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Lenore**[Sounds of writing—pen on paper]**

Lenore: Last night I dreamt of a woman in a white dress. She was wandering through the halls of my new home, lost, and her throat was torn out. I could see the great stain of blood on the breast of her frock, could hear the gurgle of her breath as she moved in the darkness. In the dream I was standing at the door of our bedroom, clad only in my night clothes, and she was walking down the staircase, trailing her hand along the banister as she dropped out of sight. I crept across the hall on slippers, followed her down the stairs and across the foyer, into the parlor where I found her with her back to the fireplace. Her eyes were the blue of a moonlit sea, and despite the ragged wound at her neck and the gore-streaked gown, she was beautiful.

Over her shoulder, its head turned unnaturally toward me, a huge dark-winged bird walked slowly backward along the mantel. Its movements felt wrong, in the way that dreams often feel wrong, like a film run in reverse.

“Why do you wander so late?” the woman asked. Her voice was scratched like an old record, and a small line of blood ran from her mouth.

“It is too hot to sleep,” I said, “and I am troubled by the wolves, singing to the moon.”

And as I said it, it was true. The night was filled at once with the voices of wolves, and her hand raised instinctively to her throat.

“All of us,” she said. And then, when I didn’t answer, “we all howl here.”

I woke with my head on my husband’s shoulder, the low growl of his snoring the only sound between the velvet-draped walls of our room. It took me a moment to remember where I was, who I was. I breathed deeply and thought my name clearly.

Now I am Lenore Thorne. I was Lenore Cartiér, but I have left my Mother's house in Essex and fully moved into Maison d'Aubépine, and taken on my role as the wife of Radcliffe Thorne. The wedding is done, the crumbs swept away, and our wedding trip to Monte Carlo is behind us.

I am the luckiest girl in the world.

[Theme music; opening credits]

[Sounds of writing—pen on paper]

Lenore: Radcliffe will be coming down for breakfast soon, but I have a few minutes before I have to present myself. I am sitting at the writing desk in my morning room, and Mrs. Perrault has just set a porcelain cup of coffee by my writing hand. It's thick with cream and I can see the steam lit by the morning sun slanting through the wavy leaded glass of the tall windows that open onto the back gardens. I can hear the birds singing. My dog Biscuit is asleep at my feet. Last night's nightmare is fading, like a child's monster story.

It is fitting that I begin this journal with a dream, I suppose. I had dreamt of Maison d'Aubépine many times, before I ever saw the house in person. Radcliffe had told me about it so often, describing the grounds and the tall oaken door. The grand staircase in the foyer. The fireplace and the library. The silken bed sheets. I could never admit to the dreams I had about those silken sheets, not without blushing, but I suppose I can write them down here in this journal. Maybe I will, eventually.

For now, though, I want to record what it is like to dream of a place and then to enter it—to become mistress of a grand house when before you were treated as a child. Who would have

guessed that little Lenore Cartier would become the mistress of Maison d'Aubépine? But I have.

Mama never approved of Radcliffe Thorne. He started coming to our parties a couple of years ago, not long after I was first allowed to attend them myself, soon after we fled prohibition to settle in England.

He was so handsome, He dressed in crimson and velvet, and his boots were lined in fox fur. His hair was dark and thick, combed back from his forehead in waves of lustrous black, and his eyes were a startling gold, shot through with veins of green. There were jewels on his fingers, rubies and diamonds, and a silver wolf's head on the handle of his walking cane.

He was always the center of attention, both because he was so striking and because of his storytelling. It never took more than ten minutes for him to draw a crowd, circled around him in the drawing room, hanging on each word as he told tales of his exploits. He had always just gotten back from Paris, or was just about to go there. He was very wealthy, and dignitaries in the city often asked his advice on issues of great import. He knew all manner of people—writers and musicians and actors—and he saw concerts and plays and was always attending dances and gatherings with luminaries. He knew Hemingway, he said, and the Fitzgeralds. Scandalously, he had seen Josephine Baker dance and implied that he frequented the Moulin Rouge.

When he was out of earshot of Mother, he would talk about dance halls and cafes with secret parlors in the back. He had been to the notorious Grand Guignol Theatre, and to private showings in hidden alleys of the Latin Quarter he would only hint at. His eyes would sparkle when he told these stories, and I knew he was as wicked as he was handsome.

But the stories I loved the most were the ones of his home. The Maison d'Aubépine was a grand old house in Brittany, on the coast of the channel. Not a mansion, not like father's family in upstate New York, but still a large house with extensive grounds. He would describe the

flowers in the garden, the sloping back lawn and the trees and pond, and I could almost smell the fragrance of the blossoms. There was, he said, a stately grandfather clock in the entrance hall, and a wide stone fireplace in the parlor. It was not his house originally, but he had settled there years ago, much like Mama and I had moved across the sea after the war. He clearly loved the estate, and he talked about it with the ardor of a lover. By the time he stole a kiss from me under the arbor in Mama's garden, I was as in love with the house as I was with my mysterious Radcliffe.

I did not want to hurt Mama, of course. But sooner or later, every child must grow up, and she must have known I would eventually leave her. Our life in Essex was so small, so circumscribed. Except for the infrequent dinner parties, we saw no one. I felt myself fading, like a dying flower when the hothouse door has been left open. So when Radcliffe asked me to be his, I said yes without reservation or hesitation.

The night before our wedding, Mama came to my room and I could see she had been crying. She sat next to me on my pink and white comforter, and put her arms around me. "My darling girl," she said, "please be careful." And I told her I didn't need to be careful, I had a strong, handsome husband to take care of me.

She said, "Oh my dearest child, you should trust yourself and no one else. Men have layers, and we can only see the surface." And there it was. She still thought of me as a child.

[Scoffing] Layers. That just means more to discover—a lifetime of beautiful surprises. The next morning we were married and I left my little girl's life behind me forever.

But I can hear Radcliffe coming down the stairs. I must go and present myself at table. More later.

[Later; sounds of writing]

I shall miss Mama, of course. I was allowed to bring my dog, Biscuit, and obviously my paints and canvasses. But it's a long way from my home, and the language is strange and so are the people, though they are nice enough. The nearest village is Gévaudan—not *that* Gévaudan, though how romantic would that be!—but a little town of several thousand. It used to be larger, but the war and the pandemic left huge swaths of it shuttered and abandoned. Those who remained are friendly and industrious, though, and there are shops enough, as well as a little post office and some restaurants. No one lives closer than town, but it's just a five minute jaunt in one of Radcliffe's motorcars to reach the shops. Paris is a longer journey, being a few hours by train from the Gévaudan station. We have Talbot and Mrs. Perrault, and a chambermaid called Edith. We hire a few townspeople to come and do for us during the day. At night we are largely on our own.

Monte Carlo was a dream. We spent our days on the beaches and in the casinos, where everyone seemed to know "Monsieur Thorne," and our nights we spent in each others arms in a huge suite that overlooked the ocean. I slept very little, not that I wanted to. There was too much to see, too much to learn.

Everyone remarked on me. Radcliffe bought me silk gowns, beaded and jeweled, and more than one envious matron told me I had made an auspicious match. By the way they glanced between us, shifting their eyes in a way that belied their voices, I could tell they meant he had married below himself. I smiled and thanked them, because I was the one who slept in his arms each night, and I was the one he took home to Maison d'Aubepine.

And he did. After ten days we climbed into his Bugatti and drove north to Brittany, where two days later I beheld, for the first time, my new home.

It is a grand old house, but the first thing I noticed as we rounded the turn of the drive

was the huge old oak tree in front. Its branches spread across the lawn, shading the wide porch and the lower level windows. The drive ended a hundred yards from the house, and we stepped out of the Bugatti and mounted a small flight of stone steps that took us onto the lawn. The grounds were lush with the late summer—this was only a few days ago—and the borders were resplendent with flowers: foxglove, monkshood, and thorn apple all blooming amongst the clematis and hydrangeas, and the air buzzing with bees.

The house itself is tall and imposing, three stories with a mansard roof, stained glass in the upper level and a wide veranda or porch that stretches to either side of the tall oak doors. It was exactly as I'd imagined, and I was instantly enthralled.

As we approached the wide steps to the veranda, the door opened and two people came out. One was a low, wide man in a tie and tails who bowed to Radcliffe and me. "My darling," said Radcliffe, "this is Talbot, the butler." Talbot took my hand and kissed it, which if I'm being honest was not very comfortable as his eyes were as hard and calloused as his hands, and then he went to the car to fetch our luggage.

The other person who had emerged from the house stood waiting at the top of the porch steps for us. She was a kindly-looking matron in a simple muslin dress, blue with a white apron. Her graying hair was pulled tightly into a bun, though a few strands escaped to wave near her small gold-rimmed glasses.

"And this," said my husband, "is Mrs. Perrault."

"Welcome to Maison d'Aubepine, Madame Thorne," she said.

Such formality from a woman old enough to be my grandmother made me uncomfortable, so I said, "Please, Mrs. Perrault, call me Lenore." She smiled at me, and her face crinkled like paper.

“Your clothes and painting things have already been put away in your room, Lenore,” she said. “I’ll have lunch for you on the side patio in half an hour.” She smiled again, and I knew we would be great friends. She curtsied, like an old-fashioned story-book character, and then she stepped aside and I crossed the veranda to the door of the house.

Later, after I had time alone in my room to sit and reflect, I realized that what happened next was a result of nerves. I hadn’t slept and I was anxious about becoming mistress of the house. Happily anxious, but still. But here’s what I experienced in the moment:

As I touched the doorknob, there was a rustle in the trees just beyond the lawn, a sound like a large animal moving quickly. It was accompanied by a low growl. I turned, startled, and as I did I saw—or I thought I saw—someone standing in the window next to the door. It was a woman with dark hair in a white dress, so I thought, standing just behind the thin lace curtain, her face turned away from me. Radcliffe stepped quickly forward, blocking my view of the window. He took my arm, saying “it’s just a dog, my dear, probably from the village.” He nodded to Talbot, who moved quickly towards the trees, and ushered me inside. I entered the house and came into my new life.

[Theme music; credits]

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