down onto his shaft with a vicious tug that had me squeezing the air from him with my thighs.

"Yes, fuck me," I begged, then louder, that Maria might hear his betrayal. "Fuck me, Louis, fuck me!"

The landing was narrow and the ceiling of the third floor low. I raised my arms above my head, placing my palms flat against the ceiling. My legs I thrust



out until the soles of my feet met the wall, reveling in the control and penetration the tight space allowed.

His fingers bit into the flesh of my bottom, the calloused tips carelessly rubbing against my nether hole as he lifted me up and down the length of his shaft. Craning his head, he caught one of my breasts in his mouth and sucked at the nipple, pulling it hard, stretching the tip and then biting the pale flesh surrounding it hard enough to mark me. (Ah, what will she think of those marks when she sees them!)

The thick flesh of my pussy swelled from the relentless assault of his cock against and inside me. I cried out, nearly screaming as the tips of his fingers once again found the puckered hole hidden between the half globes of my bottom.

“Yes, hold me like that!” I panted. I squirmed against him, trying desperately to bury his cock deeper and to pull his fingertips into that other hole even as my body recoiled in shock. I knew that if any part of his hand penetrated me there, my body would burst.

He was grunting, sucking at my breasts like some newly birthed piglet, noisy, greedy, his saliva mingling with the light layer of perspiration that covered my throat and chest and the heavy drip of sweat from his forehead.

“Like that!” I demanded again, trying to clamp down on his finger as it strayed closer to the hole.

“You would fling us into hell,” he accused, letting go only to grab me by the waist.

“Afraid of damnation now?” I laughed and he slammed me against the wall once in warning. I laughed at him again and he threaded one hand through my hair, pulling me away from him and forcing me onto the landing on my hands and knees. I looked down the stairwell and saw candlelight still flickering up from the kitchen.

“Fuck me, Louis,” I hissed and reached behind me to spread my pussy lips for him.

His hands closed around my hips like a vise and he rammed his cock into me, my head bouncing against the banister from the force.

“Again!” I commanded him.

He obeyed, leaning as he pumped his cock into me. His fingers, curled like meaty hooks, pulled at my breast, pinching the nipple to a blood-red peak. With my opposite hand on the floor, I braced one shoulder against the banister and began to rub my clit in time to the deep thrusts of his cock inside me.

“Yes.” I panted my pleasure down the stairwell, moaning and groaning to Maria’s torment. “That feels so good, Louis. Sooooo good.”

My nails grazed the skin of the two swollen sacs that hung from his cock and he shuddered against me, the tremble of it filling my pussy. “I feel like I am on fire, Louis.”

Just as the fire began to blaze across my entire body, I felt his seed ripple through his engorged cock, felt the muscles at its base twitch inside me.

“I am coming,” he bit out, his voice and body exhausted as he yelled it again. “I am coming, Beatrice.”

That was the final thing he said to me last night. His body locked mid-thrust, shooting so much of his seed into me that it spilled down my thighs before he even withdrew.

Withdraw he did. Nothing sweet or lingering. There was no need for tenderness, after all, was there? Not for such a dirty little whore. No, enough that he had fucked me like I wanted him to. When he was done, he picked his pants up from the landing and left, his face a storm cloud of confusion.

Me, I crawled on hands and knees back to my room. I pulled myself up onto the bed where I let my fingers explore the angry flesh of my pussy. How I wished it was daylight so that I could see the puffed red tissue, see the white pearls of his seed still dripping from me. I spread my fingers in the delicious mess, ran them over my clit once again, and down along the crack of my bottom to that other hole to gently explore its edges, more fire bursting from my center as I probed deeper.

And that is how she found me this morning, my hand still buried between my legs, my body rank with the sweat and seed of her beloved husband, my lover.

*March 22, 1787*

She must have threatened him. How else could his careful avoidance of the house be explained? That he didn't want me? Impossible! I saw in his eyes how his desire still burned. And I caught him looking up at my window each night since. But he stayed down in the stables!

Yet she could only keep him from me for so long, now that we'd been together. Duplicity or fate was bound to reunite us. Which it was, I still cannot say. Did I mean to cut Mother's finger at tea this evening or was it really an accident?

She was reaching for the bread, which was alongside a bar of butter. And I was reaching for the butter...with the saw-toothed knife Maria had used to cut the bread. Looking out the window, I was thinking of Louis and didn't realize which knife I was holding until I heard Mother's bloodless gasp.

The lace tablecloth, on the other hand—not bloodless at all. Who would think that one bony little finger could channel so much blood? Even now, I wonder whether she sent me to the room, to him, because of her finger or the precious scrap of fabric.

That she sent me, of course, is all that really matters. I had to bite down on my tongue to keep the tears of joy and laughter from rolling down my cheeks. Maria raced into the room, begging forgiveness for my clumsiness. Even telling Mother that it was sinful to send me for a beating! Sinful, yes, what would go on in that room, what had already gone on in that room. Still, I would wager my opal earrings that Maria will be on bended knee tonight at church praying that her lie be forgiven while I lounge in my bed, still playing with the wet field of today's lust.

His gaze was wide, frightened even, when he came in from the stables, Maria having been sent to fetch him. He smelled of sweat and horseflesh, but it only made me hotter for him.

“Maria says you cut your mother?”

Maria was standing in the kitchen, watching us, and he glanced back over his shoulder at her. She didn’t look away and he turned back to me.

“It was an accident,” I told him, my voice trembling. How different from the last time I had sat on that wobbly stool with the broken pottery resting on my skirts. I had feigned being innocent then, now I truly was. But still I craved his punishment. I realized I had missed the feel of the board against my flesh, of his forced dominance of my body when he otherwise would shrink from his own desires.

“This can be no accident, Beatrice!”

“It is,” I protested. “I...I was thinking of you.” I looked at Maria as I said this, saw her eyes brighten with unshed tears. Louis stiffened, his body freezing half an instant before he would have looked back at her.

I hardened my tone, wiped any trace of timidity or fear from it. “But I am ready for my punishment despite such innocence.”

His nostrils flared at that, his sensuous mouth pressing into a hard line. “You dare claim any kind of innocence?”

“Yes.” So sweet was my voice, as sweet as the honey that pooled between my legs. He must have smelled my excitement, too, for his stance softened. “Look at me, Louis,” I entreated, still sweet, still light with youth. “I am just a girl, barely eighteen years on this earth.”

I raised my hand and gestured around the room. “This house and the convent are all I know of the world. Mother, the sisters and girls at Sacred Heart, you and Maria, Mdm. Bilodeaux—these are the only people I know.”

I let my gaze play over his safely cloistered cock, its swelling already evident, and then raised my head to stare him down. “If I have lost any claim to innocence, where, among so few people and places, should blame be placed?”

His arm shot out, pushing the door to the pantry open. “Get inside!”

“Louis, no!” Maria moved across the kitchen, her hand extended as if its frail strength could stop him. “Do not do this.”

Ah, my own entreaties thrown back at him in his wife’s voice. *No, Louis, do not. Stop. Do not stop, Louis.* Yes, that is what I had meant all along, perhaps even that first day when I thought my struggles real. And I had made him immune against such pleas. What were her tears and threats compared to the pleasures my body offered him?

I was still sitting on the stool and he grabbed me by my upper arm, pulling me to my feet. She reached us before he could shove me into the room and I let each of them tug at me. I tugged back, feeling my bodice stretch as husband and wife yanked at a sleeve. The lace binding loosened and I smiled in anticipation of a breast popping free as Louis tried to drag me into the pantry and ravish me while Maria tried to stop him.

He let go of a sudden and I crashed against Maria, my full breasts pressing against her smaller ones. Our faces came so close I could have kissed her on the mouth, let my tongue play over her thin lips before charging beyond the pearl gates of her teeth. She must have seen some of my intent written across my face. She scrambled away, but not before Louis caught her. She paled beneath his tight grip while I thrilled at the raw passion that blazed across his features. He would not let her come between us again!

“Get inside,” he repeated, not looking at me, knowing innately that I would obey, that my whole body was shaking with the need to obey.

He released Maria and dismissed her with a stern command to return to the kitchen. He closed the pantry door and dragged a heavy sack of flour against it, then looked around the room, measuring and discarding potential implements of pain and pleasure.

“Take your clothes off,” he ordered.

I started stripping, stopping every now and then as I watched him arrange the crates in the room. Each time he would urge me on in my disrobing with an enraged gaze that promised a painful retribution. At last, I was naked in front of him, my hands across my breasts as I tried to calm my excitement.

He had made a rough set of steps with the crates, one serving as the bottom step and two more stacked together to form a top step or platform. Grabbing the paddle from next to the door, he tapped the lower crate.

“On your knees, Beatrice.”

As I moved to comply, he shoved me forward and pressed my chest against the top platform. Slamming the paddle down next to my head, he grabbed my arms and pulled them back until one of his large hands encircled both my wrists. He fished a loop of leather lacing from his pants and bound my hands together.

“What—”

“Quiet!”

God help me, a fresh burst of cream coated my pussy at his barked command. I shut my mouth only to have him pry it back open when he forced his belt between my teeth. Only my moans were tolerated, his breathing growing heavier with each delighted squirm of my body as I waited to find out what he would do next.

Keeping one hand on the belt’s ends, he twisted the strap until I was forced to look back at him. His pants fell to his ankles and his cock, purpled with his readiness, pulsing in the air like a third arm. He stroked it a few times, my mouth and the leather between my teeth growing wet as I watched his hand sliding over his shaft. I squirmed some more, damning the string that kept my hands from touching him or relieving my own need.

Releasing his cock, he picked the paddle back up and delivered the first blow to my bottom. The wood of the crate, unsanded, scraped at my breasts as the power of his arm pushed me across the crude platform’s surface. Again he hit me, my bottom surely purpling to match his swollen cock. I jerked, pain and pleasure combining until my pussy was a mad throb of need.

Another hit and frustrated tears rolled down my cheeks. *Yes. More, please. Take the gag from my mouth so that I can beg you for more, Louis. Unbind my hands so that I may grovel with them clasped around your ankles!*

Another hit and the dam broke, my body thrashing violently as my pussy constricted with pleasure. He dropped the paddle and took a belt end in each hand, pulling my head back as he kicked my legs to the sides of the first crate, stretching my pussy tight before he rammed his cock into me. Louis worked the makeshift rein, pulling back again and again as if we were at full gallop, playing the roughrider to my tender mare.

Tender, indeed! He speared me again and again, his shaft too massive for such sport. I could feel the inner walls of my pussy protest each time his cock slammed into me, feel the tearing of the fragile tissue that surrounded its entrance. And I loved him for it! More so than I ever had. He was master now, if only for today. And I, his dirty little whore until, shaking and coming, I fainted beneath him.

*March 24, 1787*

Saturday has come at last! It is not joy with which I punctuate my sentence, but despair. I write this from the coach that will return me to the Sacred Heart before evening mass tomorrow, stopping only for the evening at another convent along the way.

How long will it be, I wonder, until Louis fills me again? Never? It seems likely that we part now forever. His lust and shame threaten to destroy him—even as I revel in this new freedom, my thoughts drifting now to the fine young coachman hired to transport me back to the school. How much transport, I can't help thinking, is he ready to provide?

Wanton of me—to already desire another lover? I don't know. I am only certain of what I saw in Louis's eyes this morning as he came upstairs to my bedroom to force me to pack. Maria even encouraged his approach, confident, perhaps, that she would shame him back to her after my departure. His gaze was hollow, as if his soul had been sucked out of him, or, more accurately, pumped into me, for he had not yet let me set my lips to the plump meat of his cock. A man on the gallows, that is what he was. As he should be! If he lamented my departure, why not tell me to stay? Why force me to pack? Why

carry my luggage down to the coach? I would have defied every thing and every one but him had he done so. I would have lived in the gutter, bathed in the sludge and piss on the street if he would but promise to master my body each night.

But no, he came to me this morning as a hollow man, with nothing to offer save what I could squeeze from him with ridicule. I wish I could say it pained me to goad him on like that. I wish I could say it, but I was wet and hot the entire time, from the first peek of his dark locks as he climbed the staircase...until he spilled the last of his seed in me.

"I am here to make sure you pack," he said, standing in the doorway, Maria looking over his shoulder.

I was still in my robe and nightgown and I started to take them off. Maria's face hardened to a polished alabaster and I thought I saw her fists curling behind his back.

"Leave us, Maria," I said and turned to examine my body in the mirror, sad that something as innocent as a length of glass and its frame were banned from the convent.

"I'm going to tell your mother," she threatened.

I smiled at her reflection in the mirror. "Do that," I suggested. She must have thought me the devil because she crossed herself, praying to Heaven for protection and intervention.

"Maria, do as she says...or would you have me in jail?"

She wasn't sure where or how she wanted him. I could see that and it only made my smile grow wider, more voracious. Perhaps I should have bid her stay and watch us fuck?

"Maria!" he hissed when she didn't move. "Go, now!"

She turned, a leaden saint, and retreated down the stairs.

"You," I turned and crooked a finger at him, pulling him into the room with no more than a gesture. "Close the door."

"What is it you want, Beatrice?"

"A proper good-bye, that is all."



“How can you do that to Maria?” He was earnest in his question and it made me laugh in his face. A flash of anger lit his gaze, narrowing the pupils to black points that threatened to tear out my heart.

Good, I wanted him angry. It made him hard, as much as he might wish to deny it. So it had been between us for so long, my fighting him, rubbing against him, exposing some bit of forbidden flesh. He could not know me without being the stern enforcer of Mother’s petty punishments. And now he had so much to punish me for and I intended to give him even more!

“I owe Maria no duty of kindness!” I spat the words in his face and he raised his hand to me for an instant before slamming his fist against his thigh.

“Is it my fault?” he asked himself quietly, not looking at me, just staring at the floor and numbly shaking his head. He glanced up, remembering that I was there, and shook his head again. “You have wantonly tempted me for so long!”

“Pity you did not take me sooner...before marrying that cow.” I thrust my breasts out, my chin following suit as I dared him to raise his hand again.

My words shocked him, filling him with horror that I should have suggested so early a taking. But some false chivalry over Maria’s honor fell across him like a black veil and he grabbed me by the throat. “That you, a whore, should talk about her—”

“Your whore,” I reminded him and stroked at the hands that threatened to squeeze the life out of me. “And what is she anyway? Is it her wifely duty that keeps her at your side still? Or, like me, does she want you to fill her with your cock, to fuck her with it, to let her take it into her mouth and suck—”

He backhanded me and I fell across the bed. On hands and knees, I crawled across the mattress, every ounce the naked, disheveled penitent. I stopped a hand’s width from him, not looking up at him, my gaze centered on the outline of his cock pressing against his pants. My tongue slipped out to wet my lips. “You are so hard,” I moaned.

My breasts, ripe with need, brushed against my arm and the sensitive nipples stung as if I’d drawn a blade across them. “I need you, Louis,” I begged, sincere at last. “This last time before I lose you forever.”

“No!” He grabbed two handfuls of hair and pulled me against him, hugging my face against his erect manhood. “Why do you say that?”

So he wanted me to stay! But would he admit as much?

“When I return...” I started, looking up and faltering as I saw the truth scratched across his features.

“I will still be your mother’s coachman...and Maria’s husband.”

I rose up, pushing angrily at him. “I will be mistress here, soon,” I warned. “Do you think that old woman, with her headaches and her vapors and all her hateful misery will ruin my life for much longer?”

I shook my head, my hair whipping around my shoulders. “No, this will be my house! And you...” I slammed my fist against his chest, my voice breaking. “You already are mine!”

“Yes, Beatrice.” He pulled me to him, hiding his face against my hair, rubbing his cheek against the satiny strands.

“Then show me!” I demanded. I reached for his belt, tearing at his pants to free his erection. So thick, wanting my touch, wanting me to taste it. My mouth descended on it, swooping down all at once, feeling it stretch my lips and press against the back of my throat. I bobbed along its length, sucking, licking, my hands workings the heavy sacs below, gently squeezing them until he put a hand on each side of my head and began to fuck my mouth. I let him control me like that, fondling his balls with one hand while I reached between my legs to pull at my clit.

“Blessed Beatrice,” he cried out, his seed rushing into my throat. “Keep sucking, keep sucking.”

He bucked inside my mouth a few more times before withdrawing and collapsing along the length of the bed. He was panting, his body weakened from the past few weeks of fucking and fighting. Whereas I had only grown stronger. I scrambled to the head of the bed, turning quickly, one leg arcing over his head as I planted my pussy against his mouth.

Louis didn’t protest, only stopped his breathing for one surprised moment before he began laving the walls of my pussy. My whole body was alive with the

sensation of his tongue stroking my labia before plunging into me. I wiggled against his face, his chin biting into the hard bone that ran beneath my clit.

The mirror was up against the wall and I watched myself squirming against his mouth. I cupped my breasts, fondled them as I began to bounce up and down. He stuck a finger inside my pussy and I cried out, my body hovering at the edge of climax. I grabbed his other hand and guided it to my bottom, forcing his index finger apart from its brothers. He licked the length of his finger and then swirled it in the thick juice that coated my pussy before ramming it into the tight hole that winked above.

My lust-filled scream pierced the morning quiet, but he kept driving his fingers into me, licking my pussy with long strokes, while he finger fucked both of my holes. I came then, a shuddering climax that thundered through my body and left me quivering above his still feasting mouth.

Louis pushed me forward onto my hands and knees and dipped his cock into my wet slit until it was heavy with my cream. Then he grabbed my bottom, his thumbs parting the cheeks. I felt the heavy tip of his cock wedge against the small opening to my bottom. Another wave of anticipation washed over me and I moaned my encouragement.

How can I explain what it felt like as he plundered that tight hole? Was there pain? Yes. But it only quadrupled my pleasure, my protesting muscles gripping his cock tighter still. His thickness filled me beyond the narrow borders of that other channel, seeming to fill my pussy with his meat as if each stroke was inside its wet, grasping depths. The pressure on my clit was stacked so high I thought urine would spill from me before I came. Everything tried to pull him deeper into me. Every muscle rejoiced as he put his first tender, exploratory thrusts aside and began to drive his cock inside me. I was moaning...crying...tearing at my hair...my face flat against the mattress as I screamed my pleasure into it until, with a bone-deep grunt, we climaxed together.

There was nothing for me to do then but get dressed and pack my luggage. Already, the livery bells were jingling outside, announcing the coach's arrival.

He carried the trunks outside while I bound my hair and walked down the hall to Mother's room. There was the polite knock, the polite good-bye, the polite assurances that I would write her once a week even though she would never write a return letter. It was not my custom to approach her bed, but I did this time, nurturing with each step closer some perverse hope that she would smell Louis on me and that the shock might stop her heart. I had told him that I would do as much, but the blank mask had already fallen back across his face and he no more than shrugged before taking the next bag down.

So here I sit, journal in hand, the spot between my legs—that delicious area that I can only think of now as my pussy—still moist, still hungry. And I wonder, would the coachman notice a little more sway to the trap? Would he hear an escaped moan over the clatter of the horses' hooves? And if he did, what would he do?

*This is the last entry in Beatrice's diary. What we know of her fate is revealed only through the letters and journals of the other young women sheltered at the Sacred Heart in the days before the Revolution.*

## Gabrielle

*Dearest Cousin,*

*I received your letter today. How can it be that so few words can bring such profit?! You did not supplement it, did you? Promise me you did not!*

*I know I should not be thrilled at the sum; the image of poor Maria's face haunts me now. My enrichment has come at the cost of her pain (although she is rather accustomed to such things, it seems).*

*You said the public clamors for another entry! How I wish I could be standing alongside the vendors as they distribute them or disguise myself as a man and sell them on the streets myself. The thrill it would bring to watch their greedy fingers pull the pages apart in their eagerness to read my words! There was, so the gossip goes, a copy smuggled into the convent and now the rumors fly. How many Sacred Hearts, the girls wonder, can there be in France? Is the convent in Beatrice's story truthfully named or pulled from thin air? Is there such a girl as fatherless Beatrice here and, if so, where was she in March? It pains me that I have not seen the copy, although it is, perhaps, for the best. I am thought so innocent of potential wrongdoing in this matter that several of the girls here have pulled me into their confidences that they might pump information from me—as to Beatrice's identity and that of the author!*

*You will, perhaps, recognize the young woman in the next installment, the end result having been so widely reported.*

*As ever,  
Candacis*

*April 10, 1787*

Sebastian! The very name makes my chest swell with love and a most immodest passion. It seems miraculous that I may soon be in a position to tell him as much. And the bringer of this miracle? That is another miracle in and of itself. Long have I chronicled my attempts to win over Veronique as a friend so that I might gain some access to her cousin. And, while the L'Aigle family is, indeed, quite anciently titled, you would think I was a commoner grabbing at her skirts on the street! But, no more. She has finally accepted me into her confidences and I her. When she learned of my unrequited love for her cousin, she, of all people, agreed that we would make an excellent match. And now, in a few days, the masquerade—and I without a costume! No time to write more. I must prepare!

*April 13, 1787*

Be still my heart! How things move so quickly when in love. Sebastian, through Veronique, has agreed to a private audience during the masquerade. I am near faint at the prospect that we will be able to discuss our mutual feelings. Yes, mutual! He has confessed as much to Veronique. It seems impossible that I wondered a mere week ago if I might ever capture more than his casual notice. Now, it is not a child's query to wonder whether marriage is far off.

Ah, more flutters fill my chest and stomach. (Dare I confess, that more than chest and stomach is fluttering at this point?)

Father, of course, will be easy to convince and pleased, no doubt. But I do worry as to Marquise L'Aigle. Ambroise is such a rough brute compared to Sebastian, despite father and son being near mirrors of one another in physique and coloring. But then, Sebastian is the stone lovingly polished by his blessed mother (may she rest in peace). A world of polishing would still find Ambroise jagged and tearing at the hands of the lapidarian. And yet, such men may be easily manipulated by a woman's soft manners. At least, somber bore

that he is, I will not have to worry about Ambroise remarrying and producing a rival heir!

*April 15, 1787*

It is the morning after the masquerade and my body is sore. Not from dancing or perching at the edge of some ancient marquessa's seat while I pretended to be enthralled with some ridiculous story of her maid having burnt a stocking and the beating that followed. No, not from anything so mundane am I sore, but from an evening of thorough lovemaking! Yes, I confess as much, here, in secret.

I arrived at the masquerade in the company of Veronique and her parents. Quickly, Veronique made her way to the masked Sebastian to identify him to me as such. He looked my way once, across the room, while they talked, but then he disappeared! I felt as if I would die there on the floor. But then Veronique, after many more minutes of talking with some of the assembled lords, made her way back to me, detailing where and when I should find Sebastian waiting for me. The soul of discretion, he feared harm to my reputation should anyone realize we had arranged a private conversation!

How long the evening dragged—how many lesser men bruised my feet as I danced with them. With each new partner, I longed to see before me one dressed in the dark blue velvet and feathered half-mask Sebastian wore, to have a supple blue leather glove take my hand. Ah, did he have another dance in mind so early, or did the evening's forced separation make him long for my touch as it made me long for his?

It was after ten when I made my way to the appointed private drawing room. Some unused suite. No fire blazed despite the room's chill. Not even a candle was lit. Instead, he stood by the window's open curtains waiting for me. With a soft whisper, he bid me lock the door and sit on the couch. I trembled as I obeyed.

When I was seated, he moved across the room and sat down on the far end of the couch. My heart cried foul! I wanted him closer. I raised my hands to my mask, but he halted me.

“None know what face lies behind that mask tonight, do they, dearest Gabrielle?” he asked.

He still whispered and I squirmed in my seat, desperate for the sound of his light tenor. “No, all night Veronique and I refused to reveal ourselves—so too her parents,” I assured him. My low tones matched his, but I wondered at the necessity. Surely we were far enough from the party that we could abandon our hushed tones.

“Then keep the mask on, as will I, should some unannounced guest intrude on our...conversation.”

For an instant, I was glad of the half-mask for it kept him from seeing what disappointment might show in the faint light. He must not think me petulant, or domineering, or anything less than perfect. And so I nodded my agreement although I ached to see his fine features.

“And will we talk like children in a game of hide and seek the whole time?” I asked, keeping my words as sweet as I could despite my mounting impatience.

He moved closer and, even in the faint moonlight, I could see the trace of a smile along his lips, or so I believed.

“It is best, don’t you think, for what we have to discuss?”

Fear gripped me. Would we discuss it so soon—were we even thinking of the same thing? I took on an evasive air. “And what,” I asked, “will we be discussing?”

Sebastian moved closer still. I could smell his perfume and deeper, more masculine scents. Had I been so close before? I closed my eyes and breathed deeply. It was not as I expected, his scent. Strong and earthy, it made me hungry—for what I couldn’t guess.

Feeling his hand on my bare shoulder, I opened my eyes.

“About our eventual marriage,” he answered.



A second time that night I thought I would die on the spot! I couldn't respond, only tremble beneath his touch. Such heights in a few short weeks, it seemed impossible.

"Is that not what you are here to discuss, Gabrielle?" he asked and withdrew his hand.

"It is, Sebastian," I assured him and reached out to touch his sleeve. "I just dared not hope to hear those words from your lips tonight."

Grabbing both of my shoulders, he pulled me closer, my breasts a mere inch from the frills of his coat. I longed to push forward, to press against his chest, but fear that he would find me brazen stopped me.

"What is it?" I asked, the words sounding with a quiver as I fought to contain the passion building in me.

"I would kiss you, Gabrielle, if that is not too bold of me?"

I relaxed beneath his touch and closed my eyes, ready for his kiss. What did I expect? Not those light pecks that clumsy admirers sometimes sought to bestow upon me. But neither did I expect a deep probing of my mouth that would leave me breathless and damp (in so many places!)

He started slow, his lips whispering across mine, leaving me sighing. Then his tongue flicked at the corner of my mouth and, like a child drawn to a nipple, I followed the motion, opening my mouth to his. His tongue penetrated me, sliding over and against mine, swiping at my palate with sensuous thrusts that had me cresting against his broad chest.

He cupped my breast as he kissed me and I offered Veronique silent thanks for having suggested a looser fitting gown. I leaned into him, returning the thrust of his tongue, and his other hand traveled down to my calf. He rubbed at my leg through the fabric, effortlessly coaxing me into a reclining position.

Sebastian uncurled his body along mine and I felt the hard press of his manhood through the cloth of my gown. I sighed, arching my back, wanting nothing more than to have him take me but not knowing how to, or whether I should, ask for such a thing.

“My love.” His voice was filled with the same warm spice that scented his body and I moaned against his shoulder as his hand traveled the curve of my hip. “I would worship your body if you would but consent, Gabrielle?”

Dark, husky, the request sent thrills racing across me followed by a warm blanket of heat. But I tightened with dread. “You would think me wanton,” I protested, my tone pleading for him to tell me otherwise.

“I would think you my mate, love, bound to me forever,” he answered. He lifted the skirt of my gown and undergarments, the leather of his glove smooth against my thigh. He gripped my hip, his thumb caressing the skin of my lower stomach.

How could I deny such a touch! I arched and moaned, my legs spreading even though I did not order them to do so. He stroked the small button between the folds of my womanhood, the touch of the leather on the sensitive skin maddening.

“Sebastian...I have never...” I stopped, the confession almost embarrassing. Would he both expect me to be a virgin and find me a silly unschooled child at the same time?

“No?” he asked, his voice almost disbelieving his good fortune. “All the more precious, love, this gift you offer.”

I almost began sobbing against his chest at that point. The silken caresses, his calling me love. It was all too much...all that I had ever hoped for and I still could not believe it true. “You will not think me wanton?” I persisted.

He pulled back and, thinking I had lost him, my heart broke. How great my joy to see that he was only removing his signet ring and one glove.

“We will be married before a month passes,” he promised. “I will go to your father this week and arrange it.” Tossing the glove on the floor, he offered the ring to me. “Take this ring and know that I tell you the truth, that I tell you what is in my heart, dear Gabrielle.”

I fastened the ring to a long chain that I wore hidden beneath my gown. I stretched my arms out and unconditionally offered my body to him. “Come to me, my love.”

He moved cautiously, his obvious concern for my pleasure making me burn hotter with each caress. His ungloved hand parted my lower lips, the pad of his fingertips exploring the entrance to my very center. I had imagined his hands to be very smooth, more so than the glove, but they were rough. The surprise left me panting as he pulled and teased the small button and lips before sticking a finger full inside me.

I could feel him testing my virtue and he groaned as his finger brushed against the velvet covering of my virginity.

“Sweet, sweet, Gabrielle.” His breathing was harsh, his passion obscuring his voice. He stroked the inside of my center with his fingers as he leaned back and watched passion whip through my body. “To think that this should be mine. Only mine.”

“Only yours,” I assured him. Begging him to enter me, I extended my arms. “But take it now, my love. Take it as my pledge of love for you, as you have given me your ring as pledge.”

He stood for a moment, removing the other glove and tossing it next to its mate on the floor. He lowered his pants until I could see the full thrust of his manhood silhouetted in the moonlight. Something half gasp, half groan escaped me at the sight of it. Like a true wanton, I reached out, sighing when my fingers could not close around the shaft.

“Will it hurt?” I asked, some part of me hoping that it would. I wanted to walk around in the morning sore from Sebastian’s love of me.

He did not answer me immediately, choosing instead to kneel in front of my wide-spread legs. My lower lips were covered in a heavily scented cream that had built while he kissed and touched me. It was in this cream that he ran the tips of his fingers before inserting them once again inside of my center. As his fingers moved inside me, his thumb ran over that distended bump of flesh that so thrilled at his ministrations. So pleased was I by his attentions I had to bring my forearm across my face and bite at the soft flesh lest I cry out and reveal our lovemaking.

As he brought my desire to a high pitch that had me thrashing on the couch, I felt the tear of my maidenly shield and then the full thrust of his fingers inside me while my body broke against a wave of ecstasy. When the waves subsided, he withdrew halfway, his fingers wedging open the swollen gate of my sex as he positioned his manhood at the threshold.

I could feel the hole expanding as he pushed in, simultaneously withdrawing his fingers. So greedy the hole for his rod, the muscles snapped shut around him and he moaned my name. His hands found my thighs and he began pumping inside of me. Already, my body was quivering against his and I heatedly demanded more, more of his thick shaft, more of the delicious meat he offered up to appease my hunger. We trembled against one another, fragile in our lust, as he pumped my body.

I marveled at his strength, at the virility of his thrusts, more enthralled with him than I had ever been. Having loved him at such a distance, I had never noticed these unexpected charms. Where I had imagined him slighter to the touch, he was solid and thick. Where I had imagined every inch of his skin to be petal soft, he was rough in all the right places!

“Gabrielle, I die happy now,” he softly cried out, his voice breaking as he spoke my name.

I clutched him to me as I, too, rushed to meet my death. Oh, happy death that spread through my limbs with a molten silence, melting each muscle so that it first quivered and then quieted with fatigue.

Both our bodies exhausted, he pressed gently against me, his arms propped such that he did not ask me to bear his weight, though I gladly would have if only to keep his shaft, still throbbing in its pleasure, inside me.

“Gabrielle?” The question was breathless and low, as all our talk had been this evening.

“Yes, my love?”

“You must not inquire with your father as to whether I have asked after you,” he said.

I did not understand his order, however gently delivered, and I told him as much.

“Do not doubt that I will seek his consent to our union,” he explained. “I just would not have your inquiries cause some suspicion on our...” He paused, searching the darkened room for some word that would pass among the decent folk still enjoying the masquerade. “Our current acquaintance,” he finished. “Do you not think, my love, that this is the wiser course?”

If I did not doubt his love, it was, indeed, the wiser course. And how could I doubt it, offered so sincerely and with his attention to my pleasure. “I will do as you ask in all things, dearest,” I answered.

I felt him swell against me in satisfaction and had to keep from wrapping my legs around him and begging him to ask me to do all sorts of wicked things!

“And will you meet with me again?” he asked.

Such nervousness, such fear trembled through his voice at the thought I would refuse. Joy leaked from my eyes.

“Tell me but when and how,” I answered, wrapping my arms around him.

Gently, he unwound himself from my embrace. “Follow Veronique’s instructions,” he answered, the smile evident in his voice. “She can be trusted in this matter, although she can only guess the nature of our...words...with one another.”

With tender devotion, he pulled the skirt of my gown back down and rearranged its folds before restoring his own clothing. Offering me his hand, he helped me up from the couch and walked me to the door. “We will not see each other until I send for you, and perhaps, even then, only once before I claim you publicly.”

He kissed me then, with the same heated intensity as the night’s first kiss, and released me into the hall. Veronique met me halfway back to the masquerade and ushered me into another room to make sure my appearance was fully aright. I protested, of course, that nothing should have caused it to go amiss, but she did not believe me, even if she would not confess openly to

thinking me a liar. What did it matter? A month from now and I will be the wife of Sebastian L'Aigle.

*April 17, 1787*

So hard it has been to do as Sebastian ordered and not inquire with Papa as to Sebastian asking for my hand in marriage. But he did not say that I could make no inquiries as to potential suitors!

And Sebastian must have visited with Papa, who is acting so strange at the hints I drop. At tea today, even though it has been only three days since the masquerade, I aired a concern that I would never find a suitable marriage. Papa dropped his biscuit into his tea! And when I mentioned a most unsuitable young man as Papa was reaching for the sugar, he knocked the bowl over! Papa is not so clumsy in a single year, let alone one afternoon at tea.

But that is not all that I base my hope on. Sebastian has called for me—in the form of an invitation from Veronique to spend the weekend at her parent's estate. The invitation did not arrive alone, the courier having a second envelope for Papa.

*April 19, 1787*

It is true, it cannot be otherwise. Papa announced at breakfast this morning that my return to the Sacred Heart will be postponed. He claims that Mama is saddened by my absence and would not lose me so soon. I am almost convinced, as I found her crying in her room this morning, saying how much she would miss me. But I can only hope that he is keeping me here so that Sebastian may propose!

*April 21, 1787*

How the days dragged after I received Veronique's invitation, even though my heart was in a constant state of flutter. I am exhausted and happy that Veronique is playing the indifferent hostess, leaving me to rest in my room.

There was a gift on my bed when I arrived. A small white box with a heavy gold chain inside to bear the weight of the ring, so his note said, until I bear it on my finger as his wife. He promised that he would be with me tonight, although his arrival and departure will be secret.

How much I would have protested the thought of such a meeting even a week ago. But I did not have his avowal of love and devotion then. Now, the secrecy of it only heightens my arousal!

*April 22, 1787*

How can the body know this much joy and pleasure and not burst into flames?

Again, our appointment was late, long after the family had gone to bed. Worn out from a day's anticipation of the night, I fell asleep almost immediately after returning to my room and changing into no more than the robe that should have covered my modest sleeping gown. It was only upon hearing the creak of the bedroom door as it slowly opened inward that I awoke.

Footsteps sounded across the floorboards only to be muffled as he reached the bed's carpeted perimeter. The curtains to the room were drawn and no candles had been lit in the hall. I had only my sense of smell and the muffled sound of his voice to know that it was Sebastian.

"Gabrielle..."

So quiet, so tentative. Did he doubt that I would come? "Here, my love." I reached out to find and clasp his hand.

He slid onto the mattress, the muted drop of his boots and clothing on the carpet assuring me he did not intend to leave anytime soon. His hands found the edge of the robe and I heard his surprised intake of breath when he discovered that the robe was all that covered me.

"Do you not approve?" I grabbed his hand and placed it over my ripe breast, moaning my own approval when he gave it a rough squeeze.

His lips found my ear and nuzzled my neck as he whispered to me, "Vixen!"

“Ah, love, I wish to hear your voice, not these whispers.” I let my body plead with him, moving beneath his roaming hand as it played me.

“Shhh...” The admonishment came with caresses as he rubbed at the sensitive button above my center until I forgot myself and gave an urgent moan that he might touch me more deeply.

“Then open the curtains that I might see you,” I said even as I pulled one knee up high to ease the entrance of his fingers into my wet slit.

He moved down the bed, stopping halfway. “I want nothing more than to make love to you by moonlight, Gabrielle.” He kissed my thighs further apart. “And by sunlight...by any light. But I would not risk compromising your name...having anyone think that I married you for anything other than love.”

“You are right,” I relented. “It is just that I so miss the sight of you, I cannot help but argue a little.”

“When we are married, we will make love in the day and by candlelight at night.” His lips brushed across the hair covering my sex as he made his promise. “Your passion-filled screams will wake the servants. They will think the devil has invaded the house!”

“You forget your father,” I moaned, barely able to form the words as his tongue punctuated his claim with a long swipe of my lower lips. “What would he think of such a daughter-in-law?”

Sebastian stilled. “Do not worry about that,” he said, his words low and clipped.

I sat up, my fingers curling in the blond locks I could not see. “But I do worry, my love. What if he objects?”

I could feel the day’s whiskers on his cheek and chin brush against the sensitive skin of my thighs as he shook his head. I collapsed back against the mattress, waiting for him to answer or to kiss and lick the question away.

“The only impediment to our marriage will be your feelings for me...if you cannot promise that you will love me and no other.”

I sat up again, drawing his face to mine. “Never think there can be such an impediment!”



I kissed him, thrusting my tongue into his mouth, tasting my own juices. I broke from him breathless and flung myself back onto the bed, opening myself entirely to his desires. "There will be no other, my love. Claim me now, thoroughly, until you can name me wife!"

He fell on me then, ravishing my body. His mouth covered my breasts, sucking at them, kneading their fullness as the head of his rod massaged my wet entrance. I brought my knees up along his hips, urging him to enter, but he would have none of my impatience. He flicked his tongue across my nipples, bringing them to hard points while his fingers teased the moist interiors of my sex. Licking his way down to my navel, he tongued the small hole there, too! The sensation was maddening...the thrust of his fingers, the tickle of his hair on my abdomen. Nearly crying for his rod, I tucked my knees up to my chest.

"Not until I have tasted your sweet nectar properly," he growled, his tongue moving lower as he added another two fingers to my pulsing hole. All but his thumb was inside me. That he used to wedge my lower lips apart so that he could nibble at the plumped bud of flesh. He took it firmly between his lips, rolling it from side to side as he tongued at the small sheath and the kernel of pleasure it hid.

I threaded my hands through his hair once again, bucking against his mouth, my eyes shut so tightly I saw lights dancing across the inside of my eyelids.

"Take me," I urged, matching the thrust of his hands inside me. "Fill me with your meat, my love!"

My demands undid him and he was quickly poised over my center, hesitating only a second before ramming his shaft into me. I felt the swollen sacs below his member slap against my bottom, battering that other hole. This was passion, abandon, and I could not think of what I had done to deserve it...to deserve him!

His strokes lengthened even as his breathing came more rapidly. Bracing himself against one of my thighs, he reached between my legs with his other

hand and rubbed the top of my sex as his gyrating hips buried his shaft deeper inside me.

“This pleasures you, Gabrielle?”

“Pleasure pales, my love.” My words came too fast. Gone was every pretense of being an elegant woman of rank. “You take my breath away... my very soul would fly...could I not cling to you.”

“Marry me and I promise you there will always be such pleasure.”

“Yes,” I gasped, bright flames of climax burning my flesh from the inside out.

He slowed, almost withdrawing, and I whimpered from the loss of his fullness. He drove hard into me once and I jerked across the mattress in ecstasy. “Promise you will accept no cock but this one, Gabrielle.”

“Yes!” I cried out.

His hand worked the flesh surround my sex and I shuddered beneath him.

“No hands but these.”

“Only you, only you,” I groaned, my heart nearly bursting from my chest, my hearing all but gone. “I promise on my life that I will not love or accept another!”

His seed filled me as I spoke, sealing the vow I had made, proclaiming me as his. Collapsing against the bed, he rolled onto his back, bringing me with him so that I was cradled against his chest, his rod still pulsing inside me.

He stroked my back, smoothed away the joyous tears that fell from my cheek onto his chest. After a few quiet moments, we started to speak and, again, I marveled that I had won this man as my future husband.

“Did you think of me this week?” he asked, withdrawing from me at last and rolling until we were on our sides facing each other.

“Every day!” I answered.

Insatiable, he reached between my legs, fingering me to another peak. “And did you touch yourself when I was not there to touch you?”

“You do think I am wanton!” My accusation lacked any genuine indignation. I knew he had every reason to think me so, although my nature seemed to please him.

“Not so,” he assured me. “It is better, do you not think, for a woman to pleasure herself when her lover is away than to let the heat of her passions melt her reserve with other men.”

“I would never do such a thing, Sebastian!” Did he think I might seek another lover? He could not, but there was caution in his voice and I rushed to reassure him. “Other men are insignificant creatures compared to you.”

“But I must sometimes make long trips, Gabrielle, to see to the entire estate’s needs.” His fingers found their way into my core, their suggestive probing shocking me all over again. “And now, you have no fear of injuring yourself should you miss me.”

“Your father makes those trips.” I heard the weakness of my argument in my voice. It was not that I lacked conviction in what I said, but that he argued with his hands as well as with words and logic. My mind felt wrapped in a warm, wet blanket. I could only repeat myself as he brought me to the brink of climax so easily. “Your father makes those trips.”

Stiffening beside me, he withdrew.

“Shhhh...love, what troubles you?” I asked, my voice breaking with concern.

“I *will* be absent. Show me how you will survive the separation.”

I could feel my cheeks flush and I drew my hands to my chest, unsure of how I should respond.

“Roll onto your back, Gabrielle,” he ordered and I obeyed. “Good,” he said and took my hand, placing it between my legs. “Do you remember how I stroked this little button?” He asked.

I nodded and then remembered that he couldn’t see me. “Yes.”

“When I am gone, you can stroke it when you find yourself missing me too much,” he said and, holding his hand over mine, he forced my index finger straight. Lightly, he made me stroke the length of the button’s spine until I

began to moan from the pleasure of it. "Do not stop rubbing that sweet pussy, Gabrielle," he said and removed his hand from mine.

"How does it feel?" he asked, his breath warm against my ear.

"Good," I confessed, my strokes growing more rapid, firmer.

Sebastian eased up the bed until his back was against the frame. Spreading his legs wide, he told me to roll over while I continued to touch myself.

"Bring your knees up," he coaxed. "And your free hand."

When I was before him, like a cat, he presented his rod to me. He was hard again, deliciously so, and I took a tentative lick at the plump head that rested atop its thick length. He was still coated with my juices, and I licked the length of his shaft, mewling with need as my bottom pumped the air, my fingers vigorously working the center of my sex and the button.

He knotted his hands in my hair, making sure that, as my mouth covered him, I kept my strokes deep and thorough.

"Sweet Gabrielle," he groaned, his body pressed tight against the bed's headboard. "I will never forget how sweet your mouth, how sweet your pussy. I will always worship your taste and your body."

His bold words drove me wild and I tightened my mouth around his shaft, letting my saliva pool so that my lips could work him at a faster pace, a pace that matched the hard strokes I delivered to my own sex. I felt his hands clench my hair tighter, his body stiffening.

"Ah, release me, Gabrielle, before it is too late!"

A disobedient wanton, I only clamped his rod more firmly in my mouth, stilling the strokes to the shaft that I might suck his seed from him as my own pleasure flowed warm down my thighs.

"Gabrielle...Gabrielle," he cried, shuddering against me, filling my mouth with the taste of his lust and love for me. I sucked harder, abandoning my own exhausted pleasures to grab his hips and keep him from pulling away until the last of his desire rippled through his shaft and spurted down my throat.

He gathered me into his arms then, cooing my name, kissing me on the mouth, running his tongue across my palate, sucking at my lips. “Gabrielle, my treasure.”

I dozed lightly in his arms until he roused me a short time later.

“I must leave, dearest.” He pushed my hair back and kissed my cheek.

“When will I see you again?” It was shameful, the need that trembled in my voice, but already I felt a great weight settling on my chest.

“Soon.” He drew me to him and buried his face in my hair. “By daylight, when I come to take you as my own love.”

His hand found my cheek in the dark and he brushed a tear away. “Does that not make the wait bearable?”

“Yes,” I whispered, but clung to him until he had to kiss my hands away.

“It is almost light,” he said, sitting up and feeling around the floor for his clothing. “Veronique and a trusted servant are the only others that know I am here, I must leave now.”

Hearing my quiet sobbing, he turned back to me, cupping my head. “I would not leave you crying, Gabrielle. What is the matter?”

“You are too good. I fear that you will realize I am not worthy to be your wife.”

“Ah, part of me would tell you how silly you are.” He leaned down and pressed his lips to mine. “But the other part, the selfish part, prays you will always think it so, that I need never worry about losing you.”

“Then say that it will be this week, Sebastian.” I was pleading, glad that, in the room’s darkness, he could not see me now even if it meant I could not see him.

He stroked my hair once, then moved quietly to the door. “I have every faith it will be this week, sweet Gabrielle.” I heard his hand on the door, heard him turn the knob. “Just remember your promise when I come to claim you.”

He didn’t wait for my answer, quickly opening the door and slipping out of the room. Wanting to catch a parting glimpse, I rose from the bed, but only an empty hallway awaited me on the other side of the door.

*April 25, 1787*

The week drags and I begin to despair. Each morning I rise early, taking such pains with my attire for the day. Each night I go to bed no closer to being Sebastian's wife. What does this delay mean?

*April 26, 1787*

Still no sign of Sebastian but some hope! Papa, his manner so strange and his sentences so carefully phrased, first inquired of my plans for the morrow (as I often go riding on Friday) and then all but forbid me to go anywhere. But, perhaps Sebastian has abandoned me and Papa, learning my true nature, prepares to send me away!

I cannot imagine the horror of losing Sebastian now. I promised him I would take no other—and it is a promise my heart will not let me disavow even if he rejects me!

*April 27, 1787*

How has this come to pass? A blindfolded child I have been, trying to play amongst the grown-ups! And *Veronique—Truth*. Hah! She is a creature of lies and I shall make sure the Truth of her nature comes back to haunt her.

As I had the last four mornings, I woke early and bathed. I had Claire bring me breakfast before getting dressed. I so wanted to be spotless when he saw me, no stain on my clothing, person, or virtue. And then I sat in the drawing room with a book that I have had all week and still have not managed to read a single page!

Around two, when I was weak from an early breakfast and skipped lunch, Papa came into the drawing room, taking the chair opposite me.

"I have had a proposal." His hands nervously smoothed the fabric of his pant legs. "Someone has asked for your hand in marriage."

He stopped, waiting for my response.

I demurely closed the book I held and sat straighter. "What house?"

“L’Aigle.”

He held his breath, I believe, and it surprised me at the time. (Foolish child!)

I smiled, fighting to keep my hands primly folded in my lap, and set about allaying his apparent fear that I would refuse. “The du Quesne family would be well served by such a match, would it not, Papa?”

He nodded, the heaviness of his gesture at odds with an answer that he should have joyously received. He seemed almost to hope I would say no!

Suddenly, I had an inkling of what might be stressing him so. “Is the dowry too high?”

“No, child, it is remarkably low.”

Like an idiot, I smiled, although I managed not to cry. I went down on my knees, grabbing Papa’s hands and clasping them to me. “Then do not worry, Papa. This makes me happy.”

“You should take your time to carefully consider this, child.” He slipped his hands from my excited grasp and held me by the shoulders as his gaze searched mine. “It would not do to change your mind later.”

Ah, I could not tell him that, even if I had not long desired Sebastian, there was no right of denial left me! But my foolish heart was singing.

“I have no desire to prolong acceptance, Papa,” I answered and moved to the writing table. “Will you dictate your answer—that we might send it immediately?”

“You may tell him yourself, Gabrielle,” Papa answered. “He is waiting for you in the garden’s conservatory.”

I spun around to see if Papa was joking. There had been no sound of a carriage arriving, not even the jingle of a single horse’s livery.

“Oh, I did not hear that we had guests.”

“He wanted his arrival to be discreet,” Papa answered warily.

Yes, Sebastian certainly knew the art of being discreet! I curtsied low. “With your leave then, I will go and give him my answer.”

“Your mother and I will be waiting in the library for the two of you...” He stopped again, another long pause while I waited for him to finish. “I suggest you take the opportunity to speak with him at length this afternoon before giving him your final answer. I will instruct the staff not to disturb you.”

The shame of it...how my mind raced ahead to think what Sebastian and I, in the bright light of day but tucked safely in the conservatory, might do with that time!

I curtsied again, saying no more, and left the house at a near run. I had to count my steps on the path to the conservatory, else I would have flown across the lawn and into Sebastian’s arms. As it was, I threw the conservatory doors open forcibly, my step faltering as I realized that the man before me was not Sebastian.

“Marquis L’Aigle,” I said and curtsied. What was he doing here?

He looked stricken as he saw the surprise on my face. His hand reached out, stopping just before he touched me. “Gabrielle...”

And then he did touch me.

The voice, the hands! My body responded even as my mind and heart threatened to shut down. What a fool I had been to trust Veronique, to make love to a masked man in the dark! To open my legs to him a second time!

I could feel the tears pooling in my eyes, feel the tremble of my lips as fear and anger flooded into me, forcing down the brief fire his touch had kindled. His face hardened and his hand moved up to grip my arm so that I might not flee.

“You have a choice to make, Gabrielle,” he said and reached behind me with one hand to push the doors shut. “And I will not phrase it in pretty words.”

He stopped, gave a hard swallow, and released my arm. “Your honor has been severely compromised and not, as you must already know, by Sebastian.”

“Why would you have done such a thing?” I softly voiced the accusation, tears beginning to spill down my cheeks. His gaze, if possible, grew sterner still.

“For the same reason you were willing to have it compromised...love.”



“You cannot think I would marry someone capable of such duplicity!” Reckless, I turned for the door, but he pulled me back and forced me against the wall.

He placed a palm against the wall on each side, trapping me against him, our bodies so close they touched, his scent curling around my senses. Ah, who was I to challenge him? He was, it was widely said, a mercenary in business who had rebuilt the family’s fortune when his father had left him little more than a title. “A cut-throat brute,” the other lords said. Here I was a mere girl who had been stupid enough to hand him my only marker—my chastity.

His head dipped forward, his lips brushing my hair and temple. “Ah, Gabrielle, I have waited all week for just the smell of you.”

He pulled back and looked at me, his gaze hot and seemingly everywhere at once. Never had I seen his eyes so animated, the sky blue irises burning with life. Always when I had encountered him in the past, he had seemed to do no more than throw a vacant, cold glance my way. What had wrought this change? Did it start as some dark proposal by Veronique to have fun at my great expense? Or had he always worn a mask, that I might not see his true face, his desire for me.

“What do you see?” he asked and tilted his head, studying my expression as he waited for my answer.

I shook my head. I wouldn’t be taken in by the strong smell of him or the heat in his eyes. He had lied to me, plotted my downfall. “A liar,” I bit out. “Nothing more.”

His smile was hard, harder still his erection as he pressed against me, forcing me to breathe in small pants. “Your choice then, Gabrielle, is this,” he started and covered my mouth with his, stabbing his tongue past my protesting lips to draw me into his kiss. He broke the kiss roughly, leaving me more breathless than before.

For a moment, he seemed to have forgotten his ultimatum, but then he went on. “You can marry me, let me put you on a pedestal and worship you as

I have worshipped you these last few weeks. You will never have to worry about your security or the safety of your family in these troubled times.”

He stopped, with a hesitant arrogance that hardened when I did not then give him my consent.

“Or,” he continued, “I will revoke my offer and reveal the affair. Shall I tell you how much scorn that would subject you and your family to?”

I refused to let him see how the prospect frightened me, or how I struggled against my own body at his very nearness. Squaring my shoulders, I challenged him again.

“You came to me knowing I loved your son!”

One fine blond brow arched as I said “loved,” some mixture of hope and scorn pinning it there as he answered.

“My...my son would not know what to do with a woman if she was tied naked to his bed,” he answered. “I have spared you heartache in your pursuit of him.”

“Only to replace it with an even greater heartache!” I protested.

“Do you think me too old?” he asked. “Or too ugly?”

I stiffened against him, refusing to yield my opinion of his age or looks. If he had only touched my skin and felt its heat, he would have known then!

“No answer?” He backed away ever so slightly, still keeping me trapped between his outstretched arms. “You would have an old man like *me*, then, announce you a whore to the world?”

The barb sank deep and I started to cry again. “You think me such?” I whispered. How could I marry a man who thought me a whore? How could he want to marry me?

“I think I want you so badly I shall die from it,” he said. “Now answer me!”

“Your manners are rough,” I said, casting my eyes down so that he could not read the emotions warring through me.

“That was not the question.” His voice gentled and he pressed against me again, more softly this time, his body not as unyielding. “Do you think me too old...too ugly?”

"You are not too old or ugly," I relented. "You are only a brute and a liar!"

"Have I physically hurt you, Gabrielle?" His head tilted so that he spoke the words against my neck, his warm breath fanning the skin until the tips of my breasts tightened into hard pebbles.

"You have damaged me," I answered. Oh, I could not look at him, could not let him see the truth lest he own me forever!

"It is only damaged if you deny me...if you do not fulfill your promise."

"I promised Sebastian," I cried. "Not you!"

He shook his head and grabbed my hand, forcing it to the crotch of his pants where his manhood throbbed against my skin, demanded that I relent. I grew weak at the knees and had to lean against him for support.

"You promised me, Gabrielle!" He forced my hand to stroke the length of his covered shaft. "This cock!" He grabbed me through the skirt of my gown, cupping my mound and squeezing until I moaned against his shoulder. "These lips."

God help me! I leaned against the wall, my legs opening against my will as he massaged my mound. I closed my eyes, not wanting to see his victory completed.

"No more of this game, Gabrielle," he warned, his voice clouded with passion. "Do you keep your promise...do you consent to marry me?"

I answered in the barest of whispers, my body beginning to tremble beneath the divine attack of his hand. "Yes."

"Open your eyes," he commanded. "I would not think you were picturing another lover touching you."

I did as he said, gasping as he raised the skirt of my gown and pushed my undergarments out of his way. Pinned to the wall, I braced my hands against his shoulders and watched him tug his pants down his hips until his cock sprang free. The damp spot that had built between my legs was refreshed, the new wetness coating my lips, making me ready for his heavy shaft.

How glorious his rod by day! I could see what before I had only felt. The tip, heavy and plumped, its coloring a swollen purple, was formed in the shape of a

mushroom cap. From there, the stalk, barely narrower than the head, ran hard and straight to a base of dark blond curls. And the sacs that hung below! My mouth grew wet as I remembered the taste of his seed, how I had sucked so greedily at it, surprising both of us. Every aspect of his physique seemed magnified and ready to rob me of any choice. My breasts grew sore at the need to taste him again. Even my tongue felt thick with the desire to dip into the opening at the tip of his cock and sample the bright pearls already beading there.

“Ambroise...”

“Do not ask me to stop, Gabrielle, please do not demand such a thing of me!”

He was begging me to let him continue! Could he not sense how hot I had become with my need of him? Did he think my trembling to be fear and not what it truly was—an appetite grown enormous at the sight of his thick cock pulsing such a short distance from my sheath?

“I was only tasting your name, my love.” I sighed and leaned my head against the wall, offering my throat to him as I thrust my hips forward so that my lower lips might kiss his cock.

I had closed my eyes again and he softly bid me to look at him.

“Watch me fill you, Gabrielle.”

It was an impassioned request he made, not a command, and I opened my eyes to see the engorged head of his cock part the uppermost split of my lips and tease the spine of my tingling bud. Burying his shaft deeper between my lips without penetrating me, he withdrew for a second, showing me how my desire, wet and aromatic, coated his cock.

“You are so moist, my love, so ready.” Passion twisted his words into groans. “Do you now renew your promise to me?”

Ah, how I wanted to make him worry, to keep him thinking that I was anything other than enslaved by his touch. How miserably I failed at doing so!

“Yes,” I cried out, feeling him enter me with a sharp thrust. “Only you, Ambroise.”

Again I was crying and he kissed my tears away before crushing my mouth with his. Joyous salt covered his lips and tongue, and I licked at his palate as he continued driving his cock into me. My fingers dug into his broad shoulders in my fight to control my ecstatic moans—the prospect that my exclamations might draw Mama and Papa from the house with worried haste both terrified me and filled me with a wanton abandon.

“Mine?” He grabbed my bottom roughly and pulled me deeper onto his shaft.

“Yes,” I moaned, thrashing on his manhood as the tension coiled like a snake in my belly.

He reached up and cupped my breast, squeezing it hard. “Mine?”

“All of it,” I panted, my vision blurring with the first wave of my climax. “All of me.”

Ever so gently, he put his hand between my breasts, covering my heart while his hips continued driving his rod into me in sweet torture. “Mine?”

The question was issued in a choked cry and I wrapped my arms around his neck, pulling myself to him, kissing the hard line of his jaw and answering before pleasure robbed me of all speech.

“Yours, Ambroise!”

Now I wait in my rooms, deliciously sore once again. True to his word, we shall be married within two weeks. I return to the Sacred Heart tomorrow...to remove temptation from him beforehand—so he had joked—and to gather my girlish belongings and say goodbye to my true friends. (Even now, my mind goes over how I shall take my revenge on Veronique for her duplicity. Is that fair, when I have what I did not know I wanted? Still, her intentions were far removed from the nurturing of love!)

And I must burn this journal, even though it nearly kills me to destroy a testament to the passion Ambroise and I have shared thus far. But I would not risk its discovery to the world, or even his discovery of it. I would not have him read of my silly devotion to Sebastian when I knew no better or of my unkind

words. Nor would I have Ambroise know the full power he wields over me. I can only hope he is a benign (but dominant) master. I must trust that he is, for my body and heart can deny him nothing.

## Lucille

Philipe,

*I cannot tell you what a furor Beatrice's story caused here at the convent. Now everyone goes around with suspicion in their eyes, tightly guarding their secrets (but not from me—I pass among them much as a servant does, invisible). Some of the sisters have even pulled burning diaries from the fire. Ah, what I would give to peek between those charred, confiscated pages!*

*I fear, however, that it will become more difficult for me to record the stories I see here. They have given me a roommate, so crowded have we become here at Sacred Heart. I did not know what to expect, she is of a very notable family. I thought I would come back to my room to find everything I own shoved into a corner or her endlessly complaining at being in no more than a broom closet (truly, it is that small). But she has been most gracious, although I sometimes wonder if it is not a subtle manipulation that she uses to ensure that she will always get the larger prize when the time comes.*

*But that is enough about AnneMarie. On to Lucille! I have moved beyond spying in diaries and journals to intercepting love letters! I cannot tell you how hard my heart pounds as I prepare to post this letter. For, you see, I have not hidden the identity of Lucille's roommate. It is Beatrice! And Lucy's complaints of Beatrice tell us all too well that something dreadful has come to pass in Beatrice's household. Yet, surely the pairing of the two stories will confirm the suspicions of the sisters and girls here at the convent. I write of them!*

As ever,

*Candacis*

*May 5, 1787*

My dearest André,

It is night and I write this by candlelight. I should be sleeping but thoughts (most wicked) of you keep me awake. I know it is wrong, that I should feel this way for a man of the cloth—for any man I do not call husband. But my soul and body burn for you. Tomorrow, when I kneel before you, will you tremble as you place the wafer in my mouth? Well you should, for I do not imagine that it is some offering of our Lord's body that I devour, but your manhood!

Will you not answer my cry for help—even if only by return letter? I plead with you to do so. My soul is imperiled and you are my only hope of salvation.

-L-

*April 15, 1787*

André, beloved,

I searched the drop point I suggested and still I find no word from you. And yet I know you receive my missives. I have gone to great lengths and expense to know that it is true.

Do you read my words or burn the envelopes unopened? You read them, I know you must! For your hand did tremble as you brought the wafer to my mouth this morning and when I was so bold as to look you in the eye, you cast your gaze to the side. So much more delicious this Sunday's communion as I imagined the salty taste of your rod on my tongue and prayed that the same image ran through your mind.

I would fill your mind with more images since you do not care to make your own pilgrimage to me. Imagine, dear André, my body as it is now, while I sit here writing this letter. I have loosened the bodice to my dressing gown,



allowing my hand to cup and stroke my breasts whenever Beatrice leaves the room. I count the minutes until she retires at last to her bed to sob into her pillow until sleep claims her.

Then, alone in my wakefulness, I lift the hem of my dressing gown. Do you picture this, beloved? Do you see the fabric sliding over my bare calves, pooling between my thighs as one hand slips between my legs while the other fills these pages with promises of my love for you—promises I would give immediate physical form if you would consent and name a time and place!

\*

Ah, I return to ink and paper now—Beatrice having finally retired for the evening. How she moans in her sleep! I worry her noise might call someone to our room and they should find me thus, my hand roaming my thighs, dipping into the wet recesses of my sex.

Would it shock you, André, if I named these parts to you, the parts that weigh so heavily in my mind? Pussy, cunt, clit, cock! How those words thrill my mouth, my tongue and lips silently shaping them as I write. Clit and cunt thrill me the most, the T's delightfully thick and swollen, much as my own sex is now as I think of fucking you.

But I do not say this to shock you—only to assure you that I would not suffer ruin at your hands—you are, my love, the only hope I have of my soul's reformation.

Let me pray before you, on my knees, my hands clasped to your hips, your hands, divine in their touch, knotted in my hair. Please, beloved, do not continue denying me all hope of salvation.

-L-

*May 8, 1787*

André,

A letter from you at last. You will pray for my soul, you say. How kind of you. Have you done so already? God must not be listening for I still burn for you, still grow damp at the thought that I will see you at services tomorrow. Look for me then—see how I squirm along the bench, needing you so badly.

Do not mistake my intensity for religious fervor—it is a divine lust that possesses me. To sate it, until you take pity on me, I purchased a poor substitute for you. A dildo...I call it my Little André, although its circumference is not at all little. Little André is flat at the bottom, with a base that pushes at my thighs as I walk or sit with it embedded in my wet cunt (yes, love, even in the confessional, I carry your namesake at all times now). From the base, three rounded balls penetrate me. They are metal, melded together, and each has the circumference of a fat egg. My pussy folds around the balls and their little valleys, contractions rippling through me with the slightest movement of my body.

So picture that, dearest, when you look for me on the bench as you preach eternal love and forgiveness. Watch my body sway with devotion—not to the God you pay lip service to, but to your manhood and the sorry replica of it that my pussy clenches and flutters at.

-L-

*May 9, 1787*

Sweet Jesus! How you trembled at evening services. Have I undone your concentration? Tell me I have!

Heed my words, André. You can save me but you must touch me to do so—how else can the carnal beast that possesses me be driven out? A meeting will not be as difficult as you might think. I am alone in my room now, Beatrice having returned home to attend the trial of some mad family servant who killed her mother and a serving maid.

Do you not see how easy, then, it will be for me to sneak out and meet you?

You must agree or I will go mad with my desire for you—desire so long contained and so long denied!

Even now, alone, I do such things as to endanger my immortal soul forever. The metal dildo, my Little André, plunges in and out of my wet pussy as I write. To stop my moans, I have stuffed undergarments in my mouth, the cloth ripe with the pungent odors of my cunt. I imagine that it is your cock wet with the taste of my desire that fills my mouth, even as I pretend it is your cock simultaneously devastating my body with the vicious thrusts of the dildo.

Do you not fear for my soul knowing this? Will you not help me!

-L-

*May 10, 1787*

How short our meeting but how very satisfying! The next time we must have more privacy. I know we could have accomplished so much more today had you not feared discovery.

Did you find me wet enough, my love? I certainly found your fingers talented. I had heard you studied piano before taking your vows. I do not doubt this. I still tingle at the way your fingers stroked my clit, pinching and pulling me closer to climax before you thrust all your fingers into my pussy. (Was that all you thrust? It felt as if, beneath my skirts, your fist possessed me—so thick and firm. Ah, I am wet all over again!)

So, too, I remember how, dripping with my juices, your fingers dared to penetrate my ass. Do you believe, worldly as I am, that this was new to me? Now I fantasize of nothing other than you filling it again—your cock in one hole, your hand in the other.

If only there had been more time! I would know your taste, know the shape and length of your cock. When will you see me again?

-L-

*May 12, 1787*

Clever, daring man! Do you think Sister Orinthia suspected anything? Ah, she does not, as some girls here would claim, have supernatural vision that can see through wood and stone. She would have died straight away had she been able to see through your desk—seen me there at your feet, your robes pulled up and cock ramrod straight, bobbing with impatience for her to leave that I might take its meaty length in my mouth once again.

Do my words make you hard with the memory of it? I know my mouth waters still. You are, truthfully, the most well-endowed man I have ever seen. I turned my hand just now—examining my wrist and wondering how I managed to take something so wide in its diameter—to have its engorged tip kiss the back of my throat.

And the taste of your seed and how much of it I milked from you. Though I loved it filling my mouth, sliding down my throat and hitting my stomach to spread its decadent warmth through my body—still, I have one regret. I would have you baptize my face and body with your cum. Can you not see me covered with it—face, neck and breasts glistening, my greedy tongue darting out to capture its taste.

How I long for the freedom that you might do just that! And I have devised a ruse to allow us to more fully explore one another, to sample every orifice the other offers until we grow sluggish and dumb from sated passions.

Do arrange, my love, a trip to the city this week and but tell me when. I shall tell you where. And do not worry as to clothes—you will be naked the entire time!

-L-

*May 17, 1787*

I am complete! You have made me so and saved my soul, without cost, I hope, to your own.

What luxury it was to lay beside you—a day of fucking before and behind us. Your juice on me and in me, your cock filling my cunt and ass. Your mouth—Sweet God, your mouth. Your tongue is as talented as your fingers.

And, my darling, your trust, your sweet anxiety as you let me penetrate you with Little André. We must have a mirror next time that you might see. It fascinated me so—the slide of the thick metal balls into your ass. My pussy clenched with envy as I saw your opening swallow each of the three bulbs. My heart constricted more tightly still with your heated demands that I pump the thick knobs in and out. How furiously fast we moved. I rode your legs as I fucked your ass. Did you know that? I rubbed my clit and wet pussy over your thick calf, soaking the hair, as I leaned against you, thrusting the dildo with one hand while I stroked your cock with the other.

Your cream on the sheets! I could have lapped it up like a cat in heat had you not thrown me on the mattress and devoured my pussy. Ah, your tongue on my clit, the nip of your teeth on that sensitive bud and my engorged labia. The thrust of your fist—your whole fist—inside my cunt. I am coming now in memory of it—my hands occupied only with paper and tit.

Sweet André, my beloved, my lover. I await our next meeting with near breathlessness—my hand and Little André poor solace until then.

-L-

*May 19, 1787*

That you must go away for two weeks saddens me, but all is not lost. Say, dearest, that you will write me. If you post in town, post in my brother's name so that it will reach me without the sisters' scrutiny.

-L-

*June 3, 1787*

Two weeks and I hear nothing from you, nor have I had any way to send you something. Surely you could have managed some note, however cryptically worded.

-L-

*June 5, 1787*

You call me deluded? You would disavow our knowledge of one another? How, when I could tell Sister Orinthia every word of her conversation with you that day I hid beneath your desk. Do not do this, I pray of you!

-L-

*June 8, 1787*

If you will not hear my pleas as your lover, will you not hear them from me as the mother of your child? Yes, André, it is true. I have spent my mornings sick the last ten days, and the river of blood that should now flow between my legs is a week late. I fear that I am with child and would have—no, I demand your guidance and comfort! If you do not offer it immediately, I shall expose you.

-L-

*Author's note (June 17, 1787): This is the last letter intercepted between Lucille and André. She and her belongings were removed from the convent during the next day's services. Her fate, as of the date of this report, remains unknown. But Fra. André delivered a fine, rousing service today.*

## Veronique

*Philipe,*

*No doubt, dear cousin, you remember Veronique? I am pleased she has provided me, however unwilling, with more material for my readers. To think, had I not seized the opportunity—in broad daylight, no less—to take her diary a mere five minutes after watching her finish an entry, all would be lost! Her family, I hear, claims to have smuggled her out of the country to ensure her safety from the rising chaos that threatens to envelope all of France. But you and I, and now our audience, know better!*

*As ever,  
Candacis*

*June 6, 1787*

I commissioned a portrait this morning by post, having met with the artist last week while visiting Mother and Father.

My feelings on the selection are quite mixed. Christophe is not yet well-known, although his brush shows great talent. I would have had someone more suited to my social standing, but the funds are not there. Already, I have run through most of the money Ambroise gave me for my part in his seduction of Gabrielle. I would have thought, since her stomach swells already with their first child, that he would have offered me some bonus. But he is so enthralled with that insipid girl and she has made sure that he keeps his purse strings tightly drawn whenever I visit.

So, instead of allowing Ambroise to throw me a coin or two for a proper artist, Gabrielle gives me Christophe's name and studio address. I went to interview him, only to avoid insulting Ambroise!

Yet something about his work captured my interest. And he was very attentive in seeing to my comforts as I posed for a few preliminary sketches that he might show me his vision. Such vision! Passionate even on charcoal and paper. How accurately he captured the essence of my soul while preserving my beauty. That those rough materials he used should be made to reveal my sublime grace—surely he is as talented as any painter at court.

So, it is done! The money for supplies went with the letter of commission this morning and I will see him this weekend when I return home for another week's stay—Gabrielle having somehow convinced my parents that the city is safe.

*June 9, 1787*

He has drawn secret pictures of me! I know because I saw them today—having searched his drawing desk while he was busy setting up his supplies and staging the posing area. I could not help but do so, his manner at my arrival made me suspicious. He was in a great hurry to hide (not merely put away) the sketch books when I came. It seemed too facile a possibility that he was trying to protect my delicate nature by hiding common nudes. Since he could not think me so ill-educated a school girl, it stood to reason that he must be hiding his sketch books specifically from me.

And I was right, though I had no idea how thoroughly impudent a beast he could be. The pictures start out innocently enough, such that I might consider them more refined exercises as he formulated his final vision. But, oh how the series progresses. It moves from a study of my face to one of me sitting on a chaise. From there, he has me reclining with a leisurely grace, my clothing much as I might wear to bed, only loosely fastened. And then he has me alone in my flesh—no covering of any fashion! Only my hair is down, falling in loose waves over my breasts.



Even there, he did not stop and I marvel at where he found the time for so many sketches—have I possessed his thoughts that he has done nothing but draw me since our first meeting? For there were dozens more—all in an unclothed state. No mere studies of my form, either. He has drawn me at the height of my passion. Images of me touching myself, images of me on my hands and knees, lips sensuously parted. Pictures where my legs were thrown wide as if I were inviting the whole world to come and take a peek.

How difficult it was to softly answer his summons to come and sit...to demurely pose before him while feeling as if he already knew me in a most intimate manner! Again and again he had to correct me as I sat there...for I could not sit still. I had to look at him, see him, try to figure out what had driven him to make those sketches.

So, too, was I enchanted by his very presence, for he is a most handsome and virile looking young man. What response, I wondered, had these images of my body so wantonly exhibited produced in him?

Now I sit here debating what I should do when I next pose for him. Do I tell him I have seen the pictures?

*June 11, 1787*

What a difficult man! When I confronted him about the pictures, he acted nonchalant and showed me sketch after sketch of nudes, male and female, some of them in the very act of copulating with one another. When I thanked him, with honeyed sarcasm, for not pairing me with one of his sick imaginings, he only gave me a sly smile! What depraved acts has he drawn me engaged in? And why do I want nothing more than to go back through those books and find myself down on my hands and knees with Christophe's manhood impaling me from behind!

*June 12, 1787*

A letter today from Christophe—canceling the day's session because something "more important" has arisen. Vile beast that he is, he sent me a picture of his phallus drawn, he says, to scale—though he must lie!

*June 13, 1787*

How accurate his pencil! I must confess, I could not throw away his degenerate token. I spent the evening in my room, studying it, learning its every detail until I could think of nothing but taking its living twin into my mouth before sheathing it deep inside me.

The shaft is of a generous size. Not so frighteningly large as to scare me away, but far more than most women can hope for in a lover. Its greatest feature, however, is the network of thick veins that run near the surface. Oh, what a sensation to have felt their texture inside of me!

The head, too, produced feelings I still cannot calm. It sits on top of the shaft in a most unusual manner from what I have seen and felt of other men. It is meaty and bulbous, too thick at the sides to form the arrow tip to which I am accustomed. Yet how it found its mark as he thrust into me this afternoon! I could hardly walk from his doorstep to the carriage that would return me home.

It was evident from the moment I arrived that he intended to seduce me. A blank canvas was prepped and a flat table covered with a velvet throw and silk cushions had replaced the chaise.

"You are not prepared for my sitting?" I asked.

His gaze swept over me like a furnace blast and he arched one brow in contemplation. "I am," he answered after spending another long minute in pointed appreciation of my breasts and hips. "You, however, are not."

I bristled at the challenge, more with impatience than anything else. He was moving quickly in his seduction of me, but still too slow for the need that burned inside me. I had not yet decided whether I would acquiesce or shred him into the mere memory of a man, but I needed the game to progress more rapidly.

“Explain yourself,” I demanded.

“If you are to sit for me today,” he answered flatly, “you need to strip.”

He turned then and began mixing colors.

I could not even pretend to misunderstand his meaning—the blatant monster!

“Young ladies of my social standing do not pose nude.” I spat the words at him and moved as if I would leave. When he made no effort to block me or call me back, I stopped.

Maddeningly slow in the process, he finished mixing a soft peach color that matched my skin before replying. “Young *ladies*,” he started, drawing the second word out with sarcasm, “of your social standing do whatever the fuck they please—as you well know, my lady.” He finished with a deep, mocking bow and returned to ignoring me.

“The actions of a few sluttish peers cannot be attributed to me,” I said and then a delicious possibility occurred to me. “Just because Gabrielle disrobed and spread her legs for you is no indication I would ever do the same!”

That seemed to give him a moment’s pause, but then I realized he was choking back laughter.

“Marquessa L’Aigle did not pose for me...her parents did. And do not mistake your desires for mine.”

Some confusion must have shown on my features, however vigilant I was in keeping my expression schooled, because he smirked in a most unbecoming manner and offered me his explanation. “I never said I wanted to fuck you.”

Oh! I was seething by this point, although few would have known. And, yet, he is an artist, long accustomed to making careful studies of people’s emotions—could I hope to keep my feelings veiled? I stepped toward him, still confident he would be begging me for my favors before our little meeting had concluded.

“Gabrielle recommended you,” I said and turned with my hand outstretched to mock his pictures as if only his cock could have earned her praise.

Ah, the beast! He had replaced the tame pictures of the previous days' sittings with pure pornography!

Christophe moved closer to me and grabbed me lightly by the elbow. "And I am quite grateful that she did," he murmured. "Now, disrobe so that we can begin the day's work."

"I did not pay for that type of portrait," I protested hotly, trying to remind him—and myself, I daresay—who was servant and who was master.

"Yes, money," he said with a sneer and withdrew only to return a heartbeat later with the advance I had given him. Without paying me any more attention, he started cleaning and putting away his brushes.

"What is the meaning of this?" I demanded and threw the money at him. I wanted to strike his face, but something in his tightly coiled muscles told me that a mistake could be lethal.

"You are wasting my time, Veronique. There are other women to paint."

The supplies were all but put away! He was about to remove the canvas from the easel when he tilted his head and saw how I trembled so. (With anger! I wanted to smother the life out of him with my cunt.)

"Why do you refuse?" he asked. "Are you afraid?"

It mattered not that I knew how calculated his question. I would let him think it had done its trick. We would see how his skills abandoned him when he beheld my undressed body!

My fingers flew to my bodice, racing from there to the strings at my back. In a short time, I was before him, utterly naked—making no attempt to cover my breasts or the dark blonde triangle of fur between my legs.

Grabbing me by the elbow, he led me to the table, his hands touching me almost everywhere as he helped me up onto the cushions. Unceremoniously, his hands pinched my nipples.

"Do not think to touch me," I snapped, disconcerted that, while I grew wetter with each moment, he seemed to have no more interest in me than if I were a bowl of fruit.

Christophe smiled briefly, his eyes still unreadable, and gave my cheeks light but stinging slaps. “What would you have me do, Veronique?” he asked before I could lodge another complaint. “Paint some cold marble bitch?”

I started to rise, but he placed his palm in the center of my chest and pushed me onto my back, his other hand shoving its way into the pocket between my thighs.

“I thought you would have some passion for me to capture on canvas,” he accused. His fingers smeared the cream of my arousal across my thighs. “You are wet enough inside—why the arid exterior?”

“You have no intention of trying to paint me,” I said. “You are only interested in seduction!”

“Really?” He backed far enough away that I could see his cock as he tugged his pants down over his hips. “Do you still think so?”

Damn him! He was flaccid, that thick, magnificent cock was as limp as a jellyfish. Yet he had seen me naked, had brushed his fingertips across the entrance to my honey-coated cunt.

Christophe pulled his pants back up and returned to the table. I was too shocked, too humiliated to protest as he rearranged my limbs to his liking. He shook his head sadly, as if I still would not do.

“Spread your legs,” he ordered. I did and he parted my lower lips, thrusting a triangle of his fingers into me, searching for and failing to find my maidenhead.

“What makes you hot, Veronique?” he asked as he stroked hard against the spongy knot of tissue just inside my pussy.

I did not even stop to consider my answers. “Power...money.” I was panting now, my body flushing a warm rose in response to his vigorous rubbing.

With his free hand, he slapped more color onto my tits, my body convulsing in orgasm from the rude treatment of breasts and cunt.

“What else?” he asked.

“You,” I admitted with a moan and an arch.

“Good.” He slapped my face again, a little harder than the first time and then he began to sharply tap at my cunt lips with the flat of his fingertips.

“Tell me you are hard now, Christophe,” I begged—all pride having fled my manner.

He grabbed my hand and pressed it against his still relaxed manhood. The humiliation of his disinterest knotted its fist in my gut and I pulled my hand back.

“I am ready to start,” he said and pulled his supplies back out.

“Christophe!” I was sitting up now, tears streaking down my face.

“You must stay as I placed you!”

His shouting should have frightened me by this point, but I could only rejoice that I had forced some more passionate emotion from him than mere artistic interest.

“Please, Christophe,” I went on my hands and knees in front of him, tugging at his pants.

He grimaced, then grabbed my wrist and dragged me toward the next room. “If I must bear your mouth, at least I can get something out of it!”

He flung himself down on the couch, me on my knees, naked in front of him. Beside us, the window’s curtains were pulled wide, letting in the afternoon sun. He lifted his hips and stripped his pants away and then picked up a sketchpad and charcoal.

Vaguely, he gestured at his cock. “Commence.”

I looked at the window positioned so close to the street. “Someone will see us...”

“The hedge is too high for them to see you on the floor and I need the light,” he responded with a flat take-it-or-leave-it tone.

And I took it.

In its unexcited state, I could just fit my mouth around the fist-like head. I released him, running my tongue over the tip and shaft before taking him between my lips again. But he was growing so hard I found the lubrication too little to allow me to work his girth and length.

“You have cream enough elsewhere, Veronique.”

I blinked once at the suggestion, ready to reprimand him. But he was right. I was dripping with my excitement and I reached between my legs, my hand coming away slick with my juices. I spread the liquid around the shaft and head, stroking him to a new firmness with my hands. His body’s response produced a fresh fount of arousal in my cunt. I coated him with more of my juices and then took the head in my mouth. I bobbed up and down, one hand squeezing his shaft while I played with my clit.

“I did not say you could improvise, Veronique.”

He was still sketching but his breathing had started to break into harsh pants and the veins on his cock stood out in thick ridges. Dutifully, I took my hand from between my legs, bringing more moisture up and clasping both hands around his rod. My whole body was absorbed in sucking that thick shaft, my tits bouncing from the long strokes, my ass following up and down. And when, at long last, he wound his hands through my hair and forced me down until my lips touched its base, I came in time with the hot rush of his cum down my throat.

Keeping his hands in my hair, he stood and dragged me up until I was straddling the arm of the couch—one leg on the floor, the other, bent at the knee, resting on one cushion. Now anyone walking by might see my face—surely they would see my body.

“Do you want me inside you, Veronique?”

“Not here,” I moaned, both desperate and terrified. My cunt was so eager to take what my mouth had struggled to contain!

“All that work and you would put aside your reward?”

The hand that did not hold me in place by my hair worked the depths of my pussy, the hard thrusts causing my clit to rub against the arm of the sofa. Once again I was shaking in orgasm. And then, sweet heaven, he withdrew his hand and wedged the heavy cock head tight into the opening of my hole.

“I want it, Christophe,” I pleaded.

How he battered into me with his cock. He used hard short thrusts that kept him from entering and made my entrance swell tighter with the abuse. Two dozen such thrusts he must have made before he stopped and wedged himself again at the opening. Then he began slowly gyrating his hips, entering my wet slit inch by inch, butting up against one wall and then the other until his full length was buried inside me.

While he buried his cock deeper into my pussy, he forced my head to turn so that I was looking out the window. Ladies with parasols passed by and tradesmen with satchels rushed to their meetings. My mind raced between two prayers—that Christophe would fuck me ever harder and that none of the passers-by would absently turn their heads and see me splayed on the couch like a whore, clawing and groaning and loving every second that his meaty cock filled me.

At last, our bodies surrendered themselves to climax, my noisy excitement only heightening the chance of discovery as he slammed into me again and again. My cries of ecstasy and pain pierced the rooms, and my torso jerked along the couch with the vigor of his thrusts.

Finished with me, he pulled his pants back on and sat down at a drafting table. He pulled out a new piece of paper and began sketching. His gaze focused on the work in front of him, he called my name as I turned to gather my clothes and some shred of dignity.

“Veronique, I would see you next week.”

I stopped in the doorway and watched him work for a few seconds before I answered. “I must return to the convent next week.”

He nodded and pulled out another new sheet of the same size. “I have a commission nearby and have been given use of a guesthouse,” he explained. “I will send a carriage for you.”

“The sisters are loath to let us out of their sights absent a parent in attendance,” I said and stepped into my dress. “They are afraid we will wind up in one of those ‘Diary’ stories.”

“Are they true?” he asked, turning at last to look at me.



I bit down on my lip to keep from blurting out the truth—what would he think if he knew that Gabrielle was the hapless twit and I Ambroise’s co-conspirator? He already seemed to think so little of me...it seemed impossible that he could think less.

“How should I know,” I answered. “I only know that the sisters have become miserably restrictive. One would think we had been sent there to take our vows!”

His attention drifted back to the table and sketch. “I will arrange something, you just must be careful not to give it away or inquire too much as to the reason behind the unexpected liberty.”

“Very well,” I answered. I would have a week to prepare for our next meeting then. He would not find me as pliant and docile as I had been today. Finished dressing, I joined him at the drafting table.

“You bastard!” I hissed and grabbed at one of the sheets that showed me with my mouth pulling back from his enormous cock, cum beading at the corners of my lips.

He caught my wrist, squeezing the nerves at its sides until I quieted. “That is the master,” he said. “No one will know the copies are of you.”

“Copies!”

Again, he caught my hand before I could tear the original up. My eyes burned with tears and shame and my voice was a squeak when I demanded he release me.

Letting go, he took the original and put a smudge-proof covering on top of it before placing it in an envelope and handing it to me.

“A remembrance,” he said before dismissing me. “In case you forget next week why you were so eager to agree today.”

And then I was at the door waiting on weak legs, with cum-soaked thighs, while he hailed a carriage.

*June 20, 1787*

My ruin is nearly upon me—my fate all but sealed. Although it will not be quite the fate she envisioned! Still, I puzzle at the other causes of my downfall—too much pride and pleasure, not enough of either?

But I get ahead of myself and there is so little time to record this. It started with the arrival of a carriage. Ah, that is not exactly true...it started back in April, didn't it? But I was too much the confident fool to suspect any foul play. Regardless, the carriage arrived, the emblem on its side and the invitation allowing for no refusal on the part of the sisters. As Christophe had instructed, I said virtually nothing, not knowing if the ruse was for tea or a funeral.

The coachman gave nothing away as well, tucking me wordlessly into the coach and driving away at a rough speed that quickly brought us to the country estate in question. Instead of going up to the main house, the coachman dropped me at a guesthouse (that eclipsed the size of most of the main houses of the nearby estates). With an unceremonious rap on the top of the carriage, the driver signaled me out and then disappeared with the same haste.

I walked to the door and knocked, waiting a few minutes before letting myself in at last. Christophe must have hoped that the surroundings would intimidate me and they did...for I meekly went inside, worried that I would be called out as a trespasser. Whether he had heard me knock, I know not, but he called to me from a room that jutted off from the main hall. The room was octagon in shape, the walls draped in black velvet without any windows visible and only freestanding candelabras blazing with dozens of candles to provide light.

The stage was already set and his body covered in no more than a robe. He motioned me into the room, bidding me to disrobe immediately. Ah, I was so damp at the prospect of our meeting and the mysterious coach ride I could have starched a week's worth of undergarments.

"You smell wet, Veronique," he said as I pulled the last of my clothing away.

I moved closer to him, keeping my body a study in softly swaying hips and breasts. "Touch me and see," I offered, pressing my body against him and resting a hand on his chest.

He gently moved away, keeping me at arm's length. "Bend over and show me," he countered.

I did and he moved further away, off to one of the walls. Reaching up, he pulled one of the black drapes away from the wall to reveal a floor-to-ceiling mirror. A satisfied smirk on his face, he moved to the opposite wall and exposed another such mirror. Taking position behind me, he spread my cunt lips further apart and ran his fingers through my juices.

"Wet indeed," he agreed. "Does it excite you to see yourself?"

Straining to look over my shoulder, I saw his fingers playing in my raw slit, saw and felt the quiver of my pussy. "Yes," I confessed, already having to press my hands against my knees to steady myself as a pre-climactic tension filled my cunt like a fist.

He motioned at the other heavy drapes. "Then see yourself, Veronique...from every angle."

I moved around the room in a slow tease, whipping a velvet covering away and then admiring some aspect of my body in the mirror beneath. I pushed my breasts together, squeezing the nipples roughly as I spread my legs wide and looked in the opposite mirror. Removing the pins from my hair, I freed it from the restrictive bun the nuns had sent me out in and spread it over my breasts. Next, I bent fully at the waist, hands on my thighs and ass seductively high in the air. I whipped my long blonde tresses in abandon, moaning, watching him through my slitted gaze to see if he was as enthralled by my body as I was. Never had I been so wild, so free!

When the last mirror was uncovered, Christophe called me back to him, slapping the outside of his thigh like he was calling a dog. When I started walking to him, he stopped me, his voice cold.

"That is not how I called you, Veronique."

I felt my spine stiffen, the play immediately evaporating as anger flooded in. But he opened his robe and the sight of his cock, erect, painfully thick and wickedly textured with its heavy covering of veins, was my undoing. I dropped on hands and knees and crawled to him like the hot bitch I was.

He had made a bed of cushions and blankets on the floor of the otherwise furniture-less room and he lay down, offering his rod to me with a bored gesture. I licked my lips and started my descent, but he pushed against my forehead.

“As you did before,” he ordered and then leaned back and closed his eyes.

I dipped my fingers into my pussy, bringing up a rich load of cream that I smothered his cock with. Wrapping my mouth around the shaft, I began to pull his cock in and out, each time the engorged tip battering the back of my throat.

“Keep your ass up high, Veronique,” he complained, his eyes open once again, his head tilted to one side that he might see the wet red of my slit in the mirror behind me.

Never had a man talked to me like this. I have had lords at my feet, begging for just the taste of my pussy and nothing more! How could I, who had spent a lifetime ordering others around, be aroused by his rough and childish commands?

“Higher, Veronique!”

I thrust my ass higher, my knees almost unbent, the added height forcing my mouth further onto his shaft until my lips were pushed against its base and the head was in my throat. I could feel the muscles in his rod begin to twitch, knew he was ready to come and tried to hold onto him, but he pushed me back at the last second, his seed spurting and hitting my face.

Pushing me onto my back and standing above me, he continued to spurt more cream into my mouth and onto my breasts. When he was done, he forced my legs apart and slid down until his head was cradled between my thighs.

“Lick it up, Veronique,” he ordered, offering stroke for stroke on my clit in exchange for what I was willing to lick off my body.

I swirled my tongue along the edges of my mouth and then smoothed his cream onto my hands, licking those and searching my breasts for more, licking when there was nothing left to lick so that his tongue would not stop its delightful torture of my clit and labia. But I was done too soon and his mouth abandoned me before release claimed me!

"I need..." I writhed on the cushions, unable to form the words, my tongue thick with cum, my mind only occasionally present.

"What?" he asked. I cannot even describe the manner in which he asked it! Bored, insouciant, quietly sarcastic?

"What do you need, Veronique?" he pressed, his finger flicking my labia to spur me on.

I bucked once at his touch. "Cum..." I moaned. "My cum."

"Do you not know how to make yourself come?"

Arrogance! But it only made me hotter, more desperate. I wanted his cock and he would only give it to me, I knew, after I had utterly humiliated myself before him. Still, I tested his resolve, my body pumping the air as my arms searched the pillows for some purchase.

"Please, Christophe, fuck me," I begged. "See how wet I am for you...have pity."

"Show me," he demanded. "Show me how you make yourself come when you are alone in that little cell at the convent." When I made no move to comply, he grabbed my hand and forced it between my legs, guiding me in touching my clit, in using my fingers to explore the slick entrance to my pussy.

I did not notice when he pulled his hand away, I was stroking myself too hard to notice. "Mmm, yes." I jerked along the makeshift mattress. Legs bent at the knees, I spread my feet far apart and thrust my cunt into the air as I fingered my clit. Over and over again, I would collapse and thrust, collapse and thrust until I screamed out my climax.

Christophe dragged me onto my feet, my body still shaking with self-pleasure. He pushed me in front of one of the mirrors. "Look at your lust, Veronique," he commanded in front of one mirror, standing behind me and

pulling my lower lips apart. He dipped two fingers into my pocket and then smeared my cream across my face as he dragged me to the next mirror. "Smell it, Veronique!"

I inhaled, another small climax claiming my body.

At the third mirror, he forced my head back by yanking on a handful of my hair. He slapped my proud, firm tits. "Look at your vanity, Veronique."

At the fourth, he forced me onto the floor, shoving my head and shoulders down and rubbing my ass and slit against the mirror. "Look, dearest, at your obscenity."

At the fifth, he dipped into my cunt again, rubbing my juices onto the mirror and forcing my face against it. "Taste your heart, Veronique."

At the sixth, he merely showed me myself. "Know your enemy."

At the seventh, he forced my head back again, choking me on his cock. "Know your master."

As the thick gag of his manhood gentled to soft strokes, he pulled me to the final mirror. I was sucking his cock in earnest then, the other mirrors and what they had revealed forgotten. Again, he let my greedy lips devour him until he was at the point of ecstasy and then he withdrew, covering my face once more with his cum.

And then, he bid me see my reflection in the final mirror. "Look at your nature, Veronique. See the truth of what you are."

So softly he said it, I almost didn't hear him. I started to cry then and he lifted me, carried me back to the cushions and wiped my face clean.

"On your stomach, child," he coaxed, arranging my body to his satisfaction as he had done at his studio.

A shameful pleasure in his treatment of me had kept my cunt moist and he eased his erection into me, his strokes slow and tortuously sweet. Everything was forgotten except for where his body touched mine. The slide of his cock, the gentle milking of my breasts whenever he leaned over me, his hands on my hips, his thumbs rubbing against the opening to my ass.

I was moaning and grunting on the ground beneath him, totally enslaved, uncaring as to whether I would ever find myself liberated.

Reaching beneath a cushion, he pulled out one more instrument of my humiliation—a soft tube of oiled lambskin filled with rounded stones and tied off at the top. He pulled his cock from me and I whimpered in protests.

“Patience, child,” he said, filling me with the lambskin, letting my juices add to the sheath’s lubrication before he pulled it from me, his sweet rod once again overfilling my pussy.

The tube of stones was narrower at the end but I squeaked my protest as I felt him spread the edges of the puckered mouth of my ass. “Christophe, please,” I begged. “Do not. I want only your flesh.”

“Shhh...child,” he said, his hand never stopping the slow forward push of the tube up my ass. “You will love this, Veronique, trust me.”

Trust! Something that is never wisely given. I knew this, how well I knew. So too was Christophe’s nature plain. He was vile! Ah, but he was also talented, masterful, and he had a cock that many women would die for. They would degrade themselves, sell themselves...do whatever it took.

No, trust him, never. Desire him? Always. Pressing my chest flat against the cushions, I relaxed the muscles that were desperately seeking to impede the tube’s process.

“That’s a good girl,” he said, shoving the rest of the tube’s ample length into my ass before I could change my mind.

Ecstasy! Just as the veins of his cock delivered exquisitely textured strokes to my cunt, the ripple of the stones as they moved against one another in the tight channel of my ass threatened to drive me insane from the pure pleasure of it.

“God, yes,” I screamed, my pussy constricting around his rod, the muscles an iron fist that refused to let him withdraw. “Mary, Mother of Jesus!” My pumping grew erratic, frenzied, as I approached some spiritual zenith that left me calling out the name of every saint I had learned, each name punctuated by a bone-shattering tremor of my climax.

Christophe came and pushed me off his cock. I could feel the vacant yawn of my pussy and ass as they were emptied, the muscles still contracting, searching for some purchase.

Half conscious, I gazed in the mirror and saw Christophe raise his hands high in victory, some sort of seated bow. My blood slowed and I stopped breathing as I realized just how complete my humiliation was.

“Gentlemen, will you not come out and congratulate us on our performance?”

To my horror, there was the sound of eight latches lifting more or less simultaneously, followed by the controlled rush of footsteps as the secret watchers gathered around my prone body. Wildly, I looked around, finding myself completely surrounded. With nowhere to run, I tensed, ready to claw them should they approach too closely. One laughed at my feral position and I looked at him, recognized him! More faces swam in front of me, dipping to peer more closely at my flushed skin, at my wet cunt. Ah, I knew most of these faces! They knew mine!

One reached down and ran his fingers between my lower lips. I lashed out, only to have Christophe catch my hand and warn me to remain polite. This man knew my father! He bent down on his hands and knees, one fist clutching a sheet of paper.

“May I?” he asked, his questioning gaze on Christophe and not me.

“Only a taste,” Christophe warned. “I do not think she can handle more.”

A chorus of snickers broke out at that. “We have seen exactly what she can handle, Christophe!”

The man who had made the inquiry had one hand against his chest. “To hell with what the bitch can handle...I am halfway to death’s door as it is.” He bent down then, his lips against my cunt, and laved the length of my pussy from the top base of my clit to the pouting rose of my ass.

“And how does my cum taste, my lord?” Christophe joked and slapped the man on the back in an effort to move him along.



All but one left then, each daring a touch or taste on his way out, until only Christophe and a middle-aged man, the only one among them unknown to me, remained. Preparing to leave me with the man, Christophe bent down and shoved a folded sheet of paper in front of me.

“Marquessa L’Aigle sends her regards.”

Mindful of the stranger’s presence, I carefully reached out and unfolded the paper. My face, as he had sketched it as I sucked his cock in the studio. Above that, the words “*an Invitation to Ruin.*” I had helped Gabrielle gain title and wealth and this was how she repaid me?

“What will you do now, Veronique?” the man asked as the paper fell from my shocked grasp.

I looked up at him, my gaze still slightly unfocused. He was smooth featured, neither handsome nor ugly...just there. A face that might easily be forgotten if it were not for the intense green-gray gaze and sensuous mouth. His tone was empty of judgment...he neither approved nor disapproved of what I had done—of who I was.

“I do not know,” I confessed. I should have been trembling, but I was too tired, my endurance stretched too thin.

He bent down, gently taking me by the elbow and helping me to my feet.

“Wh...what are you doing?” I asked. Was this some fresh game of Christophe’s?

“Helping you, Veronique, if you will let me.”

“Why?”

He tilted his head, a flash of compassion crossing his features before he smoothed his expression once again. “Because you need it,” he answered. “And because I think there might be some profit in it for me.”

Mock anger made me recoil. He did not protest, choosing instead to mutely stand there waiting for my eventual acquiescence. I would not give it. I would not!

I collapsed into his arms, tears bursting from me. I was naked, covered in another man’s cum, but he hugged me fiercely until my sobbing stopped.

“What am I to do?” I asked when no more tears remained.

He dressed me then, introduced himself only as “Daniel,” and quietly laid out my options. I could come with him, to England, and help in his “business” of gathering and selling information from the wealthy and powerful. Or I could trust to my family’s forgiveness.

Fool that I was, I chose the latter. I thought I could coax forgiveness from them...that I need not prostitute myself—for that is the nature of his proposition—to lure secrets when the prey is impassioned and vulnerable. To manipulate others as Christophe had manipulated me.

But now, I am to be forced, for the sake of my soul and father’s name (as if he had not already bankrupted his name much as he had bankrupted our estate on his stable of mistresses!), to take my vows. To walk as one among these drab gray ghosts! I will not. Father, confident in my shame, has allowed me to spend this last week walking free (if not unwatched) in the convent and its grounds. And so I go to Daniel! I am, I now know, a mere novice, but I already have learned so much about the art of deceit and betrayal this last week. In time I will be a mistress of the art and then I shall return to France, when everyone who disclaimed me or betrayed me has grown soft with forgetfulness.

I do this tonight at evening prayers. While they pray for their souls, I pray for my escape!

## Candacis

Philipe, my beloved cousin,

You have been most generous, not only with your financial support, but with your praise and approval. But what will you think when it is my own story I send to you? Yes, it is true. The words that follow are about me, about my lusts and adventures and disappointments. Yes, disappointment. It would seem that we women need a man's approval to be free and that is no freedom at all! (I do not, dear Philipe, lay the blame entirely on your gender—time and again the oppressed have successfully thrown off their yokes. Women seem all too happy to wear theirs.)

You will no doubt remember my mentioning that they had given me a roommate—AnneMarie? We had developed a cautious friendship, my approval of her only tentative for so long because I could not believe that she should wish to call me friend. I thought at first she was kind only to secure my fawning services—that I might make her bed or keep our room clean entirely on my own. But she served me! I would return from my duties at the convent too tired to lift a finger (although, I admit, my duties took so much of the day because of the time I spend in hiding, transcribing the diaries). The room would be clean, she would even have my towel and nightshift on my bed that I might more easily take my bath and return to bed—where she would brush out my hair afterwards.

Why? I could not quell my suspicions and had to ask, but she would only demur, saying the room was so small that it was no trouble or that she liked my long dark hair. “It flows like black ink,” she would say. (She is so blonde as

to be white, Philipe—we walk down the hall like night and day in so many ways.)

On the Thirteenth, I returned late to the rooms—almost too late to bathe. My things were out, as they always were, but AnneMarie was nowhere to be seen. Taking my clothing and towel, I went down the corridor to the washroom. Instead of it being empty as it should have been at that late hour, AnneMarie was filling the tub with hot water, her own night clothes folded neatly on the bench.

“Ah, I wondered where you were,” I said and started to back from the room, but she waved me in, crossing the room as she did so to close the door and shut us in.

“I am almost finished filling the tub for us,” she said and added a second bucket to cool what she had heated over the fire.

“For us?” I asked. (Philipe, no doubt you already know where this leads, but I did not! None of the diaries or gossip I have heard here at Sacred Heart ever hinted of such a thing, and yet it must be all too common.)

“I dawdled all evening, I fear.” She began disrobing, then stopped before revealing the flesh of her breasts. “I can skip my bath if it makes you uncomfortable, Candacis,” she said. “I forget that you are an only child...not one of four girls as I am.”

I mentioned, did I not, how we are very dissimilar in appearance? She blonde haired but with a light peach colored skin that keeps her from looking washed out as so many of the other girls here can. I, with my black hair and equally black eyes, my skin so pale it borders on translucence. Looking at her, with her hand hovering at the closures that kept her breasts concealed, I had to know how else our bodies varied.

“It does not matter,” I said. I lied, of course, my breathing had grown quite shallow in anticipation. “I dawdled, too.”

She smiled then as if our joint tardiness made us conspirators. Ruby lipped, her teeth were an even gate of precious pearls and I had to pull my gaze from them, lest I miss her disrobing. I undressed as she did, studying her from

the corner of my eye. I might as well have stared directly at her. I do not think I fooled her.

Her breasts are full, nearly the size of ripe cantaloupes, impossibly large for her narrow shoulders and slim waist. The nipples, too, are large and as ruby red as her lips—bright like the first day of menses. Her hips flare out seductively, her ass full. From her navel, a line of hair runs down, starting thin but blossoming into a thick bush that disappears down between her thighs.

It seems scandalous, Philipe, to describe my own appearance to you, but I would have you know how I felt, watching her undress. How inadequate I pictured myself compared to her rounded beauty. My work at Sacred Heart, while not backbreaking, has left me lean and angular with an unfeminine outline of muscles along my arms, abdomen and legs. My breasts, I can cover with my own hands and the budlike nipples are a light pink, the remainder quite pale with blue veins visible just under the surface. My waist, though small, is a straight run to my hips, making me almost boyish in appearance and my mound has only a soft dusting of black hair—nothing like the womanly tangle of fur AnneMarie possesses.

Naked, she slipped into what passed for the tub on our floor of the convent. It was a tun barrel sawed down, its diameter so great we never fill it with more than a few inches of water. I mention the tub's details, Philipe, so you understand that, when she urged me to sit in front of her between her legs, there was no need for us to be so close.

No need, only a wish, but what manner of wish? My naïveté embarrassed me, and I waited motionless to find out what she would do next. She released the pins in my hair, the points of her nipples brushing against my back. As she moved I could feel the tickle of her thick fur against my bottom and I had to keep myself from moaning. From the diaries I have transcribed for you, I knew too well what my body's reactions were—lust—but I had never imagined a woman could incite such a feeling in me.

She reached in front of me for the soap and washcloth. Her breasts pressed flat against my back, her pubic mound full against my bottom and lower back.

She dipped the soap and cloth in the water in front of me, between my legs and I recoiled slightly, only to find myself pressed more tightly against her.

“Move forward a little, Candacis,” she said.

I complied, my cheeks burning. Had I miscalculated her? Or had she abandoned her seduction of me this close to my boyish frame?

I nearly cried out when she began running the soapy cloth over my back. And when her breasts, slick from soap, joined the soft caress of cloth, I began trembling.

“AnneMarie?” My voice shook. The heat from her cunt, magnified by the tub’s steaming water and the rich coating of her hair, was hot against my back—stoking my own sex until I thought I would burst into flames.

“What, baby?” she asked, pressing her breasts flat against my back as she reached around to soap my chest and stomach.

I let my head lean idly back against her shoulder, watching the earnest expression on her face as she cleaned me. “I would not misunderstand your intent,” I said at last.

The corner crease of her mouth rose in a soft smile and then she turned her head and kissed me. At the same time, her hand reached between my legs and began wiping the inner folds of my labia with the cloth.

I moaned, parting my lips, her tongue entering my mouth. I let her thrusting tongue subdue my own and melted into her soapy embrace. Running her hand under my calf, she lifted my leg until it was over the side of the tub, the washcloth abandoned now as an unnecessary impediment. She rolled my clit between her thumb and index finger and I gasped at how quickly I approached the peak of pleasure (compared to my own clumsy attempts at pleasuring myself).

She broke the kiss as I began to squirm uncontrollably against her.

“On your knees, baby,” she said and urged me forward.

When I was on my knees, she placed my hands on the edges, my breasts hard against the wooden rim. She slid down until her torso ran under me. This kept my legs spread wide while she rested against the opposite curve of the

tub. With her face less than a hand's width from my pussy, she pressed her fingers into me. I tried to thrust back, but she pushed against my bottom.

"Slowly," she said in soft warning before explaining. "Too hard and I might break your covering."

I laughed then, the sound bitter. "I do not think I need worry of a husband's opinion."

"Sweet Candacis," she murmured, her breath warm on my cunt. "There are men who will desire you...your small size, your ambiguous frame."

Her words stung for an instant, but the rub of her fingers inside my cunt erased the hurt and I could only moan.

"I want your touch, deep within me," I protested, squeezing down on her fingers for emphasis. "I want your fingers to fill me." My curiosity so aroused by what I have read, I wanted her fist to fill me. I could not find enough boldness to voice that desire yet.

"Not yet," she said. "Let me teach you this way, first."

It felt so good, how could I argue? Already I knew I would die if I could not return her touch, give her the same pleasure she was giving me. And so I must learn how far was too far, what she did and did not find acceptable.

Her tongue sucked at my clit, delivered rapid little flicks to its engorged hood. Within me, she had curled the two fingers that plunged in and out, keeping her strokes shallow but deliciously thick.

I brought my hands in front of me on the rim, biting the back of one when the pleasure threatened to erupt from me in a scream. I moaned her named, bucking against her hand, the thrashing of my head the only release in the silence that had settled over the rest of the floor.

"I am coming," I whispered urgently. "Ah, AnneMarie, I am coming now."

I jerked against her mouth. Her stroking and tonguing slowed to a languorous pace as the last of my climax trembled through me.

"Now I will teach you penetration." The sound of her lust caught in her throat as she slid out from beneath me. She pushed me forward until my

breasts were over the rim and I was clutching the tub's frame to keep from falling out.

I felt the rough bar of soap against my netherhole as she built a thick lather. Then she twirled the bar between her hands until skin and soap were too slick and the bar splashed into the tub. Getting on her knees, she positioned herself behind me, her thumb entering my cunt as she spooned her four fingers to cup the spine of my clit. She began rubbing the hard vein of muscle beneath, her other hand vigorously rubbing the pucker of my ass, keeping the layer of soap well lathered.

Just as she brought me to the edge of another climax, I felt a single digit invade my ass.

"Yes," I squirmed against her, panting in my approval. The penetration was every bit as sensuous and discomfiting as I had read and I trembled around her invasion of cunt and ass. "More," I pleaded, needy in my lust.

She slipped another finger in, the hand at my pussy cupping me hard before she slipped a third in.

"Is that good, little one?" AnneMarie asked. She had pressed her body close to mine. I could feel her luxuriant pussy hair brush my thighs as she ground against the heel of her own palm, pleasuring herself with the same hand she used to penetrate me. The thrust of her hips forced her hard in my ass.

It felt so good that I was reduced to answering her in grunts, the only coherent words I could form being my pleas that she not stop. And then bright starlight burst behind my tightly shut eyelids. She kept slamming into me as my orgasm stiffened my limbs. I started sobbing and she withdrew, her hands going to my hips as she continued rubbing her mound frantically against my ass until I felt her nails dig into my flesh and she jerked once, warm liquid releasing against my thigh.

AnneMarie sank back into the tub, pulling me with her, finishing the task of cleaning my body, her mouth at my neck, her fingers straying casually to my nipples.



"I am going to suck your little rosebuds sore tonight in bed," she warned me and then stood, coaxing me to stand so that she might dry me.

She followed through on her promise and I moved through the next day with sharp intakes of breath each time my nipples rubbed against the fabric of my gown. My cunt was a wet slit of anticipation of what the night would hold.

For three nights she pleased me with her hands and mouth, gaining her own release only by rubbing against me though I pleaded with her. I should have known, as I grew more desperate for her taste, that I was falling into a trap. And though she serviced me each night, our roles otherwise reversed such that I sought a hundred ways during the day to gain her favor. I made her bed, pressed her clothes, did anything and everything.

On the fourth night, I refused her touch although my drenched pussy vibrated with its rage at the denial.

"Sweetest," she coaxed, her body close to mine on my small bed. She massaged my back and shoulders as I pressed against the wall. "Open yourself to me."

"Open yourself to me!" I grabbed her by the wrists and forced her onto her back, the strength hidden in my still child-like body surprising her. I clamped my mouth over her covered breast, sucking at her nipples until I could see their hard points through the wet cloth.

I pulled her nightgown up and shoved my hand into her moist pocket.

"Care—" She arched beneath my touch, her warning lost in a moan.

"Yes," I promised, sliding down to the V of her widespread legs. I started slowly with my tongue, my fingers burning with the need to penetrate her sweet hole. I sucked the enflamed hood of her clit, the flat of my tongue stroking its base while my top lip inched up and down its spine.

AnneMarie tangled her hands in my hair and thrust against my mouth, her breath coming in harsh little pants. "Baby...so good. Keep licking me."

The smell of her arousal was thick in her bush, the hairs lightly caressing my face on all sides. I mouthed her entire pussy, my thirst for her nearly unquenchable after her prolonged denial. Nearly so...but she was so wet. Her

cream coated my tongue, clogged my nose so that I had to breathe against her plump labia.

“Yessss,” she moaned, thrashing along the bed now as the knuckles of my first two fingers penetrated her. “Keep sucking me, little sister.”

I growled against her pussy, my mouth rough on the soft velvet membrane that threatened to smother me. Harder I stroked her, searching for the knot of tissue just inside the entrance of her cunt, flexing my fingers to fill her while keeping her maidenhead intact.

AnneMarie wrapped her legs around my head, crushing my willing mouth to her clit. She came then, her silky sweet cum gushing down my throat. When she released me at last, I moved up the length of her body until our mounds, equally wet, were pressed against each other. I braced myself with one arm alongside her shoulder, my free hand cupping her breasts through the fabric, squeezing it rhythmically as we pumped one another to climax.

You cannot imagine my joy, Philipe. I possessed this lovely creature—we possessed one another—over the next few weeks. A prince might take her as his wife, so notable her family, but it was my legs she was buried between, sucking and licking each night, her mouth coated with my juices. Surely no less than a marquis would bury his shaft between her thighs when she was claimed as a bride, but it was my fingers that stroked her cunt and ravaged her tight ass.

The last few years of hardship melted away and I could not think of anywhere other than Sacred Heart that I would rather be.

And then the letter arrived. It would not be a marquis, I learned, that would fill her legs, but an English duke.

“Father feels we must leave France,” she told me, her voice steady, her eyes clear, despite my sobbing. She placed a hand on my shoulder. “Perhaps I can send for you once I am settled in?”

How long would that be? My pride would not let me ask. I knew the summons would never arrive. It would be far more convenient for her to replace me. I sniffed and gathered my blanket around me so that I might not feel the

gentle heat of her hand. I stopped crying, though my body shook with unshed tears, and turned from her, ignoring her soft murmurings until she gave up and returned to her bed.

Nothing but silence passed between us the next day. She grew peevish at my quiet rebuke, her true nature showing at last. I should be grateful for what she had taught me, she chided. I should thank her for the pleasure she had given me, a mere orphan with no estate and a meaningless title. On and on she went until, at last, I humbled myself before her, approaching her mattress on my hands and knees the night before she was to depart for England forever.

She liked seeing me crawl, it was evident in her eyes. I stopped at the edge of her bed and pressed my cheek against her knee, my tears wetting her skin. She stroked my dark hair, drawing me onto the bed. We lifted our gowns together, each part of our bodies pressing against the other's mate as it was exposed until we were mound to mound and breast to breast, our tongues writhing like mating snakes. She cupped my ass, I hers, and we rocked together, the kiss deepening as we grew damp and hot between our thighs.

Her rocking became more urgent and she broke the kiss. Throwing her head back, a strangled half-suppressed scream of pleasure issued from her. I pumped harder, my own peak fast approaching, my nearly bald mound rubbing against her wet triangle of fur.

I cupped her cunt and she collapsed back onto the mattress, squirming beneath my touch. It would be my last drink from her cup, I knew, and I bent my head in mock reverence. I spooned my tongue, pulling the cream from her cunt into my mouth, swallowing it down in greedy gulps before I teased her engorged clit. I brought her to the edge of climax, backing away when she begged me to end the assault, to grant her the relief her wildly bucking hips demanded. I massaged her thighs, her calves, kissed the soles of her feet until she grew complacent under my touch. Then I would fall on her again, ravaging the exterior of her pussy, pulling her back to the rim of the abyss, my pinkie teasing the tight pucker of her ass but never penetrating.

“End it, Candacis!”

Her demands grew louder, her entire body a quivering mass of flesh that thought only of release, of filling my mouth with the honeyed gush of her climax. Slowly, I eased a finger into her cunt, softly probing, my gentle touch hiding my intent. You see, she had marked me, damaged me. I loved her, as foolish as it might seem, and my heart was breaking. Should I allow her, then, to leave unmarked?

“Yes, baby,” she cooed when I slipped a second finger in, flexing against the opening of her cunt and then shoving a third one in. “Careful, baby, careful. Oh God...yes.”

My pussy was wet, sopping, my ass pumping the air as I tightened and relaxed my own internal muscles, excited by her pleased cries and the knowledge of what I was about to do.

“Yes, baby, yes. I am coming...baby, yes.”

She thrust her hips high in the air, her ass leaving the mattress. I joined the upward thrust of her cunt with a downward thrust of my fingers, the tightly held triangle breaking the smooth velvet fabric of her virginity.

AnneMarie froze for a brief instant, her heated encouragement hanging in the air, and then her ass hit the mattress and she scrambled away from me. She saw the blood on my fingers, saw me lift them to my mouth and suck the red away.

“What have you done?” she cried. “How will I explain—”

I stopped her words with a harsh kiss, knifing my tongue into her mouth to give her a coppery taste of my betrayal, of her betrayal of me. I turned away, my soul hardened against her tears. “You will find some way, I am sure,” I answered. “But you will know on your wedding night, as you worry that your ruse will fail...you will know that I took this from you, that it was mine to take.”

Then I went back to my bed and did not leave it until after she had left the next morning, an entourage of servants packing her belongings while she waited in the carriage.

I send this now to you, two days later. It is the last letter I shall send and I have packed the envelope full of material taken from the girls. Print this, print

them all as it should please you or consign them all to the fire. I trust that you shall do what is best.

Forgive me, Philipe, that it should come to this, that, once weakened by her touch, I have not the strength to go on.

As ever,  
Candacis

## Philippe

*[Translator's Note—the following begins the first page of Philippe Vremont's journals. It is not known whether he kept journals before this date, only that no other diaries personal to Philippe passed with his estate.]*

*July 6, 1787*

I am at an inn a short distance from Sacred Heart. Receiving Candacis' letter, I set out at once to retrieve her from this wretched place that I should have rescued her from when she first was orphaned. I feared that I would be too late—as well I am. They found her in the tub, her veins slit up the length of her forearms. The same plain tub, I imagine, in which AnneMarie seduced her.

I take her body far from here, where none will know she died a suicide although I wonder how I will hide the physical evidence long enough for her to be buried within a churchyard. But business in Paris has shown me there is always someone who can be paid to make ugly little truths disappear.

I am alone in the world—Candacis, my last relative, now as dead as the rest. Nothing binds me to France, with its crumbling monarchy, and so I do this one last thing—bury my sweet little cousin—before I find passage to America.

*August 15, 1787*

A little over a month has passed since I put my sweet cousin to rest. What assets I owned, I sold off save for a trunk full of books and another of clothes. Unable to find a buyer, I abandoned the press, along with a few debts. It was

money owed to rich men and, somehow, I do not think they shall starve. If they do, I am beyond caring.

Despite traveling light and with a full purse, passage has not proved as easy as I thought it would be. I could find no direct transport to America to suit my need to be rid of France as soon as I could. And so I find myself seething in a British port, waiting three more days while the ship takes on more cargo and passengers and knowing that vile creature AnneMarie lives in wealth and comfort only a short distance to the west.

I do not casually know her location. I spent time and money while I waited for passage finding out the identity of AnneMarie's duke and the location of his ancestral lands. I had thought to send the newly wed duchess a letter, detailing the cost of her seduction. I wrote it out, still carry it in my breast pocket. It is all there, in black and white. How fragile and pale Candacis appeared. Bloodless and childlike. How no child bears marks like those she carved into her arms. I recorded for AnneMarie the exact length and path of my cousin's self-mutilation. I wrote of how many priests I had to approach before I found one who would perform the burial and a sextant who would ask no questions. I detailed the cost of bribing them down to the last coin.

Yet, for all the words written, it is not enough to pierce her cold heart, I fear. I can see her, in my mind's eye, turning to the maid, feigning a chill so that the girl will light a summer's fire. Alone, she will let the sheets of paper drift into the flame. Using the poker to stir the embers, she will stay at the hearth until all has turned to ash and no proof of her crime remains. Will she even read the letter in its entirety? Should I address it to the duke, instead? Certainly he will make sure she is aware of the letter's contents. And if he does not brand her a whore and cast her away immediately, surely he will remind her time and again of her sins. What comfort I would find in that I am not sure. For a man such as the duke cannot understand the true nature of AnneMarie's transgression—not that she loved Candacis, but that she left her.

August 19, 1787

While I am rid of the sight of England's shores, it is not because I am at sea, crossing the Atlantic. Rather, I am sitting at an inn in county Sussex and forging a letter of introduction that will hopefully gain me audience with Bainsworth and his new bride.

I seek, of course, to appeal to the man's greed. He has already profited from France's woes by securing a bride. And so I shall present myself as a liaison for some of France's other fine families—families with priceless antiques and fair daughters, both of which they're willing to part with for a secure entry into English society. Given the delicate subject matter, there will be no easy means by which he can confirm my credentials—for what family openly advertises that their heritage and flesh are for sale?

*August 22, 1787*

The letter secured my entry into Bainworth's home and his study. Far from protesting his honor and disdain for such an industry, the man grilled me in such minute detail I could scarce invent my lies as fast as he asked his questions. I only hope he does not seek to go over the particulars I outlined to him again. He would soon know me a fraud for I cannot remember half of what I said. Still, I need little time, just long enough to be alone with AnneMarie for a few minutes.

*AnneMarie.* Already I feel at odds with my original intent. It is a strange thing, looking at a beautiful, clothed stranger and yet knowing her contours, knowing that beneath the cream silk of her dress is a triangle of thicker, paler silk. Looking at the lace of her bodice, my mind's eye saw not the English fineries but the rubied nipples hidden beneath. How had Candacis described them? *Large and as bright red as the first day of menses.* And to know the passion she is capable of, passions I would have thought well-bred women strangers to before that first letter from my cousin containing Beatrice's story.

Well I know that I shouldn't have been looking at her bodice, but looking at her face for more than a second would have completely undone me. Hers has become a beauty that is haunted. Dark circles shadow her eyes, eyes that are



the clouded blue-grey of a winter lake. Skin that was described as a light peach is now pale and bruised at the wrists and throat, the marks less carefully hidden than her husband would like...if his frequent glances at her dress are any indication. To look at her face is to feel both pity and admiration for one I am honor bound to despise.

Since I could not pity or admire her, I looked at her tits and her hips and tried to think of her as nothing more than a wanton who seduced and abandoned my naïve little cousin. And if I take a blonde-haired serving girl to my bed tonight, if I treat her a little more roughly than I am wont, dot her full breasts with sharp kisses as my mind sighs another's name—have I been disloyal to my sweet Candacis? And if such a *liaison of the sheets* strengthens my resolve to punish AnneMarie with the knowledge of the girl she left behind, have I then been disloyal?

*August 24, 1787*

Damn my soul to hell, but I want to help her. It was perhaps because she saw straight through my ruse, not only that I was not who I claimed, but that I was there on her lover's account.

"You have the look of her," she said the moment we were alone, Bainsworth having been called to attend to another visitor.

I feigned ignorance, wanting to leave her no room to deny knowledge of Candacis. It was more effort than needed, she made no attempt to hide her acquaintanceship with my cousin.

"Candacis," she continued, her gaze rising to meet mine for the first time since she had entered the room. "You could be her brother in face and voice, but I know she has none."

"You knew her well, then?" What game I hoped to draw her into by asking, I'm unsure. It was pointless, anyway. She seemed to know better than I that there was no time to waste.

"We were lovers."

What sadness there was in her voice, each word wrapped in melancholy. It was as if she already knew in her heart what I came to tell her, as if she already mourned my cousin's death.

"If you came here to blackmail me," she started, dropping her gaze once again, "it is of no use. It will matter little to my...to him...that it was a woman who took my virtue."

I could not hold back my bitter laugh, though I feel half contrite now at my rudeness. She looked up, her gaze startled and innocent, and then a sad, wry frown tugged at the corners of her full lips.

"You will excuse my coyness." She turned, looked out the window. "I meant, of course, my maidenhead."

"I did not come to blackmail you." Despite lying to gain entry into her home, I was insulted at the accusation and I tried to edge my voice with a hard tone.

She looked back at me. Her smile trembled at its edges. "You did not come to demand I make good on my promise? I would not bring her into this house, as dear as she is to me."

"Oh, I would be loath to disturb her grave that you might stay true to your word." Far sharper than any knife, I saw my words slash across her face. As many times as I had imagined telling her, I never imagined the abject grief that paled her features or how it would affect me. I never thought I would feel guilt at telling her the truth.

"How...I mean, she was not sick—"

And then he returned, Bainsworth, his gaze skipping over her not even long enough to notice her distress. It was only a few minutes longer before he ordered her from the room so that our conversation might turn back towards the business venture I had fabricated.

Now I do not know when I will see her again and, already, I dismay.

September 7, 1787

It is done! I will not record my actions here for another to use against me. Nor shall the day fade from memory before death shuts my eyes. It is enough to

say that I am bound now for Guaymas, by way of landfall at Tabasco, and that I do not travel alone.

According to the ship's registry, we travel as man and wife. The truth is altogether different. There are marks on her face, not mine, but his. She is quiet. Humbled. She claims she owes me her life. Does that not make two lives she owes me? Or even three—for I have done something I did not think myself capable of.

But I will not write of that, though the need to claws at me. Nor will I speak of it despite the questions I see always hovering in her stormy gaze.

What else lingers in that gaze? Already I am damned for wanting to know. And how she torments me with comparisons absently spoken like some idiot child.

“You are so like her.”

“You read like her.”

“You write like her.”

“We are not the same,” I tell her each time.

“I know...you are a man.”

And in that regard she finds me like him—my hand at her elbow makes her cringe, my fingertips at the small of her back bring her stiff and straight. She fears me...and well she should, having seen what I am capable of. But I would not hurt her, though I hate and want her in the same breath, the same heartbeat.

Ah, I never should have accepted that first manuscript from Candacis. How different things might have been. She would not have been seduced first by the other girls' words and their lifestyles and then by AnneMarie. Perhaps that is not true, even battered and fearful, AnneMarie is a hard creature to resist. Yet Candacis, already rebuked by me at the first letter, might have gone to her grave silent at least. Selfish of me, yes, to desire that she had done so, but I fear now for my sanity and soul and think that my own duplicity in publishing the diaries has rebounded on me. How it gnaws at me that one more troubled, needful glance from AnneMarie, one midnight whimper as she relives that last

night at Bainsworth's estate, might lead me to betray my dead cousin, to take AnneMarie into my arms and comfort her or comfort myself.

For I am not sure it would be a comfort to AnneMarie, she remains such a mystery to me. Yet surely I would find relief at her touch, the thought of which occupies half of each day and most of the night.

September 23, 1787

She has taken to calling me *baby* in her moments of inattention, in much the same sweet cooing voice I imagined she called out to Candacis. And I have taken to sleeping topside, though it is prohibited. The captain tells me we are still more than three weeks out from where we will disembark.

Could I not be rid of her then? She did not leave Bainsworth's without means of support. If I help her barter a fair price for her jewels, can I not leave her in good conscience? What warped chivalry binds me to her? But I have made her a widow—a widow who was married to a monster, but a widow nonetheless. Is she not a monster herself? The seductress of a naïve girl if I am to take a suicide's word. Should I? What is the word of one lover over another?

If only she would stop calling me *baby*.

October 3, 1787

She found the letter. The one Candacis wrote and not my letter of accusation. That she read long ago after I forced it into her hands. That she read with tears falling freely.

This I found her reading stone-faced. I did not mean for her to read this letter. It was meant for me. It was not mine to share. I took it from her. She seemed finished anyway. Her gaze was blank, her hand trembling slightly from how long she had held the sheets of paper. She didn't argue when I took them, didn't move.

I forced her, after a few more minutes, to lie down on the bunk she was sitting on. She would not move from the position I put her in. I do not think she even blinked. I wanted to slap her, to force her from her silence with at

least a sharp cry. Yet I do not think I could have stopped had I released even the lightest blow against her.

Would that I had never left the ship in England!

Half an hour or more passed with her motionless on the bed. I sat down next to her. I touched her shoulder, expecting her to flinch as she always does when I must touch her to get her attention. She offered no response. I bent low over her, brushed my fingertips across her cheek.

“Say something, AnneMarie.” It shamed me to plead with the woman who had made my cousin a suicide and me a murderer. My desire to comfort her now was but another betrayal of Candacis.

“I loved her.” At last tears began to pool, spilling out the corners of her eyes when she finally blinked.

*I loved her.* That would be my own defense as well were I called to answer for my crimes. I loved AnneMarie, I think, at first glance.

Had she only stopped there. Had she turned into herself, rolling to face the wall, to hide from me as she so often does. Had she done anything but touched my cheek and reminded me once again—

“You are so like her.”

I pushed her hand away, held it against the pillow as my other hand curled in her hair. I bent all the way down until my chest pressed hard against her breasts and her gaze widened. I kissed her, her lips coloring from the force the instant I broke away. Seeing the flush and swell, I kissed her again, releasing her hand to grab her breast. I forced my tongue between her lips, wrapping my fingers tighter in her hair as I squeezed her supple flesh.

It hurt her, I know. She whimpered in pain even as she arched against me. I had to show her she was wrong. I was not Candacis. I would be an altogether different lover. Even if it meant being like Bainsworth, I would not remind her of my cousin.

“Philippe!”

Her hard little cry of terror only drove me on and I whipped her skirt up. Reaching her center, I found that her fear made her tight. But she was still wet,

too. A layer of arousal coated her skin and she clung to me, shaking violently, doing nothing to push me away.

I entered her with my hand, three fingers wide and hard. "Have I not made myself your husband with his murder?" My whispered question was as savage as it was low.

She tightened around me, buried her face against my shoulder. "Please, Philipe. I meant no offense." So soft her voice, so broken with her tears. "I loved her and every day it is as if I still look upon her."

She could not make me retreat that way, if such was her plan. She could only strengthen my resolve. "Have I not made myself your husband?" I asked again, my voice rising to match my anger. I thrust into her again, forcing her higher up the mattress. "Answer me, AnneMarie!"

"Yes! Damn you!" She hit me, struck me full on the cheek with the side of her closed fist.

The blow was nothing to me in my anger. I shook it off, pressed harder against her.

"Then this is mine to take." Four fingers into her, my hand flexed and cupping her, my thumb pressed hard against her clit, I made my demand.

"Do not, Philipe."

She tried to land another blow. I ducked and tightened my hold on her cunt.

"Do not mistake this for a request, AnneMarie." I released my hold down there, pushed her skirts up and freed my cock, my torso weighing heavy on hers all the while to keep her pinned down.

"I have made myself your husband."

"Yes." She had stopped fighting, her protest down to weeping hiccoughs.

"You owe me your life."

"Yes."

"You owe me this." I entered her then, awkwardly, my emotions and actions mixed between anger and something more gentle.

“Yes, but I do not owe you my love.” She turned her head, shielding her face with her hand. Whether it was so that she did not have to see me or so that I could not look upon her, I have no guess.

My seed spilled into her, erupting after no more than a few rough thrusts. Grunting, I pried her hand away, forced her to look at me as I spoke.

“Your vanity deludes you, AnneMarie. I have not asked for your love.”

October 8, 1787

She sleeps beside me now. I have not taken her again. She does not speak to me unless it is to answer a question with a simple *yes* or *no*. She does not look at me unless it is from the corner of her eye. She moves around the small cabin like a dancer beneath a glass bell, her head always slightly tilted down, not quite facing my direction.

I know what I want of her.

What does she want from me?

October 11, 1787

I woke nestled against AnneMarie this morning. Our bodies were shaped as sleep might mold together a man and woman in love, though I slept in shame and she in some unknowable state of mind. Awake before me, she turned in my arms, gaze dreamy and whispered to me, “Candacis.”

Awake before me, I say. This was no sleepy murmur, no carryover of a pleasant dream. She meant to be sharp and cruel, her lover’s voice as calculating as it was sweet. She is unfathomable and I am lost if she intuits but half the strength of my feelings for her.

October 13, 1787

She moves against me in her sleep, my cousin’s name on her lips. A true sleep, I think, despite knowing how calculating she can be. She moves, she rubs, she freezes and trembles in climax. I can feel the heat of her sweet pussy, feel its juices weep from between her pressed thighs. I want so desperately to

take her again. Is that her sleeping intent? To drown us both in the same pool of degeneracy?

*October 17, 1787*

Again, I have taken her, but such a different unfolding than the last time. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she has taken me.

She was goading me again, saying that other name, a name I have almost come to despise in my jealousy. But my letter from Candacis reveals much about AnneMarie, particularly to one who has spent weeks confined in a small cabin with her. The one thing I understand above all else when it comes to her nature is this: she is as prone to desire and temptation as she is an expert in the art of seduction.

So, when she curled towards me, her lips moist and murmuring another's name, I turned away. Not in anger, but with indifference, I rose from the bunk. It being less precious than water on the crossing, I uncorked the wine bottle and took a long drink before offering it to her. Watching me with a narrowed gaze, she refused with a slow shake of her head. Another thing I have learned about her, she does not like it when someone acts outside her expectations. Not her demands—for she is as accustomed to hearing *no* as anyone at this point—but, I repeat, her expectations.

Forcing my expression to remain dispassionate, I stripped. I could not look at her as I did this. To see her then would have knocked all pretense from me. Despite the substandard fare and little opportunity for exercise on the trip, her health has much improved these last two weeks. Color and a cold fire have returned to her, making her all the more desirable to me.

So I did not look at her as I disrobed, nor after I lay back down upon the bunk beside her. I closed my eyes altogether, letting her look at me as she would. She would not push me again to indulge my darker nature.

“Do you think I want you?” She whispered her question in my ear, her breath moist against my skin and starting the first stirring of my erection.



I stayed quiet. My body would betray me soon enough, but at least my mouth would offer no assistance.

"I could do the same," she threatened. "Were I to lie naked beside you, it would not mean I wanted you."

Fool that I am, I opened my mouth. "Show me, then."

As I expected, she was willing to raise the stakes to win her point. But I did not quite expect how quickly or how high she would bid. She did not rise off the bunk to undress, but straddled me as she removed her nightshift and tossed it on the small rectangle of the cabin floor.

Eyes wide open from the instant the flesh of her thighs touched mine, I watched her ripe breasts tumble from the shift, felt my cock swell as my balls twitched in appreciation. Heavy handfuls, red tipped, they had escaped my gaze these long weeks. I longed to reach up, touch them again, take the large expanse of one nipple into my mouth and suckle her like a child.

The soft fur of her cunt brushed against my stomach as she moved forward to slide away. I had felt how thick her bush was that night. Seeing its lushness trapped my gaze until she was almost off me. I grabbed her, one hand at her hip, the other at her shoulder, and looked into those blue-gray eyes.

"You are nothing like her," I said. She stiffened and I smiled. "But if I close my eyes," I started and let my hand travel from her shoulder to her breast, "if I close my eyes I can pretend."

Beneath my touch, she wound herself tighter. "You cannot play me, Philipe."

One hand I filled with her heavy breast, the other I let slip down to stroke the line of her cunt. I kept my eyes closed, a sleepy smile on my face as I spoke. "Think what you will, AnneMarie—that I am trying to play you, that I cannot play you."

I slid a finger into her. She was slick, humid with her arousal. "Just try to stay quiet, will you not, Wife?" My finger wet with her juices, I rubbed her clit until she began to squirm against me. "Your voice breaks the illusion."

She stilled at that and I felt a tremble of doubt shiver across her skin. “So very much like her.” Softly spoken, I do not think she meant me to hear what she had said.

“Shh,” I admonished. “Be quiet for me, my sweet Candacis.”

“Philipe...” She was bent low over me now, the brush of her pubic hair soft against my cock. “Do not pretend—”

I stopped her again with the command that she be silent. “Slow, our first time this, darling cousin.” I stroked her pussy, my thumb at her clit, the line of my finger between her labia and at the swollen door to her cunt. “Do you like that? Does it pleasure you?”

“Yes, but, please, Philipe—”

I kissed her then, silencing her with the slice of my tongue through her mouth. Grabbing her around the waist, I rolled with her in the narrow bunk until I was poised over her. I dipped my head down to her breast, that she might not see my eyes were open and that I might at last pull one rigid nipple into my mouth, relaxing it with the heat of my tongue.

Ah, that little whimper of a moan as she moved beneath me, her hips lifting to bring her mound against my stomach. Palms flat against the bunk head, she pushed herself down the mattress. She slipped a leg from beneath me, throwing it wide so that her cunt was fully open to accept me.

I slid further down, evading her intent as best as the bunk’s confines would allow me. I slid my thumb into her sex, pushed against its swell until I was dripping with her juice. Down the smooth skin to the circle of her ass. They had pleased one another this way, I remembered, and let the knuckle of my thumb tease the tight hole. She jerked, her thighs flexing as she thrust her hips high. And then she relaxed just as suddenly, grabbing her knees and spreading herself wide, whimpering her need.

“So wet, you cannot deny it, baby.” So very wet. I could smell her arousal, almost jerked with my own climax. She was writhing and I knuckled her harder, my other hand beneath her bottom to push her back up the bunk. I

placed my mouth against her cunt, inhaling her scent through the thick bush that hid her sex.

“Wider, baby.”

She obeyed, straining her thighs impossibly wide until I could see the dark salmon slash of her cunt, wet with the desire to be fucked. I ran my tongue its length, circling the glistening hole, moving up, over the hood of her clit, along its spine, stopping at the hood again to slowly suck it in. Her breathing changed to a sharp pant and I stopped, moving back up her body until I could stare into her unfocused pupils.

Reaching up, she dug her nails into my shoulders, her body moving beneath me to find its own climax. Such a sweet, wicked body, I only needed to have it rub against me to be at the threshold of my own orgasm.

“Only...two...of...us.” She had me grunting like a pig and I wasn’t even fucking her yet. “In...this...bed...AnneMarie.”

She rediscovered herself in that moment, rediscovered me. Her gaze sharpened, tears swimming at the surface. “You, Philipe. My love.”

I had the truth of her then even if she should try to deny it later. I entered slowly, as softly as I should have the first time. She coiled around me, her limbs, her mouth, her cunt. Her body was like the ocean we traveled upon, one moment gently, sensuously rolling, the next crashing against me, pulling me down, wearing away at me only to return to rolling waves as she breached the wall of her climax. I followed her over the wall, slamming into her, pumping her with cock and cum until she was screaming from another climax. Tears rolled down her cheeks, I kissed them away, traded their salt on my tongue for the sweet flavor of her mouth.

At least for the night, I knew she was mine and mine alone.

March 13, 1793

It has been so long since I made an entry, the last time being the birth of our third child, Felicitas. It is fitting that I do so now, for the diaries that started this new life are about to come full circle. AnneMarie returned from

town today walking like a soldier wandering from a battlefield. I thought her injured at first, but there was no sign of damage to her person. I took her into our room, sat her on our bed and begged her tell me what could make my AnneMarie so quiet?

“I am unsure.” She stumbled the words out and gestured at the bottom drawer of my writing desk.

I didn’t move. It is in that drawer, locked tight, where we buried my cousin and the rest of the girls of the Sacred Heart.

“It is her, I think.” She gestured at the drawer again, impatient with my inaction. “Betrayed by the painter, what was her name?”

Veronique’s name was ready on my lips, but I would not confess to my darling that I have re-read the diaries so many times during our life together that the name was immediately available to me. Women so little understand the particular boredom that can infect a man and AnneMarie is no exception to this fact.

“Let me see.” I took the key from my vest pocket and sat in my desk chair. I bent down, taking my time. “It is not possible, my love. Think, AnneMarie, not one, but two girls from the same convent in such an out of the way place?”

“We came here to get lost,” she answered. “Perhaps she has done the same.”

Ah, that worried me. For if it was Veronique, perhaps she had seen and recognized AnneMarie. And might she not know what had happened in England? Were we then in danger of discovery?

“Do you think she saw you?” The years had changed AnneMarie, matured her beauty in a way undiminished in my eyes. But she was far removed from the haughty aristocrat who had moved through the highest social circles of France and England.

“It was when I caught her staring at me that I recognized her!” Her gaze was frightened as I handed the sheath of papers to her. Her hand moved to take them as if it were pushing through water, her reluctance now to learn the truth slowing her.

“Veronique.” A whisper of the girl’s name. “Yes, some lower branch of the L’Aigle family. I remember her exactly now.” She frowned. “She is much changed.” She ran her hand over her apron, the right corner of her mouth quirking up. I wanted to kiss her then, tell her all would be well.

“So am I,” she said after another second. She looked up at me, searching my face with that blue-gray gaze that was sharper than Spanish steel. “Perhaps she has as much to lose?”

That question was a command. She would not wait to find out we had been discovered and turned in. I found it difficult to believe Veronique might have as much to lose. We had three children to protect and a stable business that kept everyone clothed and fed. “You want me to go to her?”

“You must, Philipe.” She frowned, searching her mind for something. “A man came up to her, addressed her as *Senora Howard*. How long can she have been here without our discovering it?”

As I was to find out, she’d been there over a year and I had met her on two occasions, for she owns the town’s only textile shop. As for AnneMarie’s failure to meet her, Senora Howard arrived in Guaymas in the last months of AnneMarie’s pregnancy with Felicitas, when AnneMarie could little leave the bed, let alone the house. The birth was difficult and AnneMarie has only resumed trips to town in the last few months. When it comes to socializing, we are little troubled by our Spanish or English neighbors. We do, after all, have our own secrets to guard. As small as the constant number of citizens is, there is always itinerant traffic from the port, those who stay a few months or more before traveling inland or going back out to sea. And Senora Howard, too, kept primarily to herself.

But now I have been to see her, learned the truth of her situation and know that she has much to lose. As with my AnneMarie and me, Veronique (who goes by Sophie) is changed from what I had imagined her to be. Time, it seems, subdues all creatures, even beautiful women. Anyway, we have agreed to help her. I make only one small request beyond her keeping the secret of our

identity. She must tell me the rest of her story as we make our journey to Cuba.

## Veronique & Daniel

March 18, 1793

I go to my love, though I do not know whether he lives or whether things will have changed between us since I last saw him. It may be that, though he survives, he remains resolute in denying my claim to his heart. Still, it will be enough to find that he has not perished, to free him from his prison even if we must then go our separate ways.

I travel with a new, and yet old, acquaintance. I knew his cousin, many years ago, at the Sacred Heart. A shadow she was, and now he confesses to me that she was the literary thief who stole our stories...our letters and diaries. Had I suspected, I would have thought her more interesting. Not knowing what those diaries would bring me in future (for surely they cost me in solidifying Gabrielle's will against me once published), I would have throttled the girl as well. That is all in the past, though. Now those damnable letters have secured me a traveling companion, one I can trust not only in helping me reach Spain and free Daniel, but in safekeeping through his wife what I leave behind.

Just this tiny thing he asks—to know what has happened to me since I left the convent. I had almost forgotten the diaries I kept once I had convinced Daniel that my invented code was secure. How I remember that battle between us! Eight times I tried unsuccessfully to record my entries in an “unbreakable” code. Little did it matter to him that a lesser spy than he was would have found at least half of them unsolvable—I had to satisfy his mind that my words were secure from all but me. So now, as we journey across land to reach our port on the Atlantic, I have the task of decoding my old diaries. And I ill remember their

key—it has taken me all day to ferret out this next entry. At least empty time is the one thing I have too much of on this trip.

August 28, 1787

Respite at last! We are finally on the outskirts of London and well disguised as brother and sister. Daniel pretends to be French as he has not yet managed to scrub away my French ways or accent. A part of me resists his attempts at Anglicizing me, though I know my safety and comfort depend on blending in as some drab Englishwoman.

How drab and desperate they are in this little town we find ourselves in! They are without the sauce or grace that marks even the poorest of France's flowers. I cannot guess at how Daniel will teach me to become one of them.

And yet, he has taught me so much already in the weeks since my escape from Father's wrath and the vows to the sisterhood I would have taken. It was twilight when I left, slipping through the building's shadows to the garden beside the kitchen. Daniel had managed, as promised, to have the delivery gate unlocked. The town had grown around the convent and its graying sisters and so I immediately found myself in an alleyway. Daniel had directed me to turn left from the delivery gate to the street that borders the back wall of the convent.

Once there, he found me and I almost gave my escape away with a startled cry when he took me by the elbow. I had only seen him the one time before and everything about his face, seen primarily through my tears, had been something of a haze. I could recall startling eyes colored like a heavy ground fog over a green pond. His mouth, too, I remembered as sensuous when kindness made it push forward. Other than that, he had been a blur, as much by his intent, I now think, as from the near hysterics I found myself in. Now, only a few days later, he looked a complete stranger and nearly old enough to be his own father!

This was the first trick he taught me—how to disguise the bloom of my youth and appear as a middle-aged woman. He wasted no time in delivering the



lesson. From the street, he pulled me into another alley a few buildings down. There, among the trash lining the buildings, he had stashed a cheap lady's long coat and bonnet. They had the slight smell of fish despite the paper he had wrapped them in. I know I must have wrinkled my nose at them because he cleared his throat in a way that told me I was to put them on right then and without the slightest hint of objection.

It would take pages to list how much hell Daniel would have caught from me a mere week before, but I was meek from the need to escape. And I was ridiculously confident despite Christophe's betrayal that, in a final accounting, I would be the one pulling Daniel's strings. But, right then, all I could do was put the coat and bonnet on to disguise my appearance and let him pull me to the opposite end of the alley with the warning to keep my head down.

He had rented a carriage, equally cheap, and I dare say Daniel's admonition not to look up was hardly needed. With the evening's shadow growing and the plain covering of my clothes, I don't think the driver gave me half a glance, let alone a second look. Yet it was not the details the driver might notice, but the discrepancies that Daniel worried over. For I had entered the cab a young woman and would leave it bent from decades that had passed in less than an hour!

This trick was accomplished by the contents of a suitcase Daniel had stored in the waiting carriage. Once we were inside, he pulled the curtains shut and forced me onto the seat next to him. I almost screamed again as he told me to undress. He sensed as much and clapped a hand over my mouth before he reached into the case and withdrew a secondhand dress and shoes.

Daniel helped me to disrobe, his nimble fingers finding and then ignoring the many little spots on my dress and person where I had hidden the last of my jewelry. How thorough he was as we bumped along the road—discovering them faster than I could think where the next one was. And then, when I was down to my under dress, he pulled me onto his lap!

"Are there any other pockets I need to search?"

I wish I could say that his breath, warm against my neck, repulsed me or that I thought him as beastly as Christophe and every other man I'd encountered. I certainly no longer trusted my instincts—but I wanted his search to continue. There on his lap, I could not put out of my head how he had embraced me on the day of my defeat. How could I forget? I had been naked, helpless and covered with filth, but he had offered comfort and acceptance.

And Satan's own bargain. I couldn't forget that either and so I managed to answer with a shaky, "You would not dare!"

"Tonight? You are quite right, Veronique."

He whispered my name as if the driver would hear it above the rattle of the carriage and the sound of the horses' hooves hitting the paving stones.

Just as quickly, he had me off his lap and was pulling the top dress down over my head. He fixed the binding in the dark far better than I would have in full daylight and then shoved the shoes onto my feet.

"Stones!" I hissed the word and tried to pull my foot out, but he held it by the ankle.

"They stay in, Ver—" He cut himself short. "What is your middle name?"

"Yseult." I was trying to twist my foot away and he gave it a sharp jerk, not hard enough to injure me but still hard.

"Fair you are," he answered and released my foot. "But it won't do calling you Yseult."

From his tone, I imagined him there in the dark with his lips pursed in appreciation. Now, two months later, I know he does not give his thoughts away, even in the dark! Still, I imagined it so right then and almost forgave him the oversized shoe with its painful little stones.

"What shall I answer to, then?" I asked, letting my voice soften to match his.

"Amelie, I think."

Even though I could not see him, I guessed where his head was from the direction of his voice. Somehow, I gave my intent away because he caught my

hand by the wrist before it could connect with his cheek. He is like a cat in this way. Nothing around him moves without his knowing it.

“Amelie is what you would name your daughter if you wanted her to marry a pig farmer.” The words came out with a high snap that might well have caught the driver’s attention if we hadn’t been passing another carriage. “You intend to have me eating and drinking with pigs?”

“Amelie,” he said and pulled me, protesting this time, back onto his lap. “I warned you already that pigs will eat and drink *from you*. How else will we get them to tell you their secrets?”

Though his answer came in a whisper, there was no mistaking the seriousness of his reply. He would leave me on the streets if I could not obey or if my actions would otherwise give him away. It was plain in the way he held me, his hands like cuffs around my wrists, his chest hard against my back and the sharp jut of his chin against the curve of my neck.

I forced myself to relax and he gave me a soft grunt of approval. It would be weeks before he gave me half so much genuine praise again. With the argument over, he sprinkled talcum in my hair to give it an aged appearance and then reached up under my skirt to tighten the waist of my under dress.

“Why?” He had drawn the strings so tight that I could barely breathe and had to tilt my torso slightly forward to find enough air to ask my question.

“Same as the stones,” he said and began stuffing my dress from the convent into the case.

When we stopped a few minutes later in front of an inn, I emerged a woman equal in age to the husband she traveled with. We were both slightly bent-back, though he did not walk with the same appearance of a bad hip that the stones produced in my gait. His hands, however, had the appearance that they were swollen with bursitis. In the light of the inn, I never would have believed those hands had held me with an iron grip back in the carriage. Just as I would not have believed that the warble of his voice issued from the same throat that had thrilled me in the dark with just a few words.

As for my own voice (and manner of speech), that was cured easily enough. Every time I started to say something, he cut me off with a glance or a word. Until I could master the most basic level of disguising my voice, it was clear that he wanted me to be silent.

And that is how we traveled through France. At the inn, we had dinner and took a room for the night—appearing to arrive rather than to be in the act of fleeing. We took our time leaving, too. Daniel even stopped to chat with the police as they quizzed the inn keeper on my disappearance.

“Probably long gone by now,” the inn keeper had said.

Standing next to Daniel, I had to bite back a nervous laugh. Indeed, the man was right. I was no more than a foot from him, but almost twenty years removed.

It was a disguise as effective as it was exhausting. Even in the relative comfort of a crowded carriage, the stones in my shoe and the tight binding of my under dress left me near tears by the time we stopped at night. Of course, my being in a tearful, hysteric state was not what Daniel wanted and he did his best each night to work the kinks from my body.

The first three nights on the road, I was too tired to protest this unexpected kindness. I let him remove the offending shoe and strip the outer dress away. I leaned against him as he loosened the binding and then let him guide me onto the lumpy mattress we’d pass the night sleeping on. Kneeling in front of me on the floor, he would peel my stockings away and begin rubbing my ankles and calves. When he flipped me onto my stomach and massaged my hips and lower back, I was as obedient as a milk cow. (Though Daniel disclaims there being any such thing! He says it shows how sheltered I have been to think cows tame.)

As I said, the first three nights I let this treatment pass unremarked upon, unprotested. On the fourth night, there was enough energy in me, and enough distance passed between our lodgings and the convent, that I became disagreeable. (Again, I am sure Daniel would label my behavior more strongly were he of a mind to talk about most of the things that pass between us.)

On this fourth night, I pulled away from him and retreated to the room's small chest of drawers. I pulled the combs from my hair, watching him through the cracked mirror atop the dresser. His face was impassive. Washed of the light cake he used during the day to give the impression of wrinkles, the smooth planes of his face made a bold dare for anyone to remember his features. Even his green-gray eyes seemed muted as he watched me. But I knew there was so much more to that face and gaze. I had seen him play so many people already—whether by necessity or some attempt to either impress me or educate me.

A little of first and last, none of the second, I fear. That was what I thought, watching him. The thought hurt, though I felt it as anger. Would I ever see his true face and, if I did, would I recognize it? The question, running through my mind, hardened me against him. When he came a second time to assist me, I pulled further down the dresser's short length.

Daniel put his hand on the far corner edge, trapping me and pushing me forward with the weight of his body until I could feel the front lip of the dresser digging through my clothes to press against my hips. "I see you want a new lesson, Amelie."

Ugh! That name. I tensed against him, felt the vague press of his erection through the layers of fabric. Christophe came to mind, and I closed my eyes against the question of whether, like Christophe, Daniel could turn his arousal on and off at will. "I want nothing from you tonight," I answered, my gaze tracking a scratch along the dresser's surface. "I was trying, discreetly, to make that clear."

"*Want* was, perhaps, not the best word." He allowed himself a light chuckle, more to unnerve me, I think, than for any other reason. "And if I had sent you tonight to a man who would use you however he wished—with the instruction that you receive him..." he paused, blowing softly along the curve of my neck so that I curled into myself, "as if lust vibrated across every ounce of your flesh?"

I couldn't meet his gaze, not even in the mirror. Lust *was* shimmering across my skin. My nipples had tightened, the faint brush of their tips against

my dress a torment with each breath taken. The skin of my inner thighs was humid and growing slick from the pocket of moisture above. I wanted him, the need inexplicably centered deep in my chest and not just in the triangle of nipples and clit. What I didn't want was another dispassionate taking with my own passions out of control. I wanted, in short, an out—and he gave it to me.

“No.” He ended the word with a warm press of his lips against my neck, holding it for an instant before going on. “I think that lesson is beyond your skill.”

He pushed me forward at the waist, hard and fast so that my arms shot out and there was a *woomph* of air as my chest hit the wood surface. “We will work, instead, on a reluctant acceptance, I think.”

He wrapped his left hand through my hair, his forearm running down my spine and pinning me against the dresser. Bending to one side, he reached down with his right hand and scooped the skirt of my dress and my chemise up and over my hips, tucking them under his elbow to keep them in place.

He freed his cock, his pants brushing against the back of my thighs before falling to the floor. And then he was in me. No courtship of cock and cunt—just hard and swift and full inside. I brought my arms close to my head, one beneath my down-turned face so that I could bite into my flesh and disguise the nature of my moan.

Daniel let go of my hair and grabbed my hips with both hands. “Hiding works.”

Oh, that cool, detached voice! I struggled against him and he drove deeper, his fingertips digging into my sides and bottom. Already straining to accommodate his length despite my wetness, I thought him fully in me. My error butted against me at unplumbed depths. Where Christophe had been thick, Daniel was deliciously long. I stifled another groan even as my hips shot up to stroke him.

“Reluctance, remember, Amelie?” There was no smirk to his voice. He sounded, for all the world, like Monsieur Pichette correcting my singing pitch in practice.

I reached back, trying to claw at him. If I could not show him how reluctance looked, I would at least let him know what it felt like. “You soulless beast!”

He caught my hands, pulled my arms straight back so that I was forced to press my cheek against the wood while he used my arms to seat me more firmly on his shaft. “Good, if you find you must move against your partner, disguise it as anger.”

“I am furious!”

Daniel slowed, his grip on my wrists tightening as his hips began to move in shallow circles, the knob of his cock head massaging deep inside my cunt, reaching some untouched mass that had been waiting for his length and patience.

I broke into sobs as my climax hit me, tears streaming down my cheeks at this fresh defeat.

“You can always recover from a surrender,” he said when I finished contracting against him. His voice at last showed some small range of emotion, but I felt hollowed by it. A pleased music teacher—that was the equivalent of what my defeat had produced.

“An unwilling surrender can be quite...” he paused, still inside me, and ran a hand across the front of my thigh and down to my knee, gently forcing it to bend so that he could now reach and remove my shoe. He took the second one off before continuing his thought. “It can be quite enticing, Ver—Amelie.”

He stripped the rest of my clothing away before withdrawing from me and leading me to the bed. Docile I was as I watched him pull the bedding back and then let him guide me onto the mattress.

I looked up at him, saw his mask shift an infinitesimally small amount. “But you...you did not find your finish.”

“Nor will I,” he said, another almost invisible shift in his expression. “It would not do for you to become pregnant, Veron...” Stopping, he leaned back and drew the covers up to my chin. “Well, it just would not do. The more we can minimize the chance, the better.”

With that, he left me alone for the night, sleeping on the room's small divan instead of in bed with me as he had done every night since my escape.

*October 15, 1787*

We have moved twice since coming to London. Daniel has pronounced me sufficiently English and now calls me Emily. It is the same in meaning as Amelie, is it not?

We are still brother and sister, or at least the family I lodge with believes us to be so. Daniel lodges separately, more in the city's center. Closer, he says, to this Lord Tolleson he has targeted. He visits me but a few times a week, checking my progress, making sure that the Starling family is keeping me properly demure.

Demure! I thought all of the Puritans had left England for America! I wish they had. It is true that the Starlings, though plainly clothed, do not wear the dress of that sect. And with eleven children in the household, I am not tasked with more than keeping my own quarters tidy. But the severity of their minds! I would have found more enjoyment with those gray sisters of the convent—knowing some of their tastes.

So, yes, he finds a proper Emily with each visit. Nor do I seek to rile or goad him on his visits. The strain of this Tolleson is all too evident despite our passing most of our visits with one of the family members present in the room.

And yet, the strain should not be evident. I know Daniel well enough, I think, to be certain he could take ten lashes across his back and not drop his smile for one second. Does he seek to manipulate me? To make me jealous? Yes, jealous, for I fear his relationship with Tolleson is sexual in nature. Perhaps he seeks to warn me of how dangerous this ruse may become. Could he not just tell me in those precious moments when we are alone in the garden or strolling through town?

*October 18, 1787*



A plain little gown arrived today, fit for a lawn party if one is not ashamed to attend as a pauper. It did not come without warning. Daniel, having visited yesterday, told me I was to attend such a party at Tolleson's estate and that a woman, a chaperone provided by Tolleson, would escort me.

For, outside this house, we no longer are to play at being brother and sister. I am to be his intended—the object of his heart just as he is the object of Tolleson's darker passions. I am, then, to be Tolleson's rival and Daniel has warned me that the man will do all he can to ruin me.

Hah! If he only knew, this little English lord, that he is too late.

October 21, 1787

I write by candlelight, glad, for once, to be safely back in my dull lodgings following two days of intrigue. The woman, an elderly Lady Hardbraith, arrived by carriage late yesterday morning. I knew her nature immediately, having used such *accommodation* chaperones myself. These false scions of propriety rent out their cloaks of respectability to bring lecherous old men some fresh flower with no one the wiser, though few are actually titled as Lady Hardbraith is.

When I arrived, lunch and lawn games in what passes for a garden in England were already under way. *Hardbreath*—so I took to calling her because she is at least seventy if not a full five score and rattles like a tea kettle at low steam—sternly bid me stay by her side and I played at being the ever-obedient Emily. Daniel, always at a distance, would glance my way, a look of puppy love crossing his face.

Ah, I knew it a sham and still it affected me. It had been so long since we traveled as a couple, since he played more than a protective and proper brother. Seeing that look, I felt hopeful and then hurt, and began to avoid looking upon him whenever I thought his attention might return to me.

Tolleson, what can I say about him? He is a small bear. Hairy in a most disgusting way. Pot bellied. He has a false, booming laugh. Each time it erupted from him, I expected his gut to escape the confines of his clothes. He

eats as if his face is buried between a whore's legs, gnawing left and right, coming up for air with his lips and chin moist from the feast. It was all I could do to achieve a lowborn air of gratefulness at his invitation when Daniel (who is known to Tolleson as *Tobias* or *Toby*) at last introduced me.

To my surprise, Tolleson insisted I stay for the evening dinner. What's more, Lady Hardbreath had already sent a note to the family I lodge with, both she and Tolleson being led by Daniel to believe that I am one of their large brood.

I was given a room to rest in and a drab little gown without a hint of ribbon or lace was brought to my room along with shoes and dulled silver combs. I wanted to ask the maid if her lord was as poor as I, not because I thought him so, but from sheer spite! The man was trying to turn me into an ugly little mouse.

Dinner was as distasteful as lunch—cooking being yet another thing the English have no skill at. But if only it had been the food alone that was disagreeable. Poor Emily! Were she real, even I would have felt pity for her. Lord Tolleson spoke to me often, asking questions he knew a girl like Emily would have no answer for and making sly jests I pretended not to understand.

The company he keeps is equally boorish. Ooh, to have to keep that facile, sometimes pained (though genuinely so!) expression through dinner when I so longed—nay seethed—with the need to relax in my chair and decimate them with a French wit they could not hope to match any better than Emily could have stood against them.

And that is what I kept reminding myself the whole dinner through. I was not, am not and never shall be *that* creature. Yet, Daniel's every glance told me I was, and that no matter how plain or dumb his Emily might be, she was his jewel.

I could not know what effect, if any, Daniel intended to have on me, but he scored with Tolleson. The man grew more belligerent, more abusive as dinner turned to drinks and Daniel finally insisted, much to Tolleson's shock, that a carriage be summoned for my journey home.

Hardbreath, however, protested that it was too late for her to travel with me and she had advised my parents in her note that she would see to my lodgings for the night. At least I was allowed to retire then. I put a chair against my bedroom door only to find a few hours later that my chaperone would share the room, and the bed, for the night.

How to describe the night that passed? When we are rid of this charade, I shall throttle Daniel, if not leave him altogether! Having to wear yesterday's lawn dress the next morning, those damnable little looks he showered me with for Tolleson's benefit and sleeping with a tea kettle! It was like a death brought on by a thousand pricks of a dull needle. Give me one sharp stab, I say. There is honor in that, or at least a quick end.

November 2, 1787

It seems that things are progressing faster with Tolleson than Daniel could have hoped. This *could have hoped* almost troubles me, for surely it is plain to Daniel that Tolleson has no impulse control. He explained that he did not anticipate quite the effect I would have on the man.

It would account for, at least, the dress that arrived yesterday at my lodgings. Far finer than Tolleson's last care package, it is a polished silk evening gown in a gray-green that perfectly matches Daniel's eyes. Odder still, I am to attend the man's next soiree without a chaperone. He believes, you see, that Daniel and I shall be married within two weeks' time.

All of this and more Daniel told me as we walked through the street market near my lodgings. One of my "little sisters" was near, as always, but Daniel pointed out another member of our party—one of Tolleson's grooms. It seems Little Bear (as I had dubbed Tolleson) had made Daniel the manservant's sole duty.

"Do give a little sneeze, Emily," he had requested after discreetly pointing the man out.

Turning my head away from him, I released a constrained *aachoo* into my hand. Accepting his offer of a handkerchief, I palmed the small disk it concealed, knowing its purpose by its shape and size.

“He must think you a virgin if he is intent on ruining you.” He studied a stall loaded with bread.

“I know what to do,” I assured him and returned the handkerchief. He pocketed it, his mouth quirking forward as if there was more he would say.

“What?”

“His appetites...you might find Christophe tame by comparison.” He turned, his eyes as bright as any young lover’s would be. “I would not ask you to endure this if I could otherwise keep his trust and company.”

And now to my shame and pleasure, I must confess, if only to myself—in writing this, I have become wet with anticipation.

November 8, 1787

It drives me insane, wondering at the secrets that must be swimming through his head while he sits there so calmly, drinking his tea and writing letters to secure our passage to Italy. (Oh, such a reward to leave England this time of year, though he warns me we go straight to work upon our arrival.)

Looking at him now, I want to tackle him to the floor and do whatever it takes for him to tell me something, to let more slip on our next adventure than the tantalizing morsel he offered me before he left our rooms earlier this evening. I am truly starving with the need to know! Daniel is more than aware of my agitation, too, offering me a pointedly tight-lipped grin when I lose myself staring at him.

But I get ahead of myself and it is best not to dwell on what I cannot (yet!) have. Better to record the events of the last few days.

There is no doubt in my mind that Lord Tolleson (*Arthur* as the night progressed) meant the dinner at his London apartments to be a nightmarish prelude for Emily to the evening he had planned. He had Daniel and me sitting

like bookends next to his place at the head of the table. Lady Hardbreath was given the honor of sitting at the far end opposite Tolleson.

Touching my arm, he would call down to her as each course was served, “Should I send your young charge down to sit by you?”

And she would whistle back up the table, mouth half full of the course the servants were carting away, “Oh, I should not task myself with trying to guard *that* girl’s honor!”

How I shrank from each touch and crude jest he peppered the evening with. I cast worried glances at Daniel. I looked, even, to the other guests for rescue. All but Daniel, looking equally helpless, returned my silent pleas with a smirk. Even the women attending were too like the men who had accepted Christophe’s invitation to my ruin, and their smug glee at my plight only set my will against Tolleson. Whatever Daniel sought from Tolleson, we *would* win it.

When he should have been leading his guests from the dinner table and into the sitting room beyond, Tolleson placed his hands on our wrists, squeezing down so that Daniel and I would not rise from our chairs.

“The rest of you leave,” he told his guests, his gaze fixed hard on my face. “I would spend the evening’s remains...toasting our soon to be newlywed couple.”

There were a few disappointed sounds and a lot of chairs shuffled without anyone actually leaving. More than a minute must have passed, Tolleson’s face growing redder with each passing second before one couple spoke their disappointment in unison, “We expected a longer theater, Tolly.”

Ah, how exact their expressions matched my memory of those others so many months ago. Had I ever been so cruel? Even with Gabrielle?

Surely I hadn’t and, at the whisper of her name through my mind, I jerked my hand from Tolleson. There was a pleased gasp from his audience of friends and then he slapped me across the face.

Daniel jumped up, his hand only lightly staying the possibility of another blow. “Arthur!” Voice low, he pleaded with Tolleson. “You said dinner, no more—not *this!*”

"You are no one in London if you leave now." Tolleson growled his threat at Daniel. No one had moved from the table and he jumped up, slamming his fists on its surface. "Go, now!"

He picked a wine glass up and threw it the length of the table. The glass shattered in front of the trembling Lady Hardbreath. In pairs they left, the last couple cupping the old woman's elbow and ushering her from the room. She left, her parting whine doddering after her. "But I wanted to stay and watch."

Seeing them go, I realized that I had, at last, found the one thing in which the English are true peers to the French—the measure of their depravity.

Tolleson turned to me once the room was drained of his guests. "I'm not a rapist, girl."

I tried to look reassured and he laughed, his spittle bouncing along my cheek.

"What I mean is, before I fuck you, you will be moaning for it like the lowborn whore I know you to be."

*Highborn whore, the inaccurate bastard!* But the less he gleaned, the better. I tried to run from the table and he sent Daniel to fetch me.

He murmured to me, high enough that Tolleson could not fail to hear him. "No fear, love. I will not let him hurt you."

I reached up, touched my still stinging cheek and glared my accusation at him. Our performance was rewarded with one of Tolleson's belly laughs.

"Sit the girl down, Toby," he ordered.

Daniel took me to a small padded bench alongside the wall. He sat down next to me, his body turned sideways to face me. He smoothed my hair and murmured comforting sounds, but said nothing. Tolleson came over and shoved a glass of wine beneath my nose.

"Drink it."

I pressed my body flat against the wall, let my nervous gaze skitter across his gut and groin, his pot belly not so large that it obscured his erection.

"Drink it," he ordered again.

Daniel took the wine from him, kissing my cheek as he pressed the rim of the glass to my lips. "Just a drink or two and we can go, love," he promised.

The bench was too small for Tolleson to join us and so he moved behind where Daniel sat facing me. He stroked Daniel's pale blond hair, the gesture proprietary and completely unlike the comfort Daniel had tried to show me seconds before. "Do not make promises you have no intention of keeping, Toby."

"Tobias, please!" I turned my head so quickly that my lips brushed Daniel's. He dropped the glass, spilling the wine onto my dress as he grabbed my head, holding me in place so that our lips remained touching in something less than a kiss.

"That is right!" Tolleson slapped Daniel on the back. "Never marry a girl you have not fucked, Toby. That is my motto." Tolleson stroked his gut before giving Daniel's shoulder a friendly jab. "Of course...never marry one you have, for that matter."

Daniel stayed silent, his lips warming against mine as we hovered at the threshold of that kiss. I cannot adequately describe the effect he was having on me. Tolleson no longer existed in my mind. His uncultured voice was an annoying buzz in my ears. It wasn't that Daniel and I hadn't kissed before. We had played many different roles since my rescue from the convent. And, this, I knew, was just another role. But it had been so long since any heavy pretense of carnal affection had passed between us. I was primed to surrender and Daniel knew it. Hell, even Tolleson sensed it and stopped goading me closer to my downfall.

"If I kiss you," Daniel stated quietly, "will you stay another drink?"

I grabbed the front of his jacket, twisted my hands in it. "Please, Tobias, take me home."

"One little drink." A whisper of a command, he spoke it a hair's breadth from my mouth. "Without tears."

I nodded, my movements shallow and my eyes shut tight.

“Not in here.” Tolleson grabbed another glass and the wine bottle, jerking his head in the direction of the sitting room as he marched past us.

With Tolleson already in the next room, Daniel gave my hand a brief squeeze. It was almost too brief for me to notice it, I was that lost in contemplation of the kiss he had promised.

Together, they sat me on the divan, one on each side of me. I cringed away from Tolleson and pressed close to Daniel. Tolleson overfilled the glass. Some of the wine sloshed onto my already wet gown and the divan’s cushion. He patted at both, his hand staying in my lap as he passed the glass over to Daniel.

“Take it, Emily.” Daniel cocked his head to the side, kissing my ear as I obeyed. With my first sip, he moved down to the curve of my jaw, his lips playing at its edge.

My hold on the glass faltered, more wine spilling only to be refilled by Tolleson. “No cheating, our Emily.”

I could feel the skin along my back and breasts crawl at his possessive intonation and I turned into Daniel, our lips meeting again. This time Tolleson took the glass from my increasingly limp grip before I could spill any more wine.

I opened my mouth to Daniel, moving up to meet him with a needy whimper. He cupped my breast as he kissed me, his touch blotting out Tolleson’s humid breath against the back of my neck. Inside my mouth, Daniel’s tongue stopped its sensuous dance and I took it as a cue to slow down. I stilled and wrapped my arms around myself in a frightened hug though I didn’t move to break the kiss.

Daniel pulled away, his hands on my shoulders as he stared beyond me at Tolleson. “The servants, Arthur.”

“You should trust to their discretion by now,” Tolleson answered as he gathered up the skirts to my gown.

I tried to scamper away but Daniel was a stone wall before me. Still not looking at me, he placed a hand over Tolleson’s. “I will not trust to their discretion in this.”



Tolleson pulled his hand away, hesitating before he went to the door and called his manservant. Within a few minutes the man was ushering another three servants out the door before following behind them. Tolleson locked the door and returned to the divan, his expression showing no sign of Daniel's growing power over him. But his acquiescence, I knew, was the first chink in his armor. Such is the pattern of many seductions, the seducer appearing, at first, to be the weaker of the two. Never before had Daniel been with Tolleson when the man was without either his servants or cronies in the house.

Daniel took the wine glass from where Tolleson had placed it and offered it to me again. "You have not finished it, love."

He did not let me sip at it. Instead, he tilted my head back, pouring the wine down my throat just slowly enough that I could swallow without gagging. I coughed when he took the glass away and he brought his hand to my chest, rubbing his palm over the flesh the gifted dress left exposed.

"I know, love, but you will be glad of the brace later." Always Daniel's whispers were just loud enough for Tolleson to hear if he strained.

Daniel dropped his hand diagonally to cover my breast, still hidden from his view by my gown. I could feel Tolleson's hand next to his and I pressed harder against Daniel's hand until the flesh of my breast began to strain against my corset. He took my mouth in another kiss and I let his tongue set the pace of my body's reaction.

Such a fast and furious tongue he had! As dear, shy little Emily, I was soon pressing my whole body against my lover, even as I was sandwiched between him and the shaggy lord.

"I told you she was a whore, Toby," Tolleson gloated as my movements grew more frantic and my moans deepened.

I made an indignant slap at Tolleson and he caught my hand. He found the other and pulled my arms back so that I was jutting forward in Daniel's direction in a wanton's fashion.

"A whore and her pimp, dearie." Tolleson punctuated his taunt with a swipe of his thick tongue against my neck.

I wanted to vomit as I imagined the snail's trail of slime he had just left. I struggled, the fight intensifying after he ordered Daniel to lift my skirts.

"No, wait. Before your bride-to-be is splayed naked in front of you...why don't you strip, Toby? It is only fair, yes?"

Daniel pulled back, his expression darkening. He glanced over his shoulder at a closed door. The bedroom, I guessed, when he spoke a second later.

"Not here."

"You have nothing to barter with, boy." Tolleson shook me as he spoke, but Daniel stayed firm.

"Not here."

Tolleson growled but let go of me. He went to the door and took a key from his pocket. I was half tempted to believe the whole point to the evening was to gain access to this locked room. It was a silly thought. Daniel needed no key—he needed an excuse for Tolleson to have him there alone.

With the door opened, Tolleson remained within the sitting room. Daniel rose from the divan and entered the bedroom, quickly moving beyond where I could see him. I remained seated, my hands nervously clenching the back of the divan until Daniel called out softly to me.

"Would you stay out there, with *him*?"

As Emily, that was threat enough to get me up and moving!

Breaching the room's threshold, I faltered. Daniel was stretched out on the bed, already naked. His long cock, limp, nestled atop the thick, darker blond fur of his sex. From there, spread out in a rough splatter, were bruises, old and new. Some of them had been left by a fat, meaty fist; others had the shape of the club. Tolleson, breathing down my neck, made it clear whose fist had landed the blows.

"Behave and you need not leave so bruised." He pushed me further into the room before shutting and securing the door behind him.

"Toby?" At the sight of the bruises, my nerves began to fray and I feared I would soon call him by the wrong name.

He moved to the edge of the bed, reaching up to place a fingertip against my lips. Behind me, Tolleson pulled my dress and chemise up.

“Hold her shoulders.”

Daniel looked around me to where Tolleson stood. “She is not ready, I tell you.”

A harsh laugh erupted from Tolleson and he pushed me forward so that I had to catch myself on the mattress with an arm to each side of Daniel.

“Her readiness is just the fact I seek to ascertain, Toby boy. Now hold her!”

Daniel obeyed, his reluctance scratched across his face, and grabbed me by the elbows. Tolleson’s finger invaded my sex and I clamped down at the same time I cried out. I felt the disk I had lodged inside earlier that morning press against the softer tissues of my cunt and froze. I sped my breathing up as if in pain, leaving it to Tolleson to decide if I was a terrified virgin or a calculating whore.

“Not quite the cockmonger I suspected,” he said at last and slipped his finger from me. He slapped my ass, the weight of his blow making me collapse on Daniel, who curled his arms around me and rolled until my back was against the mattress.

“How to begi—”

Before Tolleson could finish his question, Daniel thrust into me and I screamed on cue as he pinched the underside of my arm. That Daniel had just denied him by “deflowering” me enraged Tolleson and he brought his fist down on Daniel’s skull.

I curled my arms around Daniel’s head, shielding him, but he shook my protection away. “It is not something she would have given you,” Daniel told him through pressed lips.

Tolleson unclenched his fist, letting it fall to his side. His face wound in on itself, making Tolleson look more pig than bear with his petulant anger. “Pretty lie—how far do you think it will carry you through your marriage?”

Daniel shot a hard look in Tolleson’s direction, his chest puffing up at the older man’s question.

“Hah, boy. Don’t go all indignant on me,” Tolleson wheezed as he fell onto the mattress. He curled one hand on the crown of my head, as if he forgave me Daniel’s betrayal, and then he kissed my temple with lips that can best be described as soggy. “I still intend to fuck the both of you before the night is through.”

“Now, Emily.” He thumbed my temple as he spoke, his gaze keen on my expression. “You are officially ruined. Might as well start to enjoy it.”

At this point, I knew I was to become ill and momentarily leave the room for the main privy chamber where I could remove the disk. I took a discreet but full breath, drawing in all of Tolleson’s odor. To say his stink was overwhelming would be an understatement. Immediately, I began to gag and Daniel pulled from me, leaving me free to flee the room. I heard Tolleson start behind me, but Daniel coaxed him back to the bed.

I was not prepared, when I returned a few minutes later, to find just how Daniel had coaxed him back. Daniel’s head was buried in Tolleson’s lap, Tolleson now as naked as his lover. Each man was focused on the act, though I would guess Daniel heard and tracked my progress from the privy to the bedroom’s threshold. I stopped there, watching him. He was on his knees, Tolleson perched in front of him at the edge of the mattress. His back was to me, flexed as he curled over Tolleson’s lap.

I had seen Daniel naked, of course. We had changed in front of one another, usually at too hurried a pace to steal any evaluative glimpses. Dressed, he could appear broad or stooped shoulder, narrow or full. These past few weeks questing after whatever prize Tolleson had hidden, Daniel had made himself appear younger and slighter framed. Naked, the gold glow of candlelight across his back, he couldn’t hide the sinewy strength of his lean, efficient body.

My hand dropped between my breasts just as Tolleson caught me watching their exchange. He pushed against Daniel’s head like he was shooing at a pet.

“Bring her closer.”

Daniel rose and crossed the room. I let my eyes travel over his body with open appreciation. It was expected of Emily and it was what I wanted to do. Adding some plumpness to its considerable length, his cock was slightly swollen but not yet erect. It hung between his lean but sculpted thighs. Above, a faint ladder of hair climbed from his cock to his navel. A ripple of muscle led up to the smooth, hairless planes of his chest. That was the measure of Daniel's body, just enough toned meat where it was needed to leave no question in my mind that the power to protect and thrill me rippled beneath the surface.

He stopped in front of me, placing his hands on my hips while he leaned forward and kissed me. I rested my breasts and hips against him, let him support my weight as his hands moved up my body. He gripped me gently by the elbow and then at the wrist. He turned, ready to lead me back to the bed and I saw that he was no longer only slightly swollen. I moaned, swaying towards him so that he had to adjust his hold into something that was half hug. I buried my face against his neck and placed my palm against his flat stomach where I could feel the bob of his cock head as we walked to the bed. Would he realize, I wondered, that the enamored girl in front of him wasn't merely my attempt at playing Emily to his Tobias?

He stopped a few feet from the bed and waited for Tolleson, who had watched our little procession with the smug superiority of one who has never surrendered to love.

"Strip her."

I moaned again, my hands traveling restlessly over my body to interfere with Daniel's attempt to undress me. He freed my breasts first and placed my hands over them that I might have something to twist and play with. My hips began to move of their own will, my body back in that room of mirrors when I had felt, if only for a moment, completely free.

With the last of my clothing gone, Tolleson motioned us closer to the bed. He brought my right foot up and placed it flat on the mattress. And then he did something I'd been waiting all night to see. He closed his fist and rubbed it

hard across his hairy chest for a few seconds before he leaned away to grab a flask from the bedside table. With his head turned from me, I watched for other signs that his heart was starting to pain him. But he only took a long pull of alcohol and then blew out as the whisky warmed his throat and chest. Tossing the flask on the mattress, he pronounced himself ready.

Tolleson reached between my legs, placing the pad of his thumbs on each side of the top split of my lips. Teasingly, he worked the lips apart. I was surprised, and pleased, that he had any technique. As he slowly moved lower, the sides of his thumbs stroked my clit, rolling and pinching the stiff spine until he came to the thick pearl drop and its hood of flesh. I arched against Daniel, felt his lips at my throat as I shuddered against both men.

From behind me, Daniel cupped my breasts, their bottom curves filling his hands as his thumbs and forefingers strained up to tug at my nipples. Tolleson used his foot to urge Daniel into a wider stance and then reached beneath my bottom to grab Daniel's erection and guide it into me. My left leg, tasked with holding my weight this whole time, trembled and then began a slow buckle, so that I was supported mostly by Daniel's hands against my breasts and the length of his cock within me.

Seeing my collapse, Tolleson nodded like a pleased school boy and grabbed my left foot, forcing it onto the bed in the same fashion as my right foot. Now I was spread before him, my lips open and cunt on full display with its tissues swollen around Daniel's shaft. He rubbed at my clit again, pinching and rolling it, stroking its length with a hard press. The bed as my brace, I tightened around Daniel's cock, sliding up and down half his length with short, desperate thrusts. Just as my climax was ready to crash against me, Tolleson rose and slapped my face again.

The blow was lighter than the one he had dealt me at the dinner table, enough to rein in, but not diminish, my arousal. Looking at his face, that seemed to be his intent, the slap merely being an efficient means of stopping my climax.

“Do you remember,” he asked, standing between my spread legs. “Do you remember what got you so hot standing in the doorway, spying on us?”

Taking a thick swallow, I nodded.

He made a slow show of pushing one and then the other of my feet from the mattress. After he sat back down, he pointed at the floor with the same sense of theatrics. “Both of you, now.”

Daniel eased from me. With his hand on my shoulder, he guided me onto my knees. Tolleson wrapped his big hands around my head and pulled my face down to his crotch. My hands on the mattress, I tried to push away in pretense, but Daniel was there to make sure I complied. One hand on my back, he rubbed at my tensed shoulder muscles while his other hand slid between my legs. He ran the pad of his thumb around the entrance to my cunt while two of his fingers stroked the engorged spine of my clit.

Tolleson watched Daniel tease me for a few seconds, one brow up in appreciation before he tugged me forward again.

“Match his strokes, our Emily, and, after I come, Toby and I will both tend to that pretty little pussy again.”

I nodded, relaxing my gaze and pulling my lips into my mouth to wet them. Tolleson’s cock twitched and he edged his hips forward.

“Yes, start at the tip...that is how you begin, our...Emily.” He released one side of my head to find the flask and take another long pull. He rubbed at his chest again, completely releasing my head and I left the tip of his erection to press my cheek against his fleshy thigh.

“Please.” I rubbed my cheek on his thigh and pressed the flat of my tongue against his balls, licking him as I nuzzled. Another lick, another mewling plea.

“Please, what?”

This time I ran the flat of my tongue against his shaft, impatiently wiggling my hips against Daniel’s strokes. “More, inside me.”

“Fuck—” The word left him in a shudder as I ran another swipe of my tongue over his erection. He leaned back, dragging me by the hair so that my mouth was once again at the tip of his erection. “No. Me. Now.”

I sucked the top bulb into my mouth and then released it with a wet pop. "Please." I covered the tip with my mouth again, teasing the small opening with my tongue while I suctioned the rest of the head tight. He quivered. His thighs tensed, I could tell, in an effort to stop his climax.

"God, give it to her, Toby!"

Daniel teased his way into me, the shallow swivels and short pumps a silent instruction on how I should similarly tease Tolleson. But I was a far cry from mastering his self-control! I followed Daniel's pace for a few minutes, wincing with need and running the erratic full stroke of my lips over Tolleson's cock. Tolleson would shudder, just another deep dive of my tongue and lips away from coming. The harder press of Daniel's fingertips against my hips would call me back, reminding me that we needed Tolleson's utter exhaustion for our plan to work.

"Please," I cried out and straightened my upper torso so that Tolleson was forced to follow the pleasure of my tongue until he was standing in front of me. "Let me lick and suck you as I would. My mouth knows all that is needed." I would go insane, lose my sense of place and person, if Daniel continued to set the pace.

The way my body moved, Tolleson had no doubt I spoke the truth and he raised a shaking hand in Daniel's direction. "You, freeze!"

Daniel stilled, his body rock hard behind me, his cock immobilized for my pleasure.

That was what I wanted, to impale myself on his long rod—to gyrate, stroke and bounce myself to oblivion on Daniel even if pleasuring Tolleson must occupy my hands and mouth. I settled onto Daniel's length slowly, trailing my tongue down Tolleson's shaft as I went. Once Daniel was fully inside, I tightened around him and felt the head of his cock lodge once more against that mass of pleasure that had gone undiscovered before him. Holding him hard inside me, my lips descended over Tolleson's shorter shaft, easily bringing it inside my mouth while I firmly cupped his balls.



Squeezing both men, I started moving in slow circles, sliding a short distance upward before voraciously descending down to the base of their cocks. They moaned in unison and then Tolleson, no longer content to let either of us set the pace, grabbed my upper arms and held them hard above my head. Mouth and cunt, I quivered around them, teetering along the edge of my own climax.

Daniel wrapped his hands around the sides of my hips and dragged me back a few inches until I was held like a taut string between the two men. Tolleson was bent over me as he held my arms, his cock aligned with the angle of my throat. I spread my legs and locked my heels behind Daniel as he slid his grip further forward on my hips to support my weight. Tolleson and Daniel began to rock back and forth, seesawing my willing body on their cocks.

From the waist down, I trembled, my body shaking not from the strain, but from the ecstasy. I could feel Daniel growing thick, feel the pulse of blood through his cock as if it were my own heart beating. He had said he would not come in me, but I willed him to now. I wanted him to baptize me into this new life, this partnership of ours. I wanted him to surrender, if only for this one time.

Both men moved faster. Tolleson tugged me up only to be matched by Daniel slamming me back down, our bodies slapping against one another with the force. All the while, my climax kept building with the stroke of Daniel deep inside my cunt against that sweet spot.

I realized my cheeks were wet, that I was crying as my pending release swirled inside me. I closed my eyes, surrendering the last of my control as I felt both men swell. Cum shot into me and I convulsed at both ends, greedy for every last drop they offered but still not finding my own release. Tolleson finished first, dropping my arms and collapsing back onto the mattress.

Daniel caught me, one arm hard against my stomach, the other diagonal across my chest with his hand on my shoulder. He wound around me, the last of his cum pumping into me. I felt his mouth at the joining point of my neck

and shoulder and then his teeth pressed against my flesh to trigger my own screaming climax.

I went deaf for a second. Blind, too, I imagine, but my eyes were pressed shut. When sound returned, I could hear Tolleson muttering something from the bed as Daniel eased me into a sitting position on the floor.

“Are you done with her?” The question was imperious, but weak. I could hear him breathing hard, the air leaving him in a wheeze.

Daniel looked up to where Tolleson lay in front of me, something of a glare showing in his gray-green eyes. “What?”

“Fetch me my powders, boy.”

The command made my heart glad. The powders did far more than calm Tolleson’s heart, so Daniel had told me. They would put the man into a deep, but natural seeming, sleep—at least they would when the servants were out and Daniel had to fix it for him.

Daniel left the room, the sound of his footsteps receding to the far end of the apartment. Tolleson’s hand flopped alongside the mattress, motioning me up.

“Keep me company, girl.”

I crawled up and stretched along side him and hid my face in my hand. Now that my sexual appetite had been sated, Tolleson had warped back to a foul-odored carpet of hair. Foul mannered, too! He reached between my legs and pushed his fingers past the seal of my lower lips.

“You are dripping cum, Emily,” he said with a dirty little snicker. “Do you like it?”

“Please...do not ask me that.” I covered my face completely with my hand, hiding from the smell and not his question.

He laughed and then brought his hand, wet with my juices and Daniel’s cum, to his chest. “You love it,” he wheezed and then gave my shoulder a friendly squeeze. “The best whores do.”

Sure that Emily would want to recover her earlier propriety, I tensed against him. Daniel reentered the room then, carrying a tray with two glasses

of different colored liquids. Tolleson made me help him into a sitting position. When I had his pillows propped, he pulled me to him and then took the glass of chalky white liquid Daniel offered him.

Tolleson chugged the drink down, his mouth pulling back in a bitter wince as he passed the glass back to Daniel.

"This one is sweeter." Daniel offered him a glass filled with a pale green liquid. "I promise."

Tolleson eyed him distrustfully, but took the glass, drinking it at a slower pace. "Teach Cora to make it this way," he said.

At the mention of Tolleson's maid, Daniel wrinkled his nose, his voice almost catty as he spoke. "Cora is too dumb to follow the instructions." He took the glass back, dropping his gaze for an instant. "And you would not find my visits so necessary."

"Toby!" A shocked little gasp escaped me, one I hoped would convince Tolleson that I was upset. Daniel had been clear that he wanted me safely out of the bedroom before Tolleson's drug-induced slumber began to take hold. I sat up, shaking off Tolleson's weakening grip. "You intend to return?"

"Oh, Toby will most definitely return," Tolleson mumbled and rolled onto his side.

I scooped my clothes from the floor and pressed them to my breasts.

"So will you, our Emi..." He didn't finish, sleep shutting his mouth until the first puff of a snore parted his lips.

Daniel took me by the elbow and led me to the bedroom door where he whispered into my ear. "Dress and wait for me by the front door."

I watched him put his own clothes on as I fumbled with my chemise. He moved quietly, his eyes on the sleeping bear he'd drugged. When he finished, he looked up and motioned me further away from the door, the rustle of my silk dress visibly setting his teeth on edge.

I crossed the sitting room and changed in the hallway. How difficult it was to dress while he searched the room! My body was exhausted. Each sound I made seemed ten times louder than it could possibly be. I jumped at every

creak of the floor board while Daniel moved in utter silence! (I asked him later to teach me his trick and the beast said it was something a woman cannot learn. I cannot be sure he was teasing, either, or whether that is his true opinion. He can be so unreadable when he wishes it.)

When I finished dressing, I looked down at myself and choked on a laugh. It counted, I think, as the worst post-coitus dressing result I'd had to date. I stretched from where I stood, looking for Daniel's shadow in the bedroom. He was still searching and I set about straightening my clothing. Mindful that he might burst through the sitting room at any moment, either with his prize or Tolleson behind him and brandishing a weapon, I proceeded to restore my hair to some semblance of order.

And then, to help settle my nerves, I gave my dress another once over. Still no Daniel and I stepped into the sitting room only to have him pop his head around the door frame and nod me back into the hallway. I waited there until I was again jumping at every little sound. There, that noise—could it be the staff returning? The muffled bounce of a shutter against the window—could that be someone peaking in? We were on the third floor, but I did not discount the possibility.

Daniel found me like that, frozen in place as I strained to hear the nature of every little sound the building produced. He placed a finger against my lips, a warning for me to stay silent (such as my silence was). Making me stand next to the front door, he retrieved our outer coverings. I didn't notice that his jacket bulged until he took a small wooden box from it and slipped it into his outer pocket. Fishing back inside his jacket pocket, he pulled out a ring of slim iron rods bent at their ends and found one that fit the front door.

On the landing, he turned and relocked the door, securing Tolleson against any more thieves for the night and then we were free! Down two flights of stairs and into the night air we walked, keeping our pace unhurried. Hitting the street, we moved a little faster, still nothing more brisk than a couple might walk if they found themselves out in the city after dark.

A few blocks away, a carriage waited for us. Daniel helped me inside first, then slapped the top of the carriage as he entered to signal the driver. The carriage lurched forward and Daniel landed on the seat opposite me. I wasted no time switching seats so that I could sit next to him with my head on his shoulder as I patted the bulge in his pocket.

“Do I get to see?” I whispered in his ear.

“Not a chance.” He covered my hand, gave it a gentle squeeze and then placed it in my lap.

I put my hand back over the bulge and gave it a shake through the fabric. “It is a ring—I know that sound.”

“I bet you are very good at Christmas and your birthday, Emily.”

“So it is a ring?” I snuggled closer to him, surprised that he would allow the intimacy.

“No, but it was a good guess.”

“Liar—” I started and snaked my hand past the flap of his pocket.

“Are you sure,” he asked and caught my hand, “you gave me everything you needed from the Starlings?”

It was not possible for him to distract me that easily from my target, but I liked the weight of his hand over mine and so I let him think he had redirected my attention.

“You had my jewels already,” I answered. (I would add that I answered without reproach, though it took me weeks before I stopped worrying over whether I would wake one morning to realize he was gone and I was penniless). “And you said no clothes, not that I will miss Emily’s rags.”

“You might find yourself dressed in worse.” He nuzzled my ear, producing a small thrill along its edge and down my neck.

*Or dressed in nothing at all*, I thought and tried to shrug away the lingering sensation of his lips against my skin. “So, that leaves me with a few pamphlets by your English playwrights and my own scribblings.”

“Ah, yes, your journal.” There was a gurgle in his throat that I interpreted as a soft laugh he hadn’t managed to suppress completely and then he leaned his head back and quietly started whistling.

Recognizing the tune, I pounded my fist against his chest in dismay. “Not already, damn you. How much did you read!”

“Enough.”

I pulled back from him, bracing myself in the bouncing carriage by placing a palm flat against his stomach. “What do you mean, *enough*?” I could not bear the idea of him reading a single word, most particularly of my feelings toward him (confused as they were and are).

“Enough to know I had your key.” He drew my hand up from his stomach and planted a small kiss against the tips of my fingers. “Stop fretting, you can keep your journal, but reverse the key and double layer the replacements,” he said, missing, completely, the nature of my worry. “And do not ever let me hear you humming or singing that song, agreed?”

I nodded, then realized he could not see me very well and softly voiced, “Agreed.”

With that, we were at our new lodgings. Daniel made sure I was securely barricaded inside our rooms and then he left again. When he returned, there was no bulge in his pocket. It was not, I surmised, a prize to be held for very long.

“Will you tell me now that it is gone?” I asked as he slipped into the bed we were to share for the next few days.

He pulled the blankets around us. “Knowing would put you in danger.”

I snorted and pulled away from him. “I was in danger at Tolleson’s, was I not?”

My intention in moving away from him was not to be coy and my chest tightened at his gesture of pulling me back to him. He ran the pad of his thumb over my bare shoulder while he thought over his answer or whether to answer me at all.

“What sort of businessman would I be if I gave away the secrets my clients hire me to protect?”

“What sort of a partner are you if you do not tell me what it is I risked my life over?”

At my question, he lightly pinched my chin and forced me to look up at him. “I’ll give you this and no more, what was in that box was proof of a queen’s treason and, tomorrow, Tolleson will likely be dead or imprisoned now that he is without it.”

That shut me up, just as he knew it would. At least it stopped any more words from leaving my mouth that night. I had already suffered enough by running afoul of an immature and vengeful duchess—I had absolutely no desire to tangle with a queen.

And so now I turn my thoughts to Italy! We travel, again, as brother and sister and he has named me *Julienne* since (another small joy) we are to be French, as well. As brother and sister, he says we will seduce a French diplomat assigned to Rome. *As brother and sister*. That is exactly what he said and he will say no more, the monster.

December 19, 1787

Newly arrived in Rome and the year is almost gone from us. So, too, the season, but that fact has only made our target that much more hospitable in receiving us. Of course, Daniel says there is a far greater reason for Monsieur Moreau’s hospitality. With my hair dyed near black, Daniel says that I could be twin to Moreau’s sister Juliette. Indeed, the first time Daniel and I entered the man’s study, Moreau looked up and called me *Jewel*, which is a nickname common enough to both *Julienne* and *Juliette*.

I played shy and retiring at his verbal slip. I asked him how he knew my nickname for certainly my brother could not have mentioned it to him before. Daniel, whom Moreau knows through correspondence as *Archard de Saint-Marc*, agreed that he could not even remember having told Moreau my first

name. Of course, the subject was smoothed over, for neither Julianne nor Archard wished to make their host uncomfortable. But, the whole of that visit, Moreau (already begging me to call him by his given name of *Vachel*) looked quite stricken. In a way, it was disconcerting for he can be quite childlike in appearance (particularly as he seems always to be freshly shaven). He is small statured for a man, only a few inches taller than me. And he has the most earnest sapphire blue gaze that stands out against the jet black hair. Had I not already known Moreau's crimes against France, I would have felt guilty in deceiving him.

We have just left from our third visit with him and I begin to suspect the exact nature of Daniel's game. It should distress me, but it does not. We return to Moreau's in two days, having made a pact as French nationals far from home, to spend the holidays together.

*December 21, 1787*

I am in my new room, awaiting the appropriate time to go down to dinner. It won't be long from now, but I must exorcise what that demon Daniel did to me before we set out for Moreau's or I will not make it through the meal!

We were waiting for the carriage and Daniel bid me to sit on his bed. The room is shaped so that the bed is placed in a small cutout with its full length flush against the wall facing the street. The window, following some long ago partition of larger rooms, is near the foot of the bed. It was there, looking out the window to the street below, that he wanted me to sit and watch for the carriage. I thought, at first, it was an earnest request, but he startled me by touching his fingertips against my ankle. I jerked my head to look at him and, without so much as glancing at me, he told me to continue watching the street below.

I will not say his face was impassive as he spoke. Others might think as much, but I know him a little better—I hope. His gaze had lost its sharp focus and his lower lip was tucked in under the jut of his upper lip. How frustrating to know this is his wistful look, but be totally clueless as to whether he has



adopted it to evoke a certain response in me, one that might not be forthcoming if he were clear that his actions were all about moving forward in our pursuit of Moreau.

“Keep watching,” he repeated.

There was nothing to do but obey him. I am not yet at the point that I will challenge his motives or question his method. So I looked back out the window while my blood slowed and pooled to a deep throb between my legs.

Bending my leg ever so slightly, he trailed the tip of his index finger up the back seam of my stocking to the hollow of my knee. “It is December, Julianne,” he said, the tease heavy in his voice. “Why so humid here?”

Oh, I did not have the patience for this game or his methods! Not when I spend my nights dreaming of his touch. I wanted so badly to see him, to search his face and body for the slightest betrayal of his true feelings for me—whatever they might be.

“I will hear the carriage...” I turned to look at him, but he jerked his head in the window’s direction, silently ordering me back to my post.

“Tell me what you hear now?” He had his knee pressed on the bed, one hand securing my calf while the other ran along the top edge of my stocking, just a few inches from my wet cunt.

“I promise I will hear it, Archard.” Ah, I let out a small moan as his knuckles grazed the fur covering my sex.

“Tell me.” His hand kept dancing purposefully close to my pussy, raising the hairs as he moved so that my swollen lips felt the ghost of his touch.

“Blood,” I confessed. “I hear it in my ears, in my chest.” I arched against him, seeking firmer contact of our flesh.

“Then keep watching,” he said, perversely denying what he knew I wanted—the chance to watch him.

Was it his plan to heighten my arousal this way or was he afraid of what I would see hiding beneath the chameleon’s skin. When I was slow to comply, he brought an end to the debate by pushing my legs closer to my body and then disappearing beneath my skirt.

True to my wanton nature, I spread my legs as wide as the new position would allow, so that they were almost under me and my cunt was raised for his convenience. My attention snapped down to the street below that he might have no reason to abandon the game he played. Humid at his first touch, I was practically dripping onto the coverlet by the time his tongue parted my lips and found the kernel of my sex. I gave a little cry and clutched the lace curtains that shielded the window from any passerby that might glance up. He pushed more firmly against me, the pout of his mouth wedging open my lips to suck at my clit.

I spread myself wider and lifted my sex higher, my skirt forming a tent over his upper torso. "Touch me," I pleaded, wanting his hands on and in me.

Ignoring the soft mewl of my request, he dipped his tongue and probed at the opening to my cunt, his hands still maddeningly nowhere near my body that I could feel. I twisted along the mattress, wanting more, wanting it harder. When he drew back the smallest fraction, I froze. He rewarded my obedience by blowing against my clit, the air warm and focused so that it curled under the little hood and filled the small opening. The warmth spread up my body, my nipples relaxing beneath the heat of a blush before drawing taut once more.

And then he was touching me again with just his tongue, spooning my cream, laving it across the spiny swell of my clit, pressing against the hard button with his lower lip until I could look out the window no more.

Half crawling up the wall at the foot of the bed, I knotted my fingers in the coverlet and began to grind against his mouth, my hips moving in hard round thrusts. It was then he put his hands upon me. He dragged my body back onto the bed, keeping me from rising as his mouth hovered over my pussy. Again and again he offered a second's teasing before backing away until, at last, the carriage came before I could.

The ride was bumpy and, when we arrived at Vachel's, I almost fainted in the poor man's arms from sexual frustration.

Daniel, I am now convinced, is one of the most evil creatures alive. And I love him all the more for it.

\*

Dinner is finished and so am I. I scarce have the energy to put these words to paper. I have been tormented all night, so, too, I think, poor Vachel, for, as I have watched Daniel, Vachel has watched me.

I say that watching Daniel was a torment because he made of each bite, each sip of wine some subtle show of intercourse. I could not look at food touching his lips without thinking of either my cunt and his tongue or cock. I could barely touch my own food, much to Vachel's concern. My breathing was shallow the whole dinner through. My coloring, I am sure, was quite pale, with intermittent flushing. I needed support, which Vachel offered, to make it to the sitting room after dinner.

"It is as I said," Daniel commented once Vachel had me sitting on the divan and covered by a light throw. "She is not well enough for the trip I must make after the Feast of St. Stephen."

"I implore you, Archard, leave her here with me." As he spoke to Daniel, Vachel moved to stand in front of him, his lesser height forcing him to look up. "It is time enough, even with the holidays, to arrange a lady's maid to stay with her while you are gone."

A frown creased Daniel's forehead and he looked to me. "There are lady's maids and then, well..." He left the rest unfinished.

Vachel laid his palm on Daniel's sleeve, nodding frantically over his honor. "I assure you, she is such the likeness of my sister, I should be most grieved if her health worsened in making this trip of yours."

"If only it were a few days, perhaps, but the information I seek may take weeks."

Ah, how obvious it seemed to me what he was doing, but Vachel was clay in Daniel's hands—clay made warm and malleable through the dinner by Daniel's manipulation of me. I had to stop myself from mouthing what I expected Vachel to say next.

*Tell me what information you seek, perhaps I can speed you on your way.*

At that, Daniel leaned forward and whispered in his ear. Vachel's face took on the look of a fox run to ground, but then his expression smoothed and he took Daniel by the arm, nodding as he led him into his study.

And that is how it has come to pass that, in less than a week's time, I shall be spending my days alone with Vachel Moreau—and a lady's maid.

December 26, 1787

The blood is rushing through my body now, thunderously loud. I feel faint. Even suspecting what Daniel had in mind, I feel faint. It has been a slow dance between Archard and his sister Juliette, one that grows bolder with the smallest of steps. At first, Daniel stared at me just a little longer than a brother should, his gaze a little higher or lower than a brother's should be. Then his touch lingered. The first half dozen occurrences, he would snatch his hand away the instant Vachel's attention was drawn. Then he began to linger, lamenting that we must be separated for a few days.

*Jewel, my sister, my Jewel.*

His words have been calculated to remind Vachel of this Juliette, this jewel of his own flesh and blood that all here who have seen her say I am as a mirror to. Daniel, however, was not to be satisfied with words or light touches. He intends Vachel to be in a living hell while Daniel is away—a hell of want and unnamable sin.

Daniel came upon me while I was playing at Vachel's piano. Vachel was in his office, the door closed. Again, Daniel's dance started slow, just enough to make its way into the song I was playing, to make me miss a key here or there. Then he was sitting beside me. I played on, the sound of a door opening an inch or less behind us inaudible. The motion, however, was visible through the mirrors that hung opposite the piano.

Moving closer to me on the bench, Daniel put one palm against the flat of my back, his other hand moving to rest against my stomach. Already straight in my posture as I played, I lifted my shoulders and breasts higher, as if I

would move away from him. This contact, I intuited, could not be one Julianne desired—at least Vachel could not think she desired it.

At this point, Daniel touched the bottom swell of my breast and leaned in to press his lips against my neck. My playing faltered and I took my hands from the keys. Lightly, I pressed at his chest while I cringed further down the length of the bench.

“I cannot do as I promised, my Jewel,” Daniel said, his voice a false whisper.

My breathing hitched, as if I would soon start to cry, and Daniel’s voice took an uglier tone. He pulled me closer too him. Grabbing my hand, he forced it into his lap and against his erection (such is his ability to completely become the character he plays). “This strength is your doing, sweet sister.”

“Archard, please.” I was sobbing at this point, trying to jerk my hand away. His grip was unrelenting and marked my skin from how hard we pulled opposite one another.

“I do not want to be free of this,” Daniel protested. He released my wrist, only to roughly grab and fondle my breast. “I want you naked in front of me again. I want to see and taste the pale cream of your breasts and their cherry tips.”

“You are supposed to be my guardian.” I raised my fist in a claw and he caught me by the wrist again, stretching my arm out so that my right breast strained against its housing.

Bending his head, Daniel licked at the lace edges of my corset where my nipple was ready to burst into view. I let my body slowly go weak, my struggles lessening until I had an arm curled round his head and my back arched so that top swell of my tit pushed against his mouth.

That is how Vachel went back to his desk, the vision of Julianne arched, shaking and crying against the press of her brother’s lips to her breast burnt into his vision on St. Stephen’s Feast Day.

*December 30, 1787*

My dance card, it seems, is not empty though Daniel is away. Vachel has taken to calling me Jewel. He finds a dozen little errands to send the lady's maid out on before he and I are to have our evening coffee. He touches me at the inside of my wrist when he seeks my attention or at the back of my neck where the flesh is bare. Often, he forgets to remove his hand. The last time, I cried as I left his company and he stopped me to ask why.

I told him, of course, that I could not answer him, just that he was too good to waste his attentions on me though I desperately wished it were otherwise.

For now, he appears content to play the gentleman once again until Daniel returns and he may properly court me. I think he will find, however, that a proper courtship is not what Daniel has in mind.

*January 3, 1788*

He entered my room and undressed while I was sleeping. Not Vachel but Daniel. Knowing our host to be an early riser, he arrived at the house with just enough presence to attract Vachel's attention to his return. The servant who let him in took Daniel's bag upstairs and, knowing his master was already awake, must have informed Vachel.

Daniel had already taught me that, to give the appearance of being caught unaware, you must often perform the same task or its variations repeatedly. Sometimes we must do the act, then wait for the target's response the next time we see him to know if he thinks he has reached some discovery on his own. If there is no indication of such having occurred, present the opportunity for discovery once more.

We knew that Vachel had caught us at the piano. That he would seek Daniel out immediately on his return also was likely. So, too, was it likely that he would quietly seek Daniel out given the behavior he had witnessed the last time he found us alone. Thus, I woke to find that Daniel wanted to raise the stakes should Vachel be eavesdropping or spying on us once again through the slatted bedroom door.

He was naked by the time I woke to the brush of the bed covers against my skin. Giving me no time to react, Daniel flipped me onto my stomach. In the space of a few heartbeats, he had my nightclothes up over my head, my legs spread wide and my arms outstretched and trapped in his grip. I struggled, as any young woman would finding herself about to be invaded by her kinsman. But Daniel is distressingly expert at the act of rape (though I hope not the sentiment).

My body stretched tight from the position he held me in, his first few strokes were rough inside me. He bit, only half gently, at the flesh of my shoulders as he thrust. Slick his love bites made me, and I forced a scream into my pillow that I might not appear to be enjoying myself should anyone be watching through the slatted bedroom door.

As I continued struggling, Daniel spoke to me, his voice low, but not so low the meanings of his words could not be discerned in the hall beyond the thin walls and bedroom door. He called me *love*. He called me *whore*. He told me he hated me, wanted me, loved me, despised me, would leave me in Rome, would never let me go. *Julienne, Jewel, my Jewel*. In one breath it was my fault, the next he could not stop begging my forgiveness any more than he could stop fucking me.

How convincing Daniel is in his play acting cannot be adequately conveyed. I believed, in some part of my heart, every word he said and my body gave rise to a stream of contradicting emotions, all overridden by the lust his touch produced in me. And, beneath the layers of play acting, I sensed another level of wordless communication that has remained present between us since he first began training me outside London.

At least, in my mind there is this other layer of communication. Such a thing surely exists—animals in packs and herds exhibit it. Why should man, superior to all other creatures on earth, not possess it as well? It is there, waiting to be rediscovered when words and open gestures have abandoned us. I believed then, as he held me down, that he was talking to me in this silent way.

Even when he spoke, there were hidden meanings. The way he said something, the words he left out. I was attuned to it all.

So, when he paused above me to find, perhaps, that it was Veronique and not the girl she played sobbing beneath him, it was not *Julienne's* tears he sought to soothe away.

"Shush, love, do not cry." He nuzzled my neck, kissing me strongly as his strokes gentled almost to a stop inside. "Come with me, love." His words were a plea. "Take as much pleasure from me as I take from you that we might lose the shame of it if only for a few glowing moments."

They were Daniel's words to Veronique, so I felt them to be. He did not shush *Julienne*, did not ask his Jewel to come with him. He left me unnamed as he spoke, leaving me to be who I am—*Veronique*.

"Will you come for me? Will you rise to meet me?" His tone was desperate, as if he were sharply poised on the tip of his own climax and lost if I should deny him the separate gift of my pleasure.

"Yes!" My voice broke as I answered.

My arms, which he had held outstretched for so long, he folded beneath me as he coiled me to him. Our bodies were locked tightly together, lifting and deep thrusting in unison. Sweat, when we should have felt the morning chill, dripped from us and lubricated the slide of skin on skin. And yet, despite the way in which our movements mirrored one another, his cock still pumped within me. The head was like a fist shoved deep inside, twisting and turning until every nerve ending within my cunt was lit with delirious pleasure.

"Now do you follow me," he said, his voice a harsh demand.

"Yes, yes—" I convulsed beneath him and the morning light that filled the room grayed in front of me. Sounds I could not focus on filled the hall. I felt Daniel's groin tense and knew that our joining had not gone unnoted.

Daniel eased from me and began dressing. I cocooned my body in the bed linens. Having some general idea of his game plan, I knew there would now be a confrontation between Archard and Vachel and, at its end, there would be some trade of *Julienne* for more information from Vachel on the men whose



identities Daniel had been sent to discover. When the supply of information started to thin or prove false, he would return with the threat of taking Julianne away. Until then, Vachel would have his Jewel.

It was not a treasure he wasted any time in claiming. He came to me within an hour of Daniel having left my room. Despite the tension that filled me (or perhaps because of it), I had drifted into an exhausted sleep and woke to find him sitting at the bottom corner of the mattress watching me. The door was shut and, while he was still dressed, his clothing was partially undone.

“Vachel, what are you doing here?” I had wound myself on Daniel’s leaving in the sheet and blanket. The blanket had found its way onto the floor while I slept, perhaps helped by Vachel. The sheet was still wrapped tight around my stomach and legs, but my breasts were poorly concealed and I tried to shield them from his view.

He would not allow it. Pushing my hands away from where I fumbled for the sheet’s edges, he undid more of my covering. “I know what has happened, Jewel. You cannot hide it from me.”

“I could not stop him...always he is too strong.” Stunned horror threaded its way through my sob, and he sought to reassure me.

“You are safe from him now.” He patted my hair and stroked my cheek before his open palm came to rest against my breast. “Let me protect you.”

I started to pant, as if in shock. I let my mouth hang slightly open, the jaw quivering. “He lives?”

Vachel’s face hardened a little, but it was a question I had to ask. The men Daniel was trying to uncover were dangerous—agents of factions within Spain who were passing directives and financing through Vachel to further upset France’s delicate political balance. If murdering Daniel would keep their little French liaison happy, I had no doubt they would do it. But I hoped Vachel would not risk their understanding that his desire for me was but a mask to cover what he felt for his sister. So, too, would he put himself at risk if they were to learn of the help he already had given Daniel. Information, if Daniel still lived, that Vachel had just added to so that he could secure my company.

“You worry after him?” He asked after another minute of tense silence.

Wildly I shook my head. “I worry only that you have put yourself at risk for my sake.” I pulled free from his hand at my breast and turned my face into the pillow. “It is not something you should have done. I do not...” Here a great sob broke from me, whipping my body once with its force. “I do not deserve it.”

He declared my words nonsense and wrenched me back around by the shoulders until I was facing him, the sheet completely fallen from my upper torso. “You deserve love and protection.” He shook me at the end of each word and, after the last shake, grabbed both sides of my face. He pressed his forehead against mine, our mouths but a finger’s width apart. “Let me give them to you, Jewel.”

I did not fully acquiesce to him then. I pulled into myself, my sobs quieting as I rocked myself within the limited space of his partial embrace. He peeled the sheet the rest of the way from me as I rocked until I was naked and curled before him.

Some of Daniel’s seed and my own juices still glistened on my sex, the outer folds of my pussy visible to Vachel from the way I pulled my knees to my chest. He sat transfixed by the sparkle of light along the liquid and the red wink of roughly fucked flesh.

I stopped rocking, realizing what must fill his gaze. A sadness came upon me with the realization. It sounds insane, but it was the second time Daniel had climaxed in me and the knowledge cut at me that, both times, it was only to serve as a means of authentication of my taking for Tolleson and Vachel’s benefit. Never had it served as proof of his desire for me.

Vachel extended his hand forward, ready to touch the wet slit of my sex. I cringed from him, begging him not to. “Please, I cannot have you look upon what he has done to me.”

“Shh, sweet Jewel.” He touched my hip, his head canted as he looked in my eyes for an instant before his gaze drew inexorably further down my body. “It is his crime, not yours.” He ran the pad of his thumb against the seal of my labia.

I jerked and tried to roll away, but his hand caught my hip again.

“His crime,” he repeated. “Let me wash it from you.” He waited for me to answer, urging me to a *yes* with a slow, continuous nodding of his head.

With my own halting nod I consented and began Julianne’s real acquiescence to her new lover. He rose quickly and walked to the bowl and pitcher near the bedroom window. He filled the bowl and then wetted the bottom quarter of the little set’s hand towel. He watched me as he wrung the excess water from the towel, oblivious to the fact that he missed the bowl and its stand entirely.

He made me stay as I had been laying there, my legs drawn to my chest. The water was cold and I gave a muted squeak when he ran it along the line of my cunt.

“It is but a brief chill,” he said and wiped again. “And then I shall see that you are warm.”

Of course he would, I thought, else what kind of brother would he be to Jewel? He ran another line over my skin, pressing deeper, and I gave an earnest shiver, my breath leaving me in a shocked pant. At that, he caressed the same line with the back of his hand, his touch almost fevered by comparison to the cloth’s coldness. With the spread of warmth, I started to uncurl and he slid one hand beneath my knee to raise my leg.

I used my hands to shield my breasts and turned my face into the mattress once more. Little crying hiccoughs rocked my body against the cloth as he cleaned between my lips and along my clit. He cooed like the morning doves he kept in his office, trying to sooth me as he invaded my most private regions. The monster, he thought himself my savior. But such are the lies we sell ourselves when society would deny our wants.

And there was no question that he wanted me, or that he would have me this very morning. Without drying me, he tossed the towel in the general direction of the bowl and its stand and then wrapped his upper body over mine. He placed one arm against my back and the other he possessively draped across my shoulder.

“Better?”

My crying was finished but my body remained coiled tight. My head jerked in something that looked like a *yes*. He started to rub my shoulder and then lifted his head high enough that he could see my face. "Shall I get the blanket and cover you?"

Again, another little jerk of my head that he could interpret as he would. He left the bed just long enough to scoop the blanket from the floor and then proceeded to cover both our bodies, his still dressed. Where my body faced away from him, he tucked the blanket tightly beneath me that I might not, I imagined, escape him.

Under the blanket, his hands started a tentative exploration. His right hand traveled no farther than my hair, gathering it up in his fist. His left hand slid along my arm, down the side of my waist, making little to no pretense as to his intent.

"I forgot to dry you," he said, his tone making it sound like a confession. "You are still wet."

My breathing hitched and I started to roll protectively to one side but he tightened his grip on my hair.

"No." Barely audible, but the tension his voice held was unmistakable. "Let me tend to...tend to this."

He was panting now, his fingers exploring the pocket between my lips that bordered on the entrance to my sex. He slid a finger inside me and groaned, his hips jerking once along the bed. "Wetter here, are you not?"

"I do not mean to be." I thought I was cried dry, but I managed to squeeze a few more tears out as he gently explored my cunt.

He retreated to the edge and then slid a second and third finger in, pushing into me until the fingers were completely buried. "So deeply wet, Jewel."

I repeated it was not my intent to be so, that it shamed me, that I did not deserve his care or protection. Little did it occur to him that I did not want his care or protection.

"Shh." He tried to quiet me as he withdrew his fingers and pushed his pants down past his hips. "Wet can be natural, love. Right, even."

With the same tentative exploration, his cock entered me. Would he had kept his fingers in me, they filled me more. Still, I tightened as if he overwhelmed me and softly cried out, biting at the pillow.

He kissed the back of my shoulders, then the curve of my neck while he took his full but shallow pumps. His hand found my breast and squeezed at it as he began to ride me more furiously, the friction, at least, causing a building tingle to work its way up my clit.

Frustration knotted my hands into fists as he flung his head back, his hips rotating so that his rod dug more deeply into me. His hand at my breast grew rougher, pulling at the nipple like a child with taffy. "Sweet, wet, Jewel. Yes, come with me, come with me."

I tensed at his words, the farce of his fucking me creating a genuine quiver inside my body that he misinterpreted as my climax.

"Yes, Jewel!" His voice as rough as his hand at my tit, he froze above me before announcing to the entire household, "I come with you!"

With that, he collapsed panting against me. I feared he would want to talk, or exchange more caresses, but he has at least one saving grace—fucking sends him into a deep sleep. And he doesn't seem, at least not yet, to snore.

*January 14, 1788*

Much does each day pass as the other under Vachel's "protection". He sports me around the great city, acting as my guardian to anyone deemed worthy of receiving an introduction. Many who have seen her seem surprised to hear that I am not his sister or, upon learning my identity, that I am not some close relative—a cousin, perhaps. Indeed, I have since seen Juliette's likeness, for he has a painting of her opposite his bed.

Ah, I have misspoken. Her painting is opposite our bed, for he makes no pretense in front of the staff. Gone, even, is the lady's maid, for she would not have her own professional reputation ruined by staying.

The painting has come to amuse me as a symbol of what is so very wrong in Vachel's head (though I would hardly claim that there is anything right in

mine). On the morning after Daniel's departure for parts unknown, Vachel sat up in our bed, tilted his head to look first at the portrait of his sister, and then at me.

"I shall have a portrait made of you." He gave a satisfied nod and then lay down and pulled me into the circle of his arms. "It will go above the mantle in my office."

"That would be a most generous sentiment." I picked my words carefully. "But perhaps, given the nature of this room, it should be Juliette's picture above your office mantle?"

He seemed to give this several minutes worth of consideration, at the end of which he sat back up and gave both the picture and me another survey. "It is not that I mind the expense of a portrait." He stopped, looked at me a little longer, and then scratched his chin. "It is just that they take so very long and are disruptive. Easier, is it not, to find that dressmaker and have her create another dress to match that in the picture."

Satisfied, he plopped back down on the bed and hugged me again. "Then there will be no question of which picture should sit on which wall—the whole question is silly, really. You are both that much alike."

Perhaps, I thought, if one is blind with incestuous need, but we were quite dissimilar. I wish my time since Christophe had taught me some sense of humility, but it is not boasting to say Vachel's sister was not my match in beauty. This would be particularly true if my natural coloring was not hidden. (Something, I must remind myself, to which I need to attend both above and below before Vachel suspects any artifice.) Nor was it mercantile flattery when the dressmaker commented on how much easier my form was to fit than the young lady in the picture had been. Indeed, she realized right away that I was not the woman in the picture—and I long ago learned to trust to the sharp gaze and mind of my dressmakers!

But I do not mean to go on as to who has the greater number of defects (I'm sure I would find her character less lacking than mine, for instance). I meant to record that I was wearing that damnable dress (that is indeed a twin to the

dress worn by that other) when Daniel reappeared at Vachel's this afternoon. I do not know how Daniel first learned of Vachel's infatuation with Juliette, most likely a servant's gossip or outright betrayal, but Daniel is well aware of the portrait opposite Vachel's bed. Seeing me in the dress, a certain satisfied and malicious light sparked for an instant in his otherwise veiled gaze. When he spoke to me, ordering me to begin packing, his tone was imperious and clearly infuriating to Vachel.

"Wait in our room for me, Jewel," Vachel said, and stepped in front of me.

I wanted to do nothing of the sort, but there were none of the agreed upon cues from Daniel that he had genuinely come to retrieve me. Showing Vachel my loyalty to him as a lover, I briefly touched his shoulder, screwing my face into a worried pinch. Vachel nodded in the direction of a side door.

"Go, I shall not be very long."

"You have no right to deny me my blood," Daniel said. "She leaves with me today."

Passing through the side door, I slowed my steps that I might hear their conversation as long as possible, but I did not look back. I wanted to. My stomach was doing odd things at the sound of Daniel's voice and I wanted one last look at his face before he disappeared again.

I have said before how Daniel can sometimes seem featureless, intentionally so. But now he was playing *Archard* and he carried himself with all the power his naming implied. *Archard the strong, Archard the defiler*. One look at him swaggering his way into Vachel's office with that green-gray gaze lighting upon me and I had become immediately wet.

*My blood...leaves with me today*. That, too, thrilled me, for Daniel has as many voices as he has faces and now his tone ran sharp and deep, vibrating forth from a body that was stronger and deadlier than the shell he left back in England. I could feel his words pulsing over the flesh and hairs of my poor, wet pussy that would have only Vachel or my own hand to satisfy it tonight. Propelled by that lonely thought, I ran the rest of the way to Vachel's room and

collapsed on the bed, my hands chastely tucked beneath me to avoid temptation or discovery.

I waited like that well over an hour. I heard them argue, heard Daniel leave and then Vachel being cross with the servants. Silence was followed by more silence. Eventually, I dozed off and woke several hours later, the evening sky already bathed in twilight at this time of year.

Vachel was just coming into the room as I sat up. My face was puffy from being pressed against the mattress and he rubbed my cheek. "Were you crying, love?"

"You stayed away from me so long," I said, too tired to lie directly. "I thought you might be angry with me."

"Never with you."

Despite the sweet words, there was a certain bitterness to how he spoke them and I pressed my cheek into his palm. "Then what was it?"

"I had to go out." The tension running through him made his hand curl alongside my cheek so that he was starting to grip me. "And there is more I must do tonight."

"This is my fault." My bottom lip started to tremble and I moved forward to wrap my arms around him.

Vachel jerked back, his hands moving to protectively cover his stomach. "No, this is all on Archard. But, until I can decide how to properly deal with him, I must buy more time by supplying him with a little information he seeks."

*Deal with him...* At the issuance of those words, I felt the need to mimic his protective stance. *Dealing* with Daniel could very well mean murdering him. I tried to think of a way to ask him what he planned without seeming to be concerned over Daniel's welfare. "At what cost to you, my love?"

He relaxed at hearing the endearment, something I purposefully offered him only as a rare utterance. Leaning forward, he stroked my cheek and then drew me into a deep kiss. "Only," he said, parting from me, "a few hours away from you, my Jewel."



His “few hours” measured almost six, the clock striking midnight shortly after his arrival back home. He smelled of a tavern, though he seemed not to have consumed more than a glass or two of wine. I could tell this by his kiss and the sober touch of his hands on me.

He returned ready to fuck and he went about it with a renewed, perhaps even magnified, intensity. He started stripping his clothes and boots away as soon as he had closed and locked the bedroom door. He said very little and kept his words gentle, but sought, at first contact, to exert a new control over me.

Seeing the outline of his naked form at the edge of the mattress, I moved to pull the bed cover aside for him. He caught my wrist and tugged me across the bed until I was flat on my stomach. He draped his body over mine, not entering me immediately, but pulling my nightclothes up over my hips and nestling his erection against the cleft of my bottom. He was, I realized, partially re-enacting the manner in which he had seen Daniel take me while he had stood in the hallway outside my guest room and peered through the door’s slats.

His mimicry was sufficiently played to make me think of Daniel, to heat my cunt in a way Vachel had not managed to do before. My legs trembled further apart. Moaning, I offered him a mix of fear and approval. “This is not like you.”

“This is exactly like me,” he countered and raised his hips to thrust into me. He buried his face against my neck, his strokes inside me erratic and wide angled. “So many nights alone, my jewel, wanting you like this.”

A line of cold raced down my back, but I did not change my pace or reception of him. He had not spent *so many* nights without me in his bed. It was his sister he spoke to as he fucked me.

“Your body, your sweet box all hot and tight for me.” He grabbed both my wrists and stretched them taut, further imitating Archard’s rape of Julianne. “I want you bound to the bed, always ready for me, wet with your love for me.”

I moaned, thinking of Daniel thrusting into me and whispering such obsessions to me.

“Do you dream of my taking you like that, my jewel?”

“Yes—” An almost breathless response as my climax built.

“How else do you dream of my taking you?” He was thrusting as hard and deep as his body would allow—still less than I could take or wanted, but enough to keep me perched on the edge of release.

“I dream of your mouth on me—ah!” I pressed the mound of my cunt harder against the bulky mattress, my clit riding one of its bulges. “And my mouth on you, my eyes covered.”

It was too much for him. He bucked hard against me and I had to race, pumping harder against the mattress, to keep from being left behind.

Finished, he rolled off me and onto his back. I pulled the covers over us and settled against him, letting him wrap an arm around my shoulder. “Tomorrow,” he said as he drifted off to sleep. “Tomorrow I shall pay a visit on the silk merchant.”

Sleep did not come so easily to me. Where he had found a new intensity, I had found a new despair. We seemed as traitors bound that night, though he knew it not. As Daniel and I had planned from the beginning, I would betray him before the month was finished. And Vachel had bought this night with me most likely at the cost of another man’s life.

I—or the fantasy of me—was as expensive as any biblical whore. Men were paying with their honor, their lives and the lives of others to fuck me. I wondered, trying to sleep beside Vachel, how it was in my nature to have become this Lady Death. But we are all what we allow ourselves to be and nothing more. So it was with Gabrielle’s willing seduction by a masked lover; so it was with my placing my future first in the hands of Christophe and then in Daniel’s. The right is ours to take what we are strong enough to claim and to suffer the consequences when we fail—seldom is the rope fitted around an innocent man’s neck. No one in our triangle of passion could cry innocence.

January 23, 1788

It was a scene scripted to crush Vachel without ever laying a hand on him. My lines I improvised, taking Daniel’s subtle cues just as I had at Tolleson’s.

We started a little after one, when the rooms were filled with the lazy promise of a bright winter's day in Rome. Daniel arrived to find Vachel and me reading in the sitting room. They sent me from the room, Daniel ordering me not to stray too far from them. I listened just outside the door I closed behind me.

One last name—*the name*—and the man's location were Daniel's demand. Vachel would not budge.

"You are insane, Saint-Marc! I would be exposed, and then what use would you find me?"

"Even less, I dare say, than my sister does." Daniel's taunt met with silence. "Should I tell her to pack?"

"She will not go with you."

Daniel offered Vachel a harsh laugh before calling me back into the room. "Have one of the maids pack your case."

I looked to Vachel for guidance. He was strung tight, his slighter frame vibrating from the tension. I turned back to Daniel. "No," I said.

Daniel brushed past me and stuck his head into the hallway. He called for a maid, banging his fist against the wall in summons until one came running. "Pack my sister's clothes and books and do not waste any time with folding."

She, too, looked to Vachel for confirmation, but Daniel gave him no time to respond. He pushed the girl further down the hall then turned and closed the door. He came to where I stood and took a position behind me close enough that I could feel his presence without his actually touching me.

"Is it true, sweet little sister, that Vachel has no skill in pleasuring a woman and no compensating...*graces*?"

"He—he has been a most...a most gracious host." This close to Daniel and my body was beginning to respond. My limbs relaxed, lengthening in their readiness to wrap around and ride him. My breasts started to swell, my breathing became deep and slow.

"You have fucked him, why be shy about that fact?" He moved to my right and leaned over me, his warm breath on my cheek and neck as he continued the interrogation.

Biting my lip, I shook my head in denial.

"I am hardly angry about it," he said and bent his head over my shoulder. He brushed his lips against the skin, his arm jerking up and out to push Vachel away when he charged at us. Vachel made another rush and Daniel wrestled him onto the couch. "Come here, my jewel," Daniel said.

Vachel's eyes were wide. I wasn't sure whether it was with fear or anger and I tried to hold out as his loyal lover a little while longer. It would make my surrender to Daniel that much more real and demoralizing when it occurred.

"I said, COME HERE." Daniel stretched Vachel's head backwards, his thumb up under the soft tissue of Vachel's chin.

"Please," I whispered to Daniel as I came to a stop directly beside him. "Please do not hurt him...he has only been kind to me."

"Then answer my question, sister." It took only one hand for him to control Vachel now and Daniel grabbed my upper arm and pulled me lower. "Did you fuck him?"

I nodded and closed my eyes. He shocked them open by biting at the fabric of my dress, covering my pebbled nipple.

"And did you enjoy it?" Either side of the question, he ran the edge of his teeth back and forth over the fabric. The wetter it became, the more apparent was my excitement.

"He has only been kind to me," I repeated.

Still holding Vachel pinned to the couch with one hand, Daniel released my arm only to curl his hand around my head and force me to stare into those green-gray eyes of his. "Then he deserves to know. When you were fucking him, moaning and crying, your eyes closed...was it his face or mine you saw?"

I closed my eyes again and tried to shake my head within his iron grip. A tear slid down my cheek and his tongue darted out to catch it. I gasped and his tongue slipped into my mouth, startling me into a passionate kiss.

Dimly, I was aware of his releasing his hold on Vachel, who remained motionless. Daniel ran his freed hand over my body, fondling my breast,

tugging at my hip. I snaked at his touch, my body undulating beneath his hand to keep from losing contact.

When he broke the kiss, he forced me to look at Vachel, to let the false diplomat see the need I had kept hidden from him for so many weeks. Speaking with his lips pressed against my cheekbone, he asked Vachel, "Would you still have her, my friend?"

I begged Vachel with my gaze to say *no*, to end his humiliation and Julianne's need tonight.

"Yes."

"Then give me the name," Daniel said, his voice just as soft as Vachel's had been in answering.

Vachel shook his head, his gaze never straying from my face to Daniel's. "Stay with me. He cannot make you go with him."

At that, Daniel pulled me roughly onto the couch and forced me half over its back so that my ass was raised high and my legs were spread in an awkward attempt to find balance. He raised my skirt and chemise, exposing my wet cunt. He tried to force Vachel to see how I was dripping from my desire. When Vachel refused to look, Daniel slapped his face once and pulled him by the hair to within a few inches of my pussy.

"Does it smell like she wants to stay?" Rough incredulity coated his question and he shoved Vachel back down the length of the couch. He played in the honeyed juices of my cunt, the sounds of his hands sluicing between my lips grotesque to my ears even though my body could not help but move with him, my moans joining in an obscene chorus.

"I cannot give you that name. I cannot tell you where he is." Vachel's tone was a mesmerized pleading. His body had started to move, to mimic Daniel's as if he were the one finger fucking me.

"But you know—"

"Knowing is irrelevant. I cannot keep her if I am a dead man."

Daniel's chest pinned me to the back of the couch. He added more fingers to his sweet torment of my cunt until his hand was buried halfway down its

palm. "She is going to come calling my name. For my hand alone she will abandon you."

"No, please. I cannot tell you."

"His name from your lips," Daniel pressed, "or mine from hers."

I was already sobbing, hyperventilating with the need to come. My lower body was on fire. Juices dripped from my cunt down my leg. When Daniel pressed his thumb against the opening of my ass, I screamed out in orgasm.

The heavy musk of my sex was joined in the air by the more bitter tang of semen and I realized that Vachel had climaxed with me. The realization, along with most of my mind, was pushed down beneath another wave of climax as Daniel continued driving into my pussy with his finger while his thumb caressed the tight star above.

"Buchamp. Damn it, stop touching her!"

"Where is he?" I was collapsing around him, but Daniel didn't miss a stroke.

"Paris already. Near the Garnier—that is all I know. Now stop touching her." Paralyzed, Vachel pled with Daniel like a helpless child despite Daniel, his hands fully occupied, being vulnerable to an attack from him.

Daniel paused his assault on my body long enough to retreat to the far end of the couch, dragging me with him. One-handed, he pushed his pants down far enough to free his cock and then reached around me to lift the front of my skirt up so Vachel could see Daniel's cock slide into me.

"My love, how I have missed you." I moaned the words, leaning my head back against his shoulder and surrendering to the perfect fit of his cock to my pussy.

Keeping my skirts pinned in place with his forearm, he used his hand to spread my lips and play with my clit. "Would you have her now?"

"Yes...do not take her from me."

"Do you hear that, sweet sister?" Daniel asked. "He loves you."

My body whipping up and down his cock, I shook my head violently. "He loves Juliette...as I love you."

“No. Jewel.”

I felt Vachel’s hand on my calf and opened my eyes to see his pleading gaze on me. “I am not her.” I panted each word, still sliding along Daniel’s length. His cock struck deep inside me, where only he could reach. I bit my lip and drew blood in my ecstasy. “And you are not him.”

Daniel stiffened beneath me, his cock swelling to pump his cum into me in thick jets. He brushed his lips against the back of my neck—a kiss I could feel, but that Vachel could not see. A kiss for me alone and I drew the mouth of my cunt tight, returning my own secret kiss.

Finished, we moved slowly from the room, leaving Vachel in a broken heap on the couch. We went to his bedroom, where my things were half packed. I moved quickly around the room in case Vachel should suddenly come to his senses.

“He tied you up?” Daniel asked, one of the silk scarves in his hand.

The flat affect of his tone gave me pause and I looked up in time to see something flicker in his gaze—something I had not seen before with him and could not name. I nodded then turned back to packing, making sure my journals were traveling with me.

“And was it something you enjoyed?” He was moving now, gathering up the scarves still tied to the bedposts.

“That question can wait until we have nothing more pressing on hand.” I snapped the case shut and turned back to him. He had been playing with the scarves, knotting them as I finished packing. The result made my blood run cold. “What is that?”

He gave a shrug and tossed the makeshift noose on the bed. “A gift for Monsieur Moreau,” he said, crossing in front of me to lift the travel case. Turning, he brushed his fingertip across my lips. “To show my appreciation for taking such good care of you.”

*June 4, 1793*

In a few weeks' time, I may be rotting in a Cuban jail cell alongside Daniel, with no opportunity to complete the unusual payment Philipe has requested. With the need to make preparations and the difficulty I have had in translating my own key, I have not yet recorded for Philipe just how I came to Guaymas or how Daniel and I parted. Indeed, there are many adventures still unrecorded. But what follows is the story I feel I must tell next should things not go smoothly in leaving La Habana with Daniel's body.

*Daniel's body.* Even after so much time spent planning, those two words threaten to choke the air from my lungs. But it is the only choice open to me. I have already established that I cannot fight or bribe my way to Daniel's release. But deception may still carry the day when gold and violence have proven unpersuasive. I hope to leave here in the guise of a grieving mother, the body in tow neither dead nor that of my son. Already, Philipe and I have made most of the preparations, all but the most essential—securing a visit to Daniel.

The rest is waiting, and so I sit here filling the last pages of my journal.

Let me start with Moreau, for, even dead an ocean away, his influence still resonates in our lives today. He died, not with the noose Daniel left on his bed, but by poison. His entire household was found dead. A packet filled with powdered residue of the poison that had killed them was discovered in his office desk. Why he did this, if he did, was subject to much speculation, not only by the authorities in Rome, but by me when I could get Daniel to tolerate a few minutes' conversation on the subject. Daniel has offered the possibility that Vachel did it for revenge, suspecting that he must have had a traitor amongst his servants (well he did, though Daniel never dealt directly with the woman). I think he did it to protect me.

Why would I be so vain as to suggest this possibility? Because Daniel's last target eluded capture in France after receiving a message from Rome. From that point forward, Archard Saint-Marc or the man who played him, was hunted. But never, in all the queries we learned of, was a female accomplice sought. In my mind, Vachel had warned the man he betrayed, but named only Archard and then killed his staff. True, he had introduced me around Rome,



but never did he attach a last name. And it was known to him that we were not registered at our hotel in Rome under Saint-Marc. Anyone searching Rome for Archard Saint-Marc would not learn that he had been accompanied by a sister. Only the staff could make that connection. Vachel had offered what protection he could in his dying act.

These queries and our own successes on the Continent and in England made it increasingly harder to work. More importantly, it made it increasingly dangerous. So we came to the *New World*, which, after so much time, seemed pretty much like the old one with its squabbling regional governments and intrigues in the name of independence. Needless to say, there was work for us in the Spanish and French colonies of the Caribbean, but that world is even smaller than the one we left behind.

Late October of 1791 we started wandering farther west. We traveled as husband and wife and I did not suspect his purpose then. He was intent on ditching me. Yes, he called it something else—giving me my life back, protecting me, a dozen other things. Men will forever call it something else and women will always know what it really is. I just didn't understand at first why he was doing it.

By January of 1792, we were in Guaymas. A house was purchased in town, as well as a failing textile shop. When I asked why he would do such a thing, he told me it was because we were staying in Guaymas. It did not take long to realize he really meant that I was staying in Guaymas. His plan was to establish our presence there as a married couple with a business front to make me active in the community. That the business he purchased was failing was irrelevant, he left me enough money that I could live as a wealthy woman for a very long time if I managed it wisely.

Then, after a few months to half a year, whatever he felt sufficient, he would announce a trip back to England to settle the rest of the our estate. More months would pass and then *Senora Howard* would receive a message that her husband had died. His plan, as can be imagined, did not set well with me. I was in love with him and he knew it, even if I made no great point of

telling him. It was something he did not want to hear, although I believe he loved me just as much.

Why then would he do this? I have a few scars to prove our work was dangerous for me and a miscarriage from six months spent as mistress to a Spanish nobleman. That was our last job in Europe and the point at which Daniel began to marginalize my assistance to him. Whenever I came into direct contact with a target, it was usually as a servant, my appearance seriously aged or otherwise played down.

Using me as a maid or similar also meant there was never any reason for us to sleep together as we had in hooking Tolleson, Vachel and so many others. He might as well have stuck me in a nun's habit here in the Americas. So the realization slowly came to me that he was unwilling to endanger me or send me to another man's bed, even if he never took his own pleasure with me.

He could have quit, I certainly asked him to. He was a private spy—a free agent of change one might say. No king or country owned his allegiance. There was money enough put away. But quitting and staying with me would have shown a vulnerability he could not admit to. Daniel—objective, logical, motivated by facts and necessity instead of emotions—could not confess to needing me.

I clearly remember our last night together in Guaymas. It was the twenty-third of April and his ship was leaving early the next morning. We had spoken little to one another in the days leading up to his departure. When he opened his mouth, it was to offer some feeble apology or assurance that this was all for the better. When I opened mine, it was to convince him to stay. Neither of us wanted to hear what the other was saying.

So, on that last night I went into his room. There was one apology I was willing to listen to and accept even as I hoped, in his tendering it, that I could convince him to stay. I made no pretense in what I was up to, I came to his room naked.

“Sophie, go back to your room,” he said before I could even cross the threshold.

“There is no Sophie here, Daniel.” In my thoughts he is always Daniel, but I could not remember the last time I had said his name out loud. Just as I could not remember the last time he had called me by my real name.

“Very well, then. Go back to your room...Veronique.” His voice was rough and he had to clear his throat before he could finish with my name.

“Always you are in charge, but not tonight.” Each word was a footstep closer to his bed. I pulled back the bedspread to find him dressed only from the waist down.

“This will not get you what you want, Veronique,” he said and reached for the cover too late to keep it from spilling onto the floor.

I grabbed his outstretched hand and held it for balance as I climbed onto the bed and straddled him. I bent forward and kissed the side of his mouth. “All I want is for you to show me you are sorry, Daniel.”

“You know I will not risk—”

I stopped him with a hard kiss, coiling my hands in his hair so that he could not easily shake loose. “That excuse does not hold any longer. There no longer is any danger should I become pregnant, even if there were a risk of it happening.”

I let my breasts slide against him as I rubbed my cheek against his. “If you say *no* tonight, it is because you do not want me...because you find no pleasure or comfort in my body.”

“Even a priest would find pleasure in your body.”

I sat up and pulled at the drawstrings of his pants. “A priest has,” I reminded him.

He captured my hands as I gripped his waistband. “You are not going to do this, Veronique.”

I twisted free and grabbed the waistband again, only to have him pull me forward by the elbows until we were chest to chest.

“Stop, you will not accomplish anything with this little girl’s game.”

“At least I will go to sleep well fucked for the first time in...how long?”

My eyes had adjusted to the low light of the room and I saw him shake his head. "I never denied you the company of other men. That argument is no good."

"Really, you did not?" I stopped moving against him while I pretended to consider what he had just said. "Then perhaps I should go down to the pier. It is still early enough I would wager."

"Really, Veronique, I taught you better than to be so obvious. Besides, it would undo the new life I tried to establish for you here." At this point he shrugged. "But it is your future. If that is what you want, I will not stop you."

And he wouldn't, I knew that. I rolled away and onto my side so that my back faced him. I hated him for a few seconds before my grief at his leaving rolled over me and I began to cry.

He sighed and then reached down to pull the blanket back up onto the bed. He snapped it high in the air above so that it floated out over us. "False tears are another tool that will not work against me. You should know that."

But they weren't false tears and it was only the second time in all our time together that he had been with me when I genuinely cried—that is, when I cried as Veronique and not as Julianne or Emily or any of the dozen other names I've held.

"Almost convincing, but stop it." He nudged me in the back with his elbow, some of the confidence having left his voice. "That is enough, Veronique. Go back to your room."

I shook my head and then stole his half of the blanket and wrapped the whole of it tight around me. "You sleep in there."

He rolled toward me and touched my exposed shoulder. "Stop crying."

I jerked my shoulder hard enough that his hand slipped. "I am not crying, remember?"

He moved closer, this time putting his arm around my waist. "Why do you want this when it will change nothing? I will still leave in the morning, and I will not be coming back."

“I just want it.” I was still crying, my body tense with the tears as he started to unwrap me. He rolled me onto my back, the blanket beneath us. As he settled on top of me, I whispered my full need to him, letting him know I would not stand for his merely pleasuring my body. “I want all of you tonight. Every kiss and thrust, *every last drop*.”

“I am still leaving, you must believe that.”

I hit his shoulder with my fist before wrapping my arms around him and pressing my fingertips into the flesh of his shoulders. “Fine, you fucking coward. Just show me that you are sorry to be going. You’ve said it enough, now prove it to me.”

I have already recorded the details of some of our prior sexual liaisons. There were instances when it certainly felt like more than stage fucking, but always it was under some pretense. Always there was a purpose to be served by his touching me. While I will not discount the possibility he wanted me, too, our first time was, I think, to teach me a lesson about who was in control. On the bed in Rome as we waited for the carriage, he wanted me ready to faint from my sexual frustration. Even then, he only teased me with his mouth. These were patterns often repeated.

This was the first time with so few pretenses—for surely, with his refusal to stay, he still offered me the lie that he did not love me or care too much for me. But it was a pretense I knew I would have to tolerate if I hoped to change his mind.

He started slow, kissing my eyes and temples, then my nose. As I relaxed beneath him, he gently parted my legs wide enough that the head of his erection could split the seal of my lips and nestle against my clit. He kissed my ears, sucking and biting at their lobes before licking my jaw line. All the while, small movements with his hips had his cock head teasing the spine of my sex.

He allowed me very little space to move as he kissed and stroked me. He pressed his arms tight against my sides, his palms open and tucked beneath me to cradle my back. He whispered my name once and then kissed me on the mouth. The kiss was as slow as everything else he was doing to my body,

starting with closed lips and then moving on to teasing little licks at the corner and tip until I opened to him. His tongue matched the pattern of his cock until I was shuddering beneath him with a need for more.

Daniel kissed his way down to my neck, untucking one hand to palm my breast. I wanted to press into his warm touch, but he kept me pinned to the mattress. His tongue trailed along my collarbone, down the center of my chest to the bottom curve of the breast he held. He licked his way up to the nipple and covered it with his mouth as his hand moved in a light caress down to my hip.

My body pulsing beneath him, I knotted my hands in his hair as my only anchor to consciousness. He moved from the left nipple to its envious twin, his hand moving in the same direction to find my center. I gasped and opened more of my sex to his touch as my hips lifted from the mattress.

Words ran through my head, but I left them unsaid, just as he remained silent. I could not trust myself not to beg. Perhaps he was equally afraid he would make some foolish declaration that would make his leaving all the harder. We allowed ourselves only the whisper and pants of one another's name.

I came as he thumbed my clit, his mouth sweet on my breast. When the quaking was done, he slid down to taste me, his tongue spooning deep inside my cunt. I grabbed the top edge of the mattress, my hips following the most nuanced move of his eager mouth as he continued to lave my sex. Another climax and I was crying his name.

His mouth settled on my clit and he slid three fingers into my wet pussy. From his other hand, he inserted his thumb, using it to stroke just inside my cunt as his fingers worked deeper. His mouth on my clit, the hard sucking motion of his tongue, both were ecstasy and I was wild beneath him, making him follow me as I planted my feet against the mattress and lifted my lower torso from the bed. There was more of his hand inside me, flexing and stroking as he ground his mouth against the swollen pearl of my sex. A third time he

had me convulsing in orgasm until I collapsed onto the mattress, my body uncontrollably jerking.

“Please, Daniel,” I said as he withdrew his hand and began to slowly kiss his way back up my body. “I want you inside me, coming inside me.”

Massaging my body and shushing me, he rolled me onto my side so that my back was to him. He pressed his lips against my throat, kissing me as he rubbed my breasts and stomach. When I had finally quieted, he lifted my top leg long enough to slide his cock into me. At first, he didn’t move inside me, didn’t allow me to move against him. Instead, he continued caressing me, kissing my neck, my shoulders and my hair.

When he did start to move, it was agonizingly slow. He was already high up inside me, the head of his cock pressing against that special mass of tissue that, with his help alone, could rob me of all my other senses and reduce the world to a pinpoint of pleasure.

Lifting my upper leg once more, he draped it over his and began to explore the exterior of my cunt with his fingertips as he kept his cock moving in tight, circular strokes. With my mind impervious to light pain, he sprinkled my shoulder blades with sharp, sucking kisses that would leave the imprint of his teeth still on my flesh the next morning.

I began to moan and thrash from the maddening pinch of his fingers on my clit and the hard rhythm of his cock inside me. He took his hand from my clit and pressed it against my shoulder blade so that I was laying three quarters on my stomach, my right leg still tangled around his. Supporting his weight with his other arm, he kept me pushed down and began to lengthen his strokes. Our bodies slapped together, the sound hard and wet. He changed the nature of his strokes, driving upward into me in a curving motion. My breath reflected off the mattress back at me in hot little pants. Even as I came, crying his name again, I wanted to curse him for all the nights we could have had this and, in one another’s arms afterwards, so much more.

“You did not,” I accused as he rested motionless against me.

“I will,” he answered and moved down my body. He coaxed me back onto my side and then lifted my leg long enough to move his head between my thighs. “Just let me have my drink of you, Veronique. Never has it been enough.”

I wanted to tell him the blame was solely his. In a way, I did because, as he burrowed his face into my sex and began to softly lick at my clit, I started to cry again. It did not stop him, or even slow him. Nor did it change my body’s reaction to him. Even as I covered my face and sobbed, my sex opened to him.

He did not bring me to climax that way, only to the edge several times until my tears had stopped and I was on the point of physical collapse. Daniel moved me onto my back and entered me, his face buried against my hair and neck. The opposite side of my head he curled his hand against, holding me still. I felt my heart breaking as I realized my neck was growing wet from his tears.

“Daniel—”

He held me harder, his strokes roughening inside me as he silently forbade me to speak. And so it was in silence he found his release and we drifted into sleep. When morning came, I was alone.

I tried to accept his having left. A few months passed and I felt like I was bravely soldiering on despite so many other changes since his departure. It seemed enough to know that he truly was sorry to leave, but that something in him would not let him stay. When six months passed and I had heard no news—received no notice as planned that Thomas Howard had perished on his trip to England, I began to worry. I frequented the docks, ostensibly on business for the little store that was now running a brisker trade than its previous owners had managed. It was in early February that I learned that Archard Saint-Marc was imprisoned in La Habana awaiting transport to Spain. The charges, entirely false in this instance, were a capital offense—espionage against the Spanish crown.

I wanted to go to him immediately, but leaving had its own difficulties...at least until AnneMarie walked into my little store.



June 9, 1793

I have officially located Daniel. Using the name we long ago agreed upon and with a priest accompanying me, I visited him as his mother, Sarah Spence. The priest, Father Gratillo, whom I have visited almost daily since my arrival in La Habana, is a necessary component of my plan. He is old, somewhere in his sixties. In one eye, he is completely blind. The other has a cataract spreading across it. He will not admit, however, to having any impediment to his vision. He is also a gentle soul, easily swayed by a mother's love for her son that is almost as great as her devotion to her God. Particularly when that mother is an Englishwoman who has not forsaken the one true Church. Having him with me certainly eased my way into the prison, but, more importantly, it will ease Daniel's way out—as a corpse.

It pains me to think that he is almost at death's threshold as it is, with no nudge from his loving *mother*. I fear whether his health will tolerate it or if I shall leave the prison to find myself truly in possession of a dead man. But it is a chance, once I conveyed my plan to him, he is willing to take. Time provides us no other alternative—if his health does not fail within a week's time, he will be on a ship bound for Spain. So I left with him a small vial filled with a drug that, were he a male in full health, would all but stop his respiration and bring his heart to a near standstill. What it will do to Daniel in his current condition is with God.

I return again tomorrow with Father Gratillo, having left Daniel with the understanding that he must take the drug at first light in his cell.

*June 11, 1793*

It was only upon escorting Father Gratillo and me to Daniel's cell that the guards realized Daniel was dead. They ushered us from the cell and it took much begging and a large number of coins on my part to get them to agree that I could take the body with me. They conditioned this, of course, on their being convinced that Daniel was truly dead.

Oh, the things they wanted to do to his body to ensure this fact! Bad enough what they managed to do before Father Gratillo stopped them. It was only his promise (coupled with more coin) that he would sit the night with the body that kept them from continuing.

They started their test by rubbing onion and garlic peelings over Daniel's gums and leaving chopped bits in his mouth. One guard was sent to find vinegar to pour down his throat while another cut the soles of his feet! They jerked his arms and shouted in his ears. One suggested hot wax, another began to heat a knife blade over a candle flame. I was, I swear, only one more desecration away from revealing that his death was a hoax and my entire duplicity in the matter. And I still could not tell whether he was alive—surely, even with the drug in him, such torture would produce a response.

But the torture stopped and one of the guards was sent to fetch a cart. I paid them to load him onto the cart and to follow us to the rectory to unload him and carry him inside.

Then the long wait through the night began. Father Gratillo, as he had promised, stayed with the body. I stayed with him, my gaze fixed on Daniel for the barest sign of life as we prayed. When it came at last, I offered a silent thanks for it and for Father Gratillo's poor eyesight. I put my hand on Daniel's wrist and felt life fluttering there, fragile and unsteady—but perceptible. Another tension-filled hour lapsed before Father Gratillo had to leave the room to relieve his bladder.

I opened an ammonia ampoule beneath Daniel's nose to rouse him. I almost broke into tears as he croaked his first words.

"Why does my mouth taste like garlic?"

"Later, love." I offered him a brief sip of water. "The priest will be back any second and he cannot know you are alive."

"My feet..."

"Shh...I hear him coming." I settled back into place and began weeping more vigorously. Father Gratillo put an arm around my shoulder to comfort me, his attention diverted from Daniel.

“Here, let us move to the bench,” he suggested. “I did not promise those beasts I would sit atop him all night and this floor is bad for both our knees.”

On the bench, it did not take long for Father Gratillo to fall asleep and we sat, propped against one another, the whole night through. When morning rolled around, I pretended to stir in my sleep, that he might think he had woken before me and his failure to watch the whole night would go unnoted.

“Would you like some tea, my dear?” he asked as I opened my eyes and looked up at him.

“No thank you, Father.” I rubbed at my face and then looked to the room’s small window. “Have the men not arrived? They said they would be here at first light that we would not vex the ship’s captain with a late boarding.”

He shook his head and stood, stretching a long moment before saying anything. “I shall go and check the yard—though I am still puzzled with how you found a captain who would take a cor—I mean your son, so quickly.”

“In the same way I convinced the guards, with your help, to let me leave with him.” Hearing the horse and cart pull up, I reached for my purse and drew out a number of gold coins. I hesitated, the coins flat on my open palm. “Father, would you allow me to also make a donation to the church?”

“You are grieving.” With his bad sight, it was obvious that he was looking at the coins in my hand despite his attempt to appear unaffected by the offer.

I was surprised—a priest saying *no*, at least initially, to a donation. “Still,” I argued gently, “My mind is clear enough to know that you did not have to offer the help you did, particularly for one accused of treason against your country.”

“I am a priest, dear lady,” he answered as he allowed me to pour the coins into his hand. “My allegiance does not rest with any country or mortal sovereign.” From his robes he pulled a small coin purse and secured the gold before cupping my elbow. “Now, shall we see if those are the men you have hired?”

Out in the yard, Philipe waited next to another man—one of the ship’s sailors we had hired in advance. Together, while Father Gratillo and I went back inside, they moved Daniel onto the cart and covered him. When they were

done, Philipe came to the back door of the rectory and told the priest's housekeeper that all was ready. Father Gratillo escorted me back out, his housekeeper following to help him back inside (he has, I should note, a number of bruises from misjudging where he walks although he projects an air of vitality and is clever in disguising his failing vision).

Once we were away from the rectory and headed toward the port, I slipped my hand beneath the sheet that covered Daniel. I found his curled fist and slipped two fingers down its center, my chest tightening as he gave me a little squeeze and held it the remainder of the cart ride.

*June 15, 1793*

My days have been heavily filled in caring for Daniel or watching him sleep. He talks little, his respiration damaged for the time being, either from the damp cell he was in for so many months, the drug or the onions and garlic shoved in his mouth. The only time he has talked at any length is when I told him of Philipe and AnneMarie. He knew at once why they had agreed to help me. Until Daniel told me, I knew nothing of the murder of AnneMarie's first husband. I had no knowledge, in fact, of her prior marriage.

Other than that one conversation, he spoke only a word or two at a time. And, although we are only a few days out to sea, he has not once reproached me directly for rescuing him. Yet I can see in his gaze that the sentiment is there. This evening, as I stripped him down and began cleaning him with a wet cloth, the thought seemed to be pressing down particularly hard on him.

"You would rather I had let you die?" I asked, dipping the cloth into a bowl and wringing it out.

"I left to remove you from danger."

At last, a confession as to his true intentions. Elated, I somehow managed not to gloat as I continued running the wet cloth over his skin. "You were wrong to leave," was all I said.

I was at his belly by this point in our conversation. He was thin and it was apparent his body had been eating away at the muscles from months of poor

nutrition. Despite this deterioration in his physique, I felt a flicker of need spark low in my gut and my hand slowed. I put the cloth back in the bowl.

“Lift your hips for me.” When he didn’t comply, I looked up at him. I cannot remember seeing him look more suspicious of me!

“Why?”

“So that I can continue cleaning you.” I couldn’t look at him as I answered. It was all I could do to keep the raw need from my voice.

“No.” He pushed at my hands. “Leave me and I will clean myself.”

“You are too weak still.”

He growled at me. Perhaps that wasn’t what he meant to do, but his throat is still so raw that the sound cannot be characterized as anything else.

“I will show you weak when you return, Veronique,” he answered and pushed at my hands again.

It is not right for a man to be able to silence a woman so quickly—not with just a few words or a glance. They have enough control over us, owning us in much the same way they own farm animals or land. For a woman to give a man control over her heart is for her to betray herself. So I always thought despite having long ago given my heart to Daniel. I looked at him, made one last attempt to make him let me stay, but he pointed at the door and ordered me out.

“Go, Veronique.”

I did and, when I came back, I found him naked and clean and dozing lightly. I picked up the bowl, dumped the water and then extinguished the light before moving back to the bed.

“I do not need to hide from you in dark,” he said, his hand caressing my thigh as I undressed.

“Perhaps I need to hide from you.” I crawled into the narrow bunk and pulled the blanket over us. Beside him like that I was near tears. Whatever he had said in the past, he had admitted the reason of his leaving. In doing so, he had admitted my right to be there with him—to be the lover and wife I had so often masqueraded as.

He rolled toward me, cupping my breast and thumbing my nipple as he placed a kiss against my forehead. He kissed me again, his hand slowing in its caress as if to test the weight of the flesh. "Your breast seems fuller."

Pulling his hand to my mouth, I tried to deflect this observation. "You are so much thinner than the last time we were together, it only seems fuller to you."

He did not argue but pulled his hand away and stroked my side and hip. Feeling him hesitate again, I reached between us and wrapped my hand around his growing erection. "You are tired, lie back and let me love you."

He let me guide him onto his back and then I slipped beneath the blanket. I kissed his navel and gently tugged at the narrow line of hair that led down to his cock. Once there, I covered the head with my mouth and let my tongue swirl the tip in slow circles. Before he could fully harden, I took his length into my mouth, something that would be impossible once he was completely erect. I sucked on all of his cock at once, my cheeks fluttering around the center of his length.

Grabbing me by the hair, Daniel pulled me up until our mouths were even and he could claim a long kiss from me. When we finally broke for air, I pushed the cover from us and mounted his cock. We sighed in unison and his hands found my breasts. He kneaded them gently as I started to rock against his shaft.

"You see," I said and squeezed around him, "you are glad I..."

His hands had left my breasts to trail over my stomach. Near my navel, he stopped abruptly at the first telling mark discernible by touch even if it was too dark to see. I had wanted, of course, to delay this moment for a while longer. But my need for Daniel's touch, and to offer him my own comfort, had been stronger.

"Another pregnancy?" His voice cracked at the end of the question. The first one in Spain had ended too early to leave any marks on my flesh.

"Yes." I wasn't ready to offer him a more detailed answer and half hoped he would stop with his first question.

“Mine then,” he said, his fingertips exploring the network of stretch marks that covered my stomach.

Enough time had passed for me to bear another man’s child, but I would not respond to his statement unless he actually dared to ask me that question.

“A live birth?” His hands had stopped and settled on my hips, the grip tense.

“Yes.”

“Damn it, Veronique, you could do more than give me a one-word answer.”

“A boy, Thomas,” I said after another minute’s silence. “AnneMarie is caring for him.”

He drew his hands away from my body and lay rigid beneath me. “You should not have risked coming.”

“I did, leave it at that.” I was surprised at how calm I kept my voice. I wanted to yell at him. How could he think to suggest I let my son’s father just die?

“You had a responsibility to stay.” He tried to wriggle from beneath me, but I tightened my thighs against his hips.

“So did you,” I shot back.

He wrapped his hands around my upper arms, surprising me with his strength as he pulled me forward and off him. “You could have died, damn it.”

“Impossible.” I let my body relax until he could no longer support my weight and I folded against him.

“You are a fool if you think that, Veronique.” His tone had evened out but did not gentle.

I wrapped my arms around him, held him tight to me as I argued. “No, because we would be together.” When he didn’t say anything, I shook him. “We never lose when we are together. Not once in all these years.” I felt him soften beneath me and rested my cheek against his chest, wetting him with the tears I couldn’t hold back any longer. “It was only when you went away that you were taken.”

It wasn't, it seemed, an argument he wanted to refute. He folded his arms around me and kissed the top of my head. He rolled me onto my back and smoothed the wet hair from my face before kissing me. He took his time, his tongue exploring my mouth as if he had forgotten its shape and taste.

Tension kept my body rigid and he started to massage my shoulders and arms as he continued kissing me. As I relaxed, he moved on to my nipples. Again, he did not rush. We had many days ahead of us on the boat and then another trip over land. There was no need to rush the night's conclusion. He covered one nipple, holding it between his teeth and gently tugging at it until I moaned.

He moved to the next nipple, pausing before he took it in his mouth. "I am going to love you like this each night we sail," he promised. "And each morning, I am going to spank your bottom raw for being so foolish."

A flush warmed my body at the threat and I arched against him, his cock sliding into me as I descended. "Tease."

He wedged a hand beneath one cheek and gave it a hard squeeze. "Not a tease."

He pumped the words into me until he was nestled just where I wanted him. I raised my legs and locked my ankles against the still strong muscles of his ass.

"But each night?"

The circles he pumped into me were tight and delicious, calculated to have me quickly at the edge of my climax. Whether it was his fatigue or he had finally surrendered all pretense of control, I felt him tremble with me and new that his own release was just as close. He drew back for one final thrust, his body rigid with need, and then drove into me as my climax unfolded. He was locked inside me, his cock pulsing as his cum jetted into me and he breathed his answer into my ear.

"Each night, this, my Veronique."



Translator's Note: My grandfather, Richard Ellis Vremont, was an incomparable storyteller. Where others chose to consume, he chose to create. He had a gift that I hope he passed on, at least in part, to me. But, wherever his stories took him, it was never to his past, or that of his family—the omission, I believe, a product of a painful childhood and the horrors of soldiering in World War II. I was surprised then, upon his death in 1989, to receive a trunk of letters and memorabilia. There was a slim little booklet on his unit's excursion behind enemy lines in Germany directly before the Battle of the Bulge. There were letters from his brothers, and there were the death notices as three of them over as many years lost their lives in the Arizona mines. At the bottom, buried beneath the story of his life, were the sheets of crumbling papers that comprise the Sacred Heart diaries.

Knowing that my grandfather spoke fluent French, I wonder what he made of the letters published by his great-great-great-grandfather, Philippe. I hope he would approve of what I have made of them.

As ever,  
Ann Vremont

## About the Author

Ann Vremont is a mother, wife, licensed attorney, technical writer, high school dropout and former Russian linguist for Army SigInt. She's called Bingo for a living, waitressed at a strip club, scooped ice cream and conducted political surveys—including for the wrong party. She maintains that, if she hadn't dropped out of high school, she would probably be a mineralogist or a geophysicist. Ann further maintains that if she had never met her husband of eighteen-plus years or had their son when she did, she would probably be making her living illegally—or, if unsuccessful, sitting in jail.

She has a large collection of minerals and a growing collection of lighthouses. Having been born and partially raised in Arizona, the mineral collection doesn't surprise her, but she's still puzzling the source of her lighthouse fetish. You can find her on the web at <http://www.annvremont.com>

Look for these titles

*Now Available*

Reluctant Muse

*An inspiring mix of a muse-on-the-loose, a plus-sized beauty and the artist next door...*

## Reluctant Muse

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Bryce is a practical, plus-sized woman with an L.A. apartment located a world away from the fairytales of Hollywood. So, when a blonde in red leather shows up proclaiming to be a muse and deputizing Bryce, she thinks another L.A. kook has landed on her doorstep.

But faster than Bryce can say, “No way, bye-bye, don’t let the door hit your skinny ass on the way out,” she finds herself in a toga and amulets that are wreaking havoc on her senses. The fight to get out of the toga and return to sanity leaves her butt naked on the neighboring patio. When she realizes her gorgeous next door neighbor is RIGHT THERE with her, it’s worse than any bad dream of showing up naked in high school.

For Mr. Gorgeous, however, it’s been a long time coming. He’s been having fantasies of painting Bryce au naturel for months. He’s had other fantasies, too, but the shy beauty has turned aside and ignored every attempt to get closer. Now that he’s got her halfway there, he’s pulling out all the stops.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Reluctant Muse*:

The knock on Bryce Schoene’s front door sounded tentative, as if the visitor questioned whether it was the right apartment. Bryce’s gaze dropped to the bottom right corner of her laptop’s screen where the time showed a few minutes before five o’clock. Squaring her shoulders, she focused on the blank Word file in front of her. It was Friday and—graduate degree hanging in the balance—she had a paper due Monday. She decided to ignore the knocking. Ninety to one odds, it was a stranger confused by the ambiguously numbered apartments.

She sorted through the jumble of ideas she had brainstormed on the bus ride home from campus, their previous brilliance extinguished by more careful thought. The knock came again, more assured this time, and Bryce chewed at her bottom lip. She considered starting the story with a knock on the door. But who would be on the other side, and why?

The visitor spoke on the third round of knocking, both the words and raps coming sharp and fast. "I can hear you thinking in there. Open up!"

The odd choice of words broke her concentration.

*Hear me thinking?*

Bryce swiveled the office chair until she faced the door. Despite the heavy muffle of oak, she could tell the visitor was a woman, the voice feminine and totally unfamiliar.

"Yes, I said 'thinking'. Open the door, Bryce," the woman called again. "I certainly don't have all weekend to stand around."

*She knows my name?* The chair groaned in protest as Bryce rose, and she winced. She walked quietly to the door, hoping the visitor was only bluffing and hadn't heard the chair's squeak.

"Come on, doll baby, this won't take long."

Despite the endearment, the woman didn't sound anything other than persistent—and likely to draw a crowd from among the many nosy neighbors whose apartments ringed the building's courtyard. Just imagining a week or more worth of curious looks from her neighbors made Bryce's skin crawl.

Approaching the door from the side, she reached up and slid the chain lock into place. Then she undid the top two deadbolts and slowly turned the doorknob. Nervous energy ran through her hand and arm, and it took her a few seconds to realize she had opened the door as wide as the chain allowed.

The two inch slice of open door revealed a petite blonde, with powder blue eyes and a slash of killer red lipstick slickening her wide mouth. Except for the peek of black boots from beneath her pants, red leather hugged her slim frame. The material's shade, slightly darker than the lipstick, dipped toward a dried

crimson. She looked, Bryce thought, like she'd just finished a shift on the corner of *Hooker and Vine*.

"Hooker and Vine?' Is this how you start all job interviews?" the woman asked.

Bryce jerked back from the door, and her brows knitted together over whether she'd actually voiced the insult. The question was abruptly pushed out of mind as the woman's second question sank in.

"Job interview?" Bryce asked. It sounded like a sales pitch. Dressed like she was, the woman definitely had *something* to sell. Bryce put her palm flat on the door and started to push, but the blonde wedged her black-booted foot between the door and its frame.

*Oh, hell, no. She just didn't. Did she?*

Bryce cocked an eyebrow at the woman and slowly raised her bare foot, threatening to place it against the blonde's twig of a leg. The woman sighed at the threat, the air leaving her in a long curling manner like spirals of smoke from a half-chewed cigar.

*Like spirals of smoke...what the heck?*

"You'll get used to it," the blonde smiled. "And if you don't, it's just for the weekend."

"Lady..." Bryce began and looked around for something else to force the woman's foot back through the door, "I don't know what you're talking about, but you've got the wrong Bryce. Okay?"

"No, doll baby." Her smile pulled the already wide mouth into a broad, thin line of determination. "Bryce Schoene, right? Bryce the Beautiful."

*Bryce the Beautiful.* Well, that proved it—no one had ever called her beautiful.

"Lady, you've definitely got the wrong Bryce."

Red-tipped fingers reached through the door and wrapped around the safety chain. The air surrounding the woman's fist vibrated like a hummingbird's wings and then the chain snapped. She swept past the stunned Bryce and into the room's center before glancing at her watch.

“It’s almost eight-fifteen in New York, doll baby,” she said. She gave a casual flick of her wrist and the watch slid beneath the sleeve of her red leather jacket just as the apartment door slammed shut. “So here’s the quick and dirty version, alrighty?”

Bryce put her hand up, hoping the “stop” motion seemed both calm and in command. “Why don’t we discuss this out in the courtyard, La...Miss?”

The darker ash blonde of the woman’s manicured eyebrows shot halfway up her forehead, and she held one slim hand in front of her mouth, just far enough away to avoid smudging her lipstick. The giggle she seemed to be fighting back escaped and she dropped the hand to clutch at her stomach. The laugh only grew in volume. “First, I’m in your head, so don’t waste time trying to trick me into the courtyard or anywhere else. Second, you can call me Percy for now.”

“Percy...well, that’s a start, I guess—”

“A damn slow one,” Percy interrupted. “Now where’s the uniform? You have to wear it, you know, for this to work.”

Bryce stared at her for a moment. *A joke.* It had to be a joke, even if she couldn’t think of anyone who would bother to play one on her. *Or maybe it was some new television show? Had the L.A. producers actually stooped so low they were invading people’s homes now?*

*Sarah Greene and Billy Fields are back, wrapped up in another mystery topped with sensual escapades.*

## The Amorous Adventures of Sarah: Mayhem for Two

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*Coming April 3, 2007 to Samhain Publishing*

It sounded like a simple case. Find a woman's missing husband, and the jewels that disappeared with him. But nothing is ever simple for the duo that makes up Greene Fields detective agency. Soon Sarah and Billy have stumbled into an international human trafficking ring, and have made enemies at every turn.

In between the detective work, both Billy and Sarah may have met their true loves. Sarah's enamored with farmer/aspiring novelist Teron and Billy's besotted with journalist Guantone. Now they're just hoping they'll survive long enough to discover if the lust could turn into something more permanent.

Enjoy the following excerpt from *Mayhem for Two*:

"Last one on the beach buys the drinks tonight." Sarah giggled. Titan took up the challenge and raced across the sand dunes, got to the sea, tasted it, pulled a doggy version face of disgust and scampered back to Sarah.

"It's beautiful here...but bloody hot for autumn." Sarah looked around knowing she wouldn't find any shade across the dunes with the sparse grass covering and miles of flat beach going from Malmouth in the south all the way to the lighthouse at Hazington, another eight miles to the north.

"The water looks cool," Sarah said with a glint in her eye. "Have you got your costume with you?"

"No."

Her grin got broader.

"You don't mean swim in your underwear?" Billy grimaced.

"No."



“Sarah. You’re not going skinny-dipping, are you?”

“No. I’m not. *We* are.”

Billy’s face got redder. It wasn’t just the sun.

“Don’t look so bashful, Billy. You may have something I’d like to get to know, but surely my naked body doesn’t excite you?” With a smirk, Sarah lifted the top she was wearing, pulling it over her head, then slipped her shoes and casual slacks off, standing in a mock pin-up pose in front of Billy.

“Do you want to see more? You hum the theme music to *The Stripper* and I’ll give you a show.”

Billy stood dumbfounded as Sarah did her own accompaniment, and with gyrating hips, wiggling ass and bouts of hysterical laughter took her bra off, swung it around her head a few times, tossed it into the air with a whoop and finally stepped seductively out of her panties. The concluding flourish was to let her panties hook on her right foot’s toes, run her hands over her breasts and loins, and with a sensual banshee shout, kick her panties whirling into the air.

She took a parody bow to a non-existent audience and inclining her head to one side said, “Well, see if you can get a better reaction from the seagulls, Billy. It’s your turn now. Or shall I come and help you get undressed?”

Billy decided it was better to go along with Sarah’s impishness. Besides, it was part of the reason she had become his best friend. He slipped his shirt off, bent and removed shoes and socks, then quickly slid out of pants and shorts. Sarah whistled and let her dark jet eyes become perfectly round, pretending innocence.

She stretched out her hand and took hold of Billy. Running together toward the sea, they whooped and shouted in unified bravado, like two parachute jumpers psyching each other up. They hit the waves with a cry of childlike happiness and plunged into the brine. After they’d swam around for a while, Sarah surfaced and hollered, “Blow this for a stupid game, I’m going to get dressed.”

Kicking seawater at each other in the shallows, Sarah jumped up at Billy, hugged him around the neck and kissed his cheek. Sliding down his naked, salt-encrusted body, she giggled and gave his cock a squeeze. "Lucky fellow who's enjoying that."

He chased her up the beach and they fell in a heap by a crumbling sandcastle which had been made, enjoyed and then deserted by children the previous day.

Resting and letting the sun dry their bodies, Sarah sat half up on her haunches, shielded her eyes from the glare with her hand and poked Billy in the ribs. "Reckon they are organizing Peeping Toms now?"

He looked toward the high dunes. There were four men in dark business suits standing by the derelict lifeguard's shed. Then he sat up with a start. "Don't reckon they are out on a voyeur's convention. Not unless revolvers are a standard issue."

"Jeez, they're coming our way...and they don't look friendly," Sarah said as she stood.

The four men started to run toward them.

"You go that way and I'll divert them this way," Billy urgently called. Sarah picked up her clothes, hugged them close...and ran for her life.

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