

The Diary of Claude Engel Deveroux

1788 - The Wintry Bloom

Paris in the 18th Century is a mother of a whore, and one that gave birth to me, during the later half of that century. Though I remember my biological mother well, and often fondly, I will always consider *La Dame de la Paris* my first and true mother.

My mother was a courtier, though never one of much social standing, she had a canny and fey grasp of the court's manners. I was the illegitimate product of an affair between her and an aristocrat whose name she never revealed to me. Though I was a bastard birth, my mother was set upon seeing my place among High Society, which was a rightful claim in her mind. Knowing that I would have little means to enter the court upon pedigree, she insisted then that I claim the route of merit, to be one of the many talented men, of learning and fame, whose company the court entertained. As such, my insisted that I receive a classical education of Paideia. She sold the family jewels and other articles to ensure its payment, and so I applied myself thoroughly to its lessons. It from here that I learned my basic rhetoric and grammar.

As I grew into this role, I found myself apt to the task of academia. Though not the best student there, when I applied myself I found I could draw upon deep wellsprings of natural talent to make up for my modicum of skill. Yet, my mother was keenly aware of the attractive man that I was growing into, she knew that I would be easily disarmed by the charms of the courts and become nothing but a dandy for the decadent pleasures of the aristocracy. She knew she would have to arm me with charm and wit of my own that I might stand upon my own two feet. By day I mastered the art of academia, by night I began to learn the rudiments of social grace. Indeed, on my 16th birthday I was to be presented to the courts. Where my levity failed, my features would find me salient passage through their fare. For a few bright years I thought I had found contentment, indeed beneath the veneer of polite society I found a caldera of political intrigue that piqued my curiosity. Though I was not to know that this intrigue would soon boil over.

In 1788, I would meet a young courtier by the name of Liselle Agincourt. From the moment she walked into the door, heads turned to greet her display, and I, like many of the unwitting young men of the court, discreetly rushed forward to greet her, much to the distaste of the women of the court. She was not of the aristocracy, but it was rumoured that her family had been granted many estates by the Bourbon family through the *Ancien Régime*. In her many visits to the court, her entrances would always be met with the disruption of the court as men almost literally fell over themselves. It was moments like that where I was forced to pull myself back so that I could watch her dance the ballet of the court. So brilliant was her skill at manipulating the court to her whim that I was often lost among them.

I was fortunate one month to have the chance of escorting her to the grand ball that evening. I had learned of this only last moment, when a chaperone of Liselle presented himself at my door during the afternoon, announcing, in no uncertain terms, that I would be her companion for the evening's events and that I would be accommodating Liselle's tastes.

Wasting no time I applied the best of my talents into my presentation, knowing that this unimaginable opportunity would likely as not make itself known again. I had to procure a small loan that evening so that I might have proper carriage hire and an outfit to match her exquisite and most likely impeccable tastes. I was to place some of my mother's jewellery as collateral for this loan.

As I left the tailors, with a fresh garment, a darkening sunset cast before me my own ominous shadow. This one moment is forever blazoned in my mind, for it is the epitaph of my requiem. The last kiss of the golden sun, with my gains on borrowed living that I might assume the affectations of a high society. As I walked, the long shadow was to be the metaphor of my undeath, this darkness cast in the relief of my being with a length far greater than my own living body. As I walk the sun sets, and my shadow grows longer. The further into undeath I travel the longer the darkness is that I cast... until eventually there is no more sun and all that remains is my silhouette.

The chill winds of night caught my breath as though trying to capture the anticipation I felt in my respiration. I instructed the coachman to draw towards the address given to me by Liselle. With small trepidation I hesitated at the gate of that chateaux, staring for endless minutes through its iron bars and something inside me quailed. I almost turned but in my mind I caught a glimpse of Liselle. In that mental visage I saw her perfect arms and ample breasts that she often displayed with contempt of courtly etiquette. My nostrils flared at the imagination of her exotic perfume and with that I had bolstered my courage to step up to the door and enter.

Liselle greeted me with a wry smile and meticulously ordered her clothes while I waited. I marvelled at the outfit she was wearing, it was quite clearly a most recent design for I had not seen its cut upon the ladies of the court. It was dangerous to try out a new style, and perhaps a social faux pas. Though if anyone had the aplomb to pass it off it was Liselle. She was a trend setter, not a follower. I recall sitting in silence on the coach for nearly ten minutes in wondrous rapture at her physique and detailed face.

"Why are you so quiet tonight, my little rabbit?" she asked at length.

"I am sorry, I was caught in a moment of rapture."

"No, you are merely regarding a simple pleasantry. Faces and physiques are petty fragilities. I did not ask you to accompany me tonight because you are a pretty boy. No I asked you because I

think you may be more than the sum of your upbringing, more than just simply a boy who is playing the games of court, though you play them very well.”

“I do not understand your meaning?”

“Forgive me, if I answer your question with a question, but I fear that our time together is not as long as it should be. What would you do if this was your last night alive?”

The question was oddly direct and indiscreet. I felt a chill down my spine for it was not a question I had expected. From there we ventured into a segue. In the last half hour of that coach ride she challenged me. She put before me questions of a deeply philosophical nature and I found myself truly wanting in the wake of her dialogue. From that moment on, the night of the ball was a blur. We flitted from person to person in the social dance of the court. As we moved through the night Liselle would whisper into my ear little pieces of advice, guiding me and helping me refine the skills my mother had taught me.

As the night drew on, Liselle’s comments grew stranger. She would comment in a rather abstract way about the mortality of the various individuals around her. Her words began to carefully draw my attention to the nearly mindless way they acted. She even referred to them as chattel once in a while. It was as though I were receiving a strange education. Midnight came closer and the candles began to burn low. A sense of hush drew over the crowd and guests began to depart. Though I myself felt tired, Liselle showed no signs of fatigue. One by one the guests drifted away. Liselle eventually clasped my wrist and drew me aside to a small alcove. Beneath the purple curtain, I could feel the chill draught flicker from beneath.

“Now my little rabbit, it is time for you to meet the Prince.”

“We are to meet his highness?” I asked incredulously.

Liselle gave a wry smile, “Think of it as more of an affectionate title. I give you this one warning, the Prince is not an agreeable man, and he has tested you this night. If you have been found worthy... well we shall see won’t we.” With that she grasped my hand firmly and then pulled it towards her heart. My hands touched the flesh above her breasts and I swelled. Her flesh was warm, but oddly smooth like fine porcelain. Though there was a terrible stillness beneath that skin that I could not place my finger on. What terrible irony.

“I give you a choice. I offer you a secret, one greater than you could imagine. I offer you the chance to become the best you could ever possibly be with untold nights to practice your arts, to perfect your mind and your games of society. Potential is yours, but it will come at a terrible price. Your choice is that you may at this point walk away and be who you are...” as she said this she drew aside the curtain to reveal an unlit hall “...or you may step into the darkness to find out what you may become.”

I stood there in front of that hall for a minute as I thought about the decision.

“What is it that you are not telling me?” my suspicion plain in my voice.

She stared at me for another minute and then drew me closer. “I did not ask for a recrimination, and you are spoiling my good

humour. If you will not decide then I must show you the urgency of your decision.”

Her hand around my arm grew firm and I could not break from it if I had wanted to. She kissed my lips with gentle ardour, though now I felt a coldness in them. There was no warmth to that kiss, only flesh without its sanguine caress. Then I felt a brief moment of pain and a shattering bliss. My world was nothing, for there was a fire in my soul burning with sheer ecstasy of her caress. Upon her caress this inner flame leaped higher and burned with such intensity I felt I would melt. Yet it burned hot, and it burned quick for I found its warmth beginning to fade. I was a failing light and the strength inside me waned.

After a few exquisite moments I felt myself dropped to the ground.

“This is now your choice, and you have bought this lesson dearly. You will die tonight, of that things are now certain. You do not have enough of the vital essence inside you to sustain your vitality. Your choice, is to either lay here and die like the son of a whore you are, or lift yourself, step behind this curtain and walk towards the hall’s end. Here you will meet hope, damnation and eternity.”

She turned upon her heel and walked softly down the hall. Not once did she look back over her shoulders at me.

I made to cry out, but had not the strength. I knew my will was failing me. I threw my entire conviction into standing. That I did was a testament to my desire for this woman than and noble courage I might otherwise give credence to. She held over me a power that I could not deny, no matter what the cost.

I moved delicately down the hall steadying myself as my head spun from the low blood within my body. I was weak and by its end, I was merely crawling upon the floor. I collapsed upon its egress at the feet of a person whose face I could not see.

“This is the supplicant my cove?” was the question of this figure. It was deep and sonorous, but had the same melodic quality as Liselle’s. This curious quality penetrated my mind, for it was desperately seeking out all the details it could and was sending urgent messages to the more primitive part of my brain, but by now I was spent and could move no longer.

“Yes he is, and as you can see, he has chosen damnation and with a determination. I seek your permission, my Lord, to bring this one into the fold of the damned.” This was definitely Liselle’s voice, I could hear it, but as it echoed across the room I could not locate its origin.

“Then let it be done, his Requiem begins tonight” came the reply, and a firm hand plucked me from the ground and raised me up the face of a seemingly young man with eyes of frosted blue.

As before, there was a moment of pain, and then exquisite ecstasy. Then there was a second moment of pain and I felt Liselle upon my back, feeding upon me as well. As my flame burned brightly, and fell to darkness I remember the strands of her brown hair fall around my shoulders like a motherly caress, her perfume flooding my nose and the soul drinking crystal eyes of the man before me.

I was collapsed upon the floor and there standing above me was the lovely Liselle. As she bit down hard upon her lips I saw a rivulet of blood drip off her mouth and over mine. There was a moment of revulsion as this fluid was expelled upon me like a midnight rain. It's odour pungent and acrid, and I thought it was searing my flesh, though this was perhaps only a delusion.

She pressed her lips against mine and I felt the hot liquid coarse into my throat. It exploded into my body and I felt wholly entwined with this creature I knew as Liselle. Though my flame had long extinguished, I felt a deep hot flame of her own though belied by the coolness of her skin. This fire fell from her lips and burned me, burned my throat and rekindled the embers of my dying being.

With but a kiss, I had my life cast out and given a flame of another nature. It was alien, dreadful and monstrous. It was the devil incarnate and I felt its malice within me. How I wanted to howl, to scream and thrash, but all I could do was slake that fire's terrible thirst.

And I was no more.

1789 - *The Sun's Descent*

Over the coming year, I was to feel the tutelage of my sire. She bent her hand towards my education that I would know the manners of the Invictus court and proper Etiquette. She encouraged me to develop my skill with the discipline of Majesty that I had shown an inordinate propensity for. When I needed caring for, she would ensure my safety and protect me from some of the more savage Kindred. Truly, I had three mothers, my first being the mother of my esteem, whose name is Paris, my second being the mother of my birth, whom I watched over on occasion as she cried for my death, and the mother of my death, who filled my Requiem.

It would be later throughout the year that I learned of the first whispers of trouble. My mother kept herself a retainer, and one that she bound into a half-undead through the power of Vitae. I was rarely allowed to speak to the mysterious girl named Verity, but from what I gathered she was my mother's eyes and ears to the city of Paris during the day. I knew she was totally and undyingly devoted to my mother through the strange bond of Vinculum, yet Liselle treated her with far more respect than any other servant I had seen.

As the year grew old, the city of Paris began to simmer. By May arguments of taxes and land estates came to the fore with bitter resentment during the Estates-General convened in Versailles. It was here that the third estate with the power of votes began to separate from the first and second estate of powers. By this point the third estate of middle class and peasantry had begun to separate from the traditional vaults of power, setting themselves up as *The Communes* as a power separate from the *parlement*. Though my sire and the Prince showed little concern for the doings of 'the rabble' they expressed concern that these machinations were in fact the work of a new covenant that had been stirring the caldera of the already tense peasantry. It seemed this young collective of neonates had no respect for the time honoured roles between Kindred and Kine. Though the court showed nothing but contempt for this, I could not but help find

myself curious by this turn of events. As having been common born myself I saw in this an opportunity to equalise the inequities between the low and the high.

Throughout the month of June, I felt my blood churn with excitement. I walked the streets of Paris at night and I could feel the sallying of her peoples, the very life blood of the city crying in a multitude of voices, to the percussive beat of the manifold footsteps of the peoples. So as though turning to a gentle lover I plied my ear to the whispers on the street to hear what ailed her. And I learned the truth. Paris was sick and diseased, and she was angry. I followed the whispers and gossip, making many long walks in the dark at night.

It was during one of these encounters that I discovered that I was being trailed. I had never considered myself threatened when walking the streets of Paris at night, for any simply thug that cared to waylay me, quickly found to their disadvantage that I was no simple prey. Yet this figure, once I had espied his, filled me with a fantastic terror that cause the demon inside me to quail with fear. I turned and fled. Through the nightly streets of Paris I felt this thing at my heels. Wherever I ran I followed as I ran blindly into the night. After what seemed like aeons I came to a stop, and held my breath. The rage inside me quietened somewhat, I could still feel this creature nearby and I worked to resist the urge to cry, to rage or to lay in quiet.

As I waited with anticipation I felt the feeling pass. I was about to walk forward when out of the shadows a silhouette stepped, framed only by the glistening light of candles in the small windows. I no longer sensed the presence of the predator upon him, but it was surely the same creature. My curiosity overcame my fear.

"What manner of creature are you that stalks as a predator on the street?" I announced stepping forward to meet this figure, placing upon me the raiment of sovereignty about me.

The shadow hesitated and then stepped forward cautiously into a little pool of light cast down by a lantern. It was a man, it was an Andalusian man with dark and deep eyes that seemed to give the impression of empty sockets. I felt my skin crawl. That is was a Kindred I had no doubt, though I felt safer for having the shield of my raiment. The figure bowed slightly.

"Good evening young rabbit, you give a good chase but now is not the time for such games." he spoke with a soft voice, soft and sibilant like a hearse whisper. "I am merely a shadow, my clan is not very prevalent in the city these nights, I think your liege has a distaste for our kind. Fortunately for us, he pays no mind to the gutter-trash and we make our havens in the slums he so despised."

At his words I remembered some of my sire's teachings. "Then you would be one of the Haunts. I had thought your kind were merely a legend."

A grimace appeared across his face at those words, "We prefer the term Nosferatu, especially when coming from the mouth of a Daeva. Oh yes, we must hide in the gutters while the Prince and the pretty Daeva court sits upon a fat and rotting city."

"Mind your tongue, lest I cut it out for you, I'll not have you speak erstwhile against the Prince or the fair city." The figure

visibly flinched at my reprimand, knowing how he had displeased me.

"I mean no offence to your fair ears my rabbit, I merely seek to offer advice and help you to open your eyes up to the reality that you are already beginning to perceive. This city is a beautiful one I agree, but she is becoming sick and lethargic under the static rule of its ruling covenant. They remain blind to the needs of mortals who are changing so rapidly that they will soon be left behind in the dark if they do not adapt." He wrung his hands around his wrists as he spoke, and though he watched the shadows nervously, he never truly took his gaze off me.

"You have my ears, speak your piece or be back to the gutters and give me my rest."

The man nodded contritely. "I have but a warning for you my young rabbit. I have watched you take an interest in the affairs of the common man, and I think that you show promise. You have but one chance to save yourself at the end of the month of *Messidor*, for the Bastille will fall and it will signal a reign of fire." He looked around nervously once more, as though listening to some unseen noise. "Take this message to the prince if you must, but I assure you he will scorn it and then you will know the truth of his stagnation and the stagnation of his covenant. The Carthians have come."

With the last of his words, he stepped back into the shadows, I ran forward to try and grasp him that I might question him some more, but I found myself clutching nothing but empty air. He had literally vanished. I remembered his words as later that month Paris exploded into violence with the Storming of the Bastille giving birth to the French Revolution. Amongst the raucous noise of gunfire and war cries, the din of screams on the street and the smell of black powder in the air I almost forgot that I had even met him.

1793 - Flight of the Nightingale

Years of revolution had left its scar on Paris. She cried blood and left carrion as festering wounds throughout her streets. The day prior I had seen Marie Antoinette meet her fate upon the guillotine. The court was in shambles and there was rioting on the streets. Many of the Invictus had been given over to their final deaths, the prince included. They had foolishly presumed the safety of their havens would shelter them from the revolutionary storm. Yet one by one the serfs had crashed once secure gates, overcame guards and staff.

The day after Marie Antoinette's death I approached Liselle to suggest that we should possibly leave Paris until the worst had settled down. As I approached, I overheard Liselle arguing with her maid, a ghoulish family often served the *Torero* bloodline. Her name was Verity and she was Liselle's eyes and ears of the street while the errant daystar flew overhead. The argument was quite heated, which I found alarming to say the least. In all my years I had never heard Verity once raise her voice to Liselle.

Despite the vinculum and years of established decorum between the two of them, Paulette claimed a potent pedigree and in exchange for her services Liselle had made arrangements for Paulette daughter to learn the trade as one of Marie Antoinette's lady's in waiting. When Marie Antoinette had gone on the

flight to Varennes Nicolette had been left behind in Versailles. At her own great expense Verity had ensured Nicolette's return to Paris. Now at the tender young age of 16 Nicolette had little hope for her future here in Paris and Verity was demanding that they flee to Milan where her family was.

It was then that I saw Nicolette for the first time in my life, she was sitting quietly in the corner, so much so that I can not notice her until now. I was in awe, she had the same lithe shape and perfect features of Liselle herself. If I had not known better I would have thought that Nicolette was the daughter of Liselle's flesh.

Over the next week I asked discreet questions to some of Liselle's other confidants. I would discover that Verity was heavy with child when Liselle had bound her to the blood. Though the child had been carried to birth, some sort of mystical exchange of *Vitae* meant that Nicolette bore the mark of her mother's Regnant. I would also learn that Verity had declined from imbibing the blood of her Regnant for nearly a year now, and that the Vinculum over her was fading fast. It was apparent to me that the maternal instinct was beginning to override the obsequious nature of her service.

I approached Verity and made her an offer to help her and her child escape from Paris and pay for their fare to Milan. Liselle was livid at me, and struck me down with a powerful blow, hurling spiteful names in my face. That night she forced me out into the street as punishment. I was barred from all the usual sanctuaries and I had but only a few scant hours before the cursed daystar made itself shown.

I stalked the streets, attempting to seek out refuge, but my well dressed clothes marked me for an aristocrat and I found it difficult to find any place where I could be left in peace. I would be rooted out time after time and I needed to utilise my disciplines at a near constant rate simply to prevent myself from being mobbed. Liselle had chosen her punishment well. With only half an hour to dawn I was bedraggled and mentally exhausted. I prepared myself to greet the dawn, when I felt a familiar presence. I turned to see the Nosferatu that I had met those many years ago.

"So the rabbit has been thrown out of the warren, and now you seek sanctuary. Perhaps now you see the folly of those who seek power through imposition."

He was not alone, he was flanked by two other people who appeared to be human, but whom I suspected were not, though I felt no flare of fear or anger. Tired I said nothing but stared at him with dread anticipation.

"We will shelter you little one, you won't like the abode, but it is better than being caught in the open during the day."