

The Eighth Day

Brotherhood

Alice M. Phillips

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First printing

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ISBN: 978-1-61296-737-0

PUBLISHED BY BLACK ROSE WRITING

www.blackrosewriting.com

Printed in the United States of America

Suggested retail price \$

The Eighth Day Brotherhood is printed in Adobe Caslon Pro

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August 1, 1888

“And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” —Book of Genesis



One by one, white feathers were grafted to the young man’s mottled skin with melted wax. Supple limbs were lifted from the stone slab, bound with thin ropes like marionette strings, and fastened to a skillfully carved wooden framework. Muscles were slashed and bones were snapped to mimic the impact of falling from a dizzying height onto a rocky shore. The Messenger, holding a fire iron with a twisted shaft ending in a red-orange smolder, insisted on melting out the man’s eyes himself.

Another press of the chloroform-soaked cloth to the dying man’s lips silenced his attempts to scream. The sound quickly faded to a murmur, allowing the eight men to continue their work without the distraction of extraneous noise. On this evening, the first night of fulfilling the prophecy, their light was dim and their surroundings were stifling, but soon their formidable sculpture would be exhibited for all of Paris to admire.

The self-appointed Messenger of the Eighth Day Brotherhood peered into the handsome face of the stranger he had selected to become his Icarus. His slender hands worked diligently, his eyes ice-bright. Occasionally, when particularly satisfied with his work, he flashed his white teeth in a wolfish grin. The smooth flesh stretched over his sharp features suggested he was not much older than his reluctant model for the First Day sculpture.

At least the young man had stopped twitching. He remained motionless

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and silent once the Messenger finished removing his eyes. Black-tinged blood diluted by viscous fluid oozed from the sockets, emitting a sickening stench.

In the façade of everyday life, the Messenger was best known as a painter. Tonight, however, marked his first masterpiece in sculpture: a living model, work of art, and necessary sacrifice combined into one magnificent composition.

The Messenger dismissed his seven assistants with a low mutter and a flick of his wrist. As the men crept away, he reached out to arrange a few sticky strands of dark hair over his model's face. How fortunate was this young man, to have been selected for such a noble purpose! His chosen model would become the first creation of the Eighth Day Brotherhood, and also its finest, the Messenger knew, since he had overseen the sculpture's intricate design and execution himself. His carefully selected muse would be resurrected in the spirit world and guide the Brotherhood into a higher state of existence: the new Creation.

Once he finished adjusting the final touches on his masterpiece, manipulating every detail with his deft fingers, he commanded his fellow artists to assist him in transporting the Brotherhood's creation to its intended location before dawn. He was impatient to supervise the model's final placement and position. The Messenger's gleeful smile widened. Everything was falling into place, just as the spirit world had promised him. Soon the sun would rise upon the First Day.



The artist's hand moved across the page of his sketchbook, slowly at first, then faster as he lost himself in the mesmerizing act of drawing his model. He was oblivious to the smears of graphite staining his knuckles as he shaded her face, to the heat and stench of sweat in the crowded auditorium, and to the sharp glances from the man seated next to him when the scratch of his pencil was distractingly loud. In his drawing, the young woman drifted in midair with her head tilted to one side, eyes closed, and wore a long white gown, like a sleeper suspended in space.

Claude often felt as if he had slipped into a trance himself while watching her. The red-haired girl was of slight build, her limbs birdlike and delicate, blue veins visible beneath nearly translucent alabaster skin. Her eyes

were closed while she writhed and quivered on the low wooden stage. Her feet were unsteady in her macabre dance, and her thick hair became a fiery mist around her face. One of her convulsions finally shook one strap of her chemise from her bare shoulders. Something in Claude's stomach twisted, making the young artist retreat into the dreamy miasma of his own mind. Instantly he was alone with her, saw only her, once their gaslit surroundings faded from his captured gaze.

She will be perfect.

Again she thrashed her head from side to side, making coils of red hair caress her shoulders. Her body exuded a haunting grace despite her erratic movements, her sinuous limbs stirring in an uncanny dance like a marionette on taut strings. Claude knew he had found his muse.

What color are her eyes?

A harsh male voice shattered Claude's reverie. "As you can see, gentlemen, Mlle. Finnegan's hysteria is an unusually advanced case."

Released from the woman's spell, Claude's consciousness snapped back to the demonstration auditorium of l'Hôpital Sainte-Geneviève and the black-suited doctor who had spoken. He realized he was holding his breath, and slowly exhaled into the moist air he shared with dozens of other curious men.

"This patient may endanger herself and others while in such an agitated state," continued Dr. Jacques-André Veyssière. "However! After many years of working with her, I have succeeded in bringing her hysteria episodes under control. Please observe."

Claude shoved a lock of dark hair out his face and watched intently, his sapphire eyes wide while Dr. Veyssière demonstrated his signature technique. The physician was an elegant but severe-looking middle-aged man with slick black hair receding from his domed forehead. His dark eyes were intelligent but often unreadable, his nose aquiline, his face angular.

Dr. Veyssière raised his large hands to the young woman's flushed face. She moaned softly and opened her eyes.

Claude leaned forward in his uncomfortable seat for a closer look. *Green. Or are they blue?* The wooden chair creaked sharply, and Claude froze as the woman's gaze flickered over him for a brief moment. *Emerald green.*

"There now, mademoiselle," the doctor said gently. Facing her, he slipped his fingertips beneath the tangled hair around her temples and pressed them firmly against her head, forcing her to meet his gaze before addressing his audience again.

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“Like the great physician Franz Anton Mesmer, I have been gifted with the ability to project my energy into my patients’ bodies and cure the imbalances that plague and torment them. This energy, or magnetic fluid, as Mesmer called it, I draw from the very cosmos. I draw upon the sun, the moon, and the stars. Yes, gentlemen—I manipulate the magnetic fluid of the celestial bodies themselves!”

The physician’s voice had grown louder and increasingly theatrical. Two muscular ward attendants quietly approached the mesmerized patient from behind, wheeling a rickety gurney. They reminded Claude of wolves circling their prey, waiting hungrily for her to weaken and fall.

The young woman’s convulsions had calmed, but she still struggled slightly when the doctor tightened his grip, pressing his palms against her cheekbones, digging his fingertips into her scalp. He raised his voice further when he continued speaking. “Now, by concentrating my energy—” He leaned his forehead against the shuddering woman’s, challenging her furious glare with his own. “—I free this unfortunate woman from hysteria.”

He withdrew both hands at once like a magician releasing a dove, and with a final shiver the woman collapsed into the waiting arms of the ward attendants. She released a long breath and remained still, her eyes shut and her face as serene as if she were enjoying a pleasant dream. One attendant replaced her chemise over her shoulders and grasped her beneath her arms. The other robust man wrapped her long grey skirt around her ankles, and together they lifted her onto the gurney.

“Now, you observe that the patient is quite docile,” the physician was saying in a lower voice. “She will remain so until her next hysteria episode. These little fits often occur in female patients with a history of trauma and suffering, and they can be triggered by environmental...”

Claude was no longer listening. He was watching the two attendants arrange the woman’s body on the gurney, their faces as expressionless as marble statues while they buckled three leather straps across her torso. Then, with a piercing squeak of wheels, they maneuvered her through a wide swinging door at the back of the stage.

Claude watched her disappear back into the sanitarium, reminiscent of Ophelia drifting downstream. First her pale face with its wild halo of red hair slowly vanished across the threshold, then her frail body, and finally her small bare feet, slightly tinged with grey dust from the dark wooden floor. Then she was gone.

Claude was dimly aware of closing the worn cover of his sketchbook and rising to his feet along with the rest of the audience, which mostly consisted of elderly doctors and younger medical students. They quickly surrounded the mesmerist and began to congratulate and question him in loud voices, eager for his attention.

“How are your methods different from those of M. Charcot at the Salpêtrière?”

“Is the patient in a trance? How long will she remain magnetized?”

“Are you willing to teach your healing technique to others, Dr. Veyssière?”

“Can we observe Mlle. Finnegan’s progress at your next demonstration?”

The questions flew past Claude’s head as he slowly pushed his way through the perspiring crowd towards the physician and climbed the few steps of the demonstration stage. The fervid audience dispersed at last, and Claude approached Dr. Veyssière. He could not help noticing that the doctor’s heavy, muscular hand did not appear to be that of a miracle worker, nor did it seem like a hand that deserved to touch the angelic woman’s body.

“Well, young man?” asked the doctor, raising a dark eyebrow. “Did you find my demonstration enlightening? I am Jacques-André Veyssière, and you are—?”

Claude realized he was staring blankly at the man’s flinty, chiseled face. He shook the stupor from his brain and bowed politely to the doctor. “Forgive me, Monsieur. My name is Claude Fournel. I want to ask about the—the patient,” he mumbled. “Mlle. Finnegan, I mean.”

“Oh! She will recover quite soon. She typically remains in a trance-like catatonic state until she has another hysteria fit—”

“No, I mean, who *is* she?”

The doctor narrowed heavy-lidded eyes that had already scrutinized Claude’s dusty black suit, paint-encrusted hands, and unkempt dark hair. “I have never noticed you attending my demonstrations before,” he said. “You are not a medical student, I presume?”

Claude lifted his chin towards the taller man and tried, but failed, to look imposing. “I am an artist,” he said boldly. “Studying at the atelier of Alexandre Baltard on the Rue de l’Abbaye to become a great p—”

“A great painter. Of course,” the doctor finished sardonically, glancing at Claude’s sketchbook. “Another art student who needs Finn to ‘model’ for you, correct?” His lips twitched into a derisive smile.

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“Finn?” Claude murmured. The unusual name swam through his mind, which began to blur back into dreaminess.

The mesmerist’s eyes darkened. “Margaret Rose Finnegan is my patient, and she is a very sick woman. I will not just sedate her and wheel her out for any artist who wants to paint her. Frankly, young man, I have grown quite weary of so-called artists and poets and other bohemian lowlifes invading my scientific demonstrations to ramble at my colleagues and I about dreams and madness and whatnot and leer at unfortunate women in their chemises. Is that clear, M. Fournel? I suppose if you were a respectable Salon painter or a prize pupil at the École des Beaux-Arts whose reputation preceded him, but—an independent atelier student, are you?—I am afraid I cannot help you. Good day.” He spun on his heel and strode resolutely towards the swinging door.

“Please, Monsieur,” Claude begged. “My intentions with the lady—with Mlle. Finnegan—are strictly professional. My work is quite modern but rooted in sublime history and myths. I considered applying to the École des Beaux-Arts but instead chose to study with the distinguished master—”

“Shall I summon my attendants, or can you find your own way out of my sanitarium?” interrupted Dr. Veysseyre, turning around sharply to focus the black chasms of his eyes on Claude’s desperate gaze.

Claude fell silent with a sigh. The doctor continued his stride, shoved the swinging door aside, and disappeared.

The artist turned listlessly in the opposite direction and withdrew from the auditorium to the main hallway. The heavy door shut slowly behind him, and he resisted the urge to cast one last glance through its narrow glass window towards the stage where Finn had stood. With his sketchbook under his arm, he stormed out of l’Hôpital Sainte-Geneviève and into the Parisian August heat.



Rémy Sauvage glanced up from the book of poetry he was reading at his bookshop counter to greet the three customers who had just entered, but held his tongue when he recognized their uniforms.

Detectives from the Préfecture? thought Rémy with an inward scowl. *They must be here to ask about the Rosicrucians again.*

He stood, straightened his eccentric garb—a forest-green velvet jacket

and a jewel-toned silk scarf—and adjusted the black ribbon loosely restraining his long ivory-colored hair. A lanky man in his mid-thirties, Rémy's pallid hair, still-youthful features, and outdated clothing made his age difficult to determine. He forced a pleasant expression onto his face, keeping his gaze bright and expectant below straight eyebrows that almost made him appear haughty. His eyes were a gold-flecked green that faded to brown in the middle, the color of medieval parchment, as if they had consumed too many rare books and were starting to turn the shade of decaying pages.

Rémy reached for his cane with bejeweled fingers. The cane's silver pommel resembled one of the architect Viollet-le-Duc's recent designs for the balustrade of Notre-Dame cathedral: a snarling gargoyle leaping from its perch on a miniature gothic tower. The bony creature's wings lay flush against its curved back, the coil of its serpentine tail providing a convenient grip for one's hand. Purchased from an antiques dealers near the Louvre, the cane was decorative rather than necessary, but Rémy had on rare occasions needed to draw the hidden blade that descended from the ornate tower into the ebony shaft.

"Welcome to *Le Jardin Sauvage*, the finest source of rare and occult books in Paris," he greeted his visitors with a bow. "How may I assist you, messieurs?"

Rémy took pride in the fact that entering his shop was akin to stepping inside a Gustave Moreau painting. Orientalist lamps, Symbolist paintings, and alchemical diagrams adorned the peacock-green walls decorated with brushed-gold patterns, while the dark-paneled bookshelves were heavily laden with occult tomes, swatches of jewel-toned fabrics, and small oddities carved in ivory. Rémy, however, also assumed that this sublime experience of life imitating art was lost on his current group of visitors.

An unsmiling lump of a man with intelligent dark eyes, thinning black hair, and a meticulously trimmed mustache stepped past the two younger officers. His intense gaze quickly surveyed the bizarre selection of Rémy's bookstore, which offered everything from Symbolist poetry to demonology, and then settled upon Rémy. "Inspector Marcel Percier from the Préfecture de Police," he introduced himself curtly. "I am looking for Rémy Sauvage, the owner."

Rémy leaned on his cane. "You have found him."

Percier tilted his head like a curious bird. "You have an accent."

"Yes—I come from Lyon. I relocated to Paris over a decade ago."

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The policemen began shuffling through the shelves, flipping through books and browsing like any other inquisitive customers.

“I know.” The inspector studied Rémy’s expression as he continued speaking. “Rémy Sauvage. You attended seminary in Lyon but you were never ordained. Was that a personal choice, M. Sauvage?”

“I asked too many questions,” Rémy replied testily, watching the policemen hasten their search through his shelves. “Anyway, I don’t see—”

“Or did it have something to do with the church’s distaste for your interests and—your preferences?”

Rémy readjusted his grip on his cane, but said nothing.

“Then you moved to Paris. Educated at the Sorbonne. According to one of your former professors, you took a particular interest in ancient literature, art, and the occult.” Percier raised an eyebrow. “Then what? *You tell me*, M. Sauvage.”

Rémy swallowed. “Then I worked with rare book dealers until a friend convinced me to start my own trade a few years ago—”

“Would that ‘friend’ happen to be Stéphane Desnoyers?”

“I—” Rémy stammered, taken aback. “Why are you here? Is he in some sort of trouble?”

“M. Sauvage, we have been conducting some interviews around this neighborhood, and we understand that you are, shall we say, a close friend of M. Desnoyers, correct?”

Rémy felt struck by a sudden dizziness, shortness of breath, and a flutter of panic. “Yes,” he replied cautiously, unconsciously tapping his ring on the silver pommel of his cane. “He works in my shop a few hours per week, and rents one of my rooms in the apartments upstairs.”

“Indeed,” Percier replied with practiced incredulity. “May I ask where you were at dawn this morning?”

“Asleep. I have not seen Stéphane—M. Desnoyers—since yesterday evening. He also works as a model for painters at the École des Beaux-Arts and various ateliers, so he keeps odd hours. Please, Inspector, what is this all about?”

Percier fixed his level gaze on Rémy’s widened eyes. The inspector’s sharp, wary features and close-cropped hair reminded the bookshop owner of Jacques-Louis David’s later portraits of Napoléon.

“M. Sauvage, I am investigating the murder of Stéphane Desnoyers, whose body was found shortly before dawn this morning at the Panthéon.

With all—this—in your possession—” Percier’s sweeping gesture indicated the occult paraphernalia surrounding them. “I thought you might know something about it.”

“Murder?” Rémy retreated back into his chair at the bookshop counter. His body felt drained of all vitality, leaving only the chill of despair and disbelief. “Why?” he asked weakly, yet even he was uncertain what exactly he was asking. Why would he, Rémy, know anything about Stéphane’s death? Why would he—why would anyone—murder the only person he had ever loved? *Why*— He shook his head, wondering when he would awaken from this nightmare.

The inspector observed the drastic drain of color from the bookshop owner’s face. “Due to the circumstances in which we found the body,” he explained slowly, “I’m afraid anyone with occult connections must become a suspect. You claim that M. Desnoyers posed for artists. Well, his final job seems to have been modeling as Icarus.”

Rémy’s empty but questioning eyes met the inspector’s piercing gaze.

Percier continued speaking. “The thing is, the ‘artist’—the murderer—mutilated him and turned his body into a sculpture while he was still alive. He was given Icarus’s wings. The white feathers were attached to his skin with wax.”

Rémy closed his eyes for a long moment. He had heard enough.

“Furthermore, strange letters or symbols were carved into his forehead. Possibly an occult reference.” Percier produced a folded piece of paper with the numbers “1:4-5” written on it in black ink. He showed it to Rémy, who shook his head, still dazed. “M. Sauvage, I will not ask you to return to the Préfecture with us. M. Desnoyers’s family has already identified the body.”

A vacant nod.

“We need the name of every artist for whom M. Desnoyers recently modeled. Can you provide us with that much?”

Rémy shrugged, suppressing a sob.

Percier ignored this display of sorrow and turned away, but then paused. “One more thing, M. Sauvage. I thought that, with your interests, you might have some insight into why someone would commit this atrocity. It is clearly the work of a madman.”

Rémy struggled to regain his composure before replying. “I—do not recognize those symbols. They could be anything. A Bible verse. An alchemical equation. A cabalistic code. A reference from a book.”

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“A book such as this?” Percier held up a copy of *The Mystic Rose* by Stanislas de Guaita. “What do you know about the Rosicrucians?”

Rémy shrugged listlessly, listening to the flutter of pages as the policemen began unceremoniously dropping books into piles on the floor. The inspector had doubtlessly ordered them to search the bookstore’s obscure tomes for the symbols carved into Stéphane’s skin. “The Rosicrucians are fellow occultists. Many are artists and writers, like that poet whose book you are holding. They visit my shop regularly, bringing me work to sell or trying to track down a rare item. Some of them are my finest customers. They seek a higher existence through deciphering mystical and divine secrets in religious texts. They are not murderers.”

“Inspector!” One of the officers, a bright-eyed young man with sand-colored hair and a thick mustache, held up a rectangular package wrapped in brown paper and twine. His feet awkwardly straddled a pile of discarded books on the floor as he turned, and he was perspiring from the heat and from the effort of his search.

“Yes, Alain?”

“What about these?”

Percier nodded at him to proceed.

“That is nothing,” Rémy insisted, as Alain tore into the package. “Only some mythology books an artist named Antoine Barre ordered months ago, but he never picked them up. I heard he left Paris to spend a year studying in Rome, so I have saved them for him.”

The young officer froze and looked at Percier, letting the wrapping drift to the floor. “Antoine Barre? Inspector, isn’t he the artist who—”

“Disappeared. Months ago.” Percier said. “And I seriously doubt we will find him in Rome.”

“*La mythologie dans l’art ancien et modern* and—*Mythologie iconographique*,” Alain read on the books’ spines. He shrugged and began flipping through the pages.

“Alain, let’s borrow those. For investigative purposes. Or evidence.” Percier turned to Rémy before the bookseller could protest. “M. Sauvage, something profane is happening in this city, and I intend to discover what it is.” He moved as if to leave, but then paused and stared intently at Rémy. “I may have more questions. Do not attempt to leave Paris. Do you understand?”

Rémy listened to the sounds of the officers’ continued investigation for a

moment before he glanced up at Percier's stony face with red-rimmed eyes. "Stéphane Desnoyers. Let me see him," he demanded.

Percier ruminated for a moment, removing his hat to wipe his forehead with his handkerchief before nodding in agreement. "If you insist. His remains were taken to the closest hospital that could accommodate us. In this heat—well, you understand. His body lies in the morgue at the Sainte-Geneviève sanitarium."



Claude was awakened by a man's calloused forefinger rudely jabbing him in the face.

"Claude, is that you? *Claude?*"

The finger touched his forehead and flung aside a dark lock of tousled hair.

"Aha! I thought I might find you here. You missed your painting lesson today, and your history tutor still charges me whether you show up or not, you know."

Claude vaguely registered the scrape of chair legs on the worn parquet floor as the black-clad figure took the seat across from him, jostling the café table as he sat down.

"*Look* at me," the man ordered.

Claude forced open his eyes, his long dark lashes making their lids appear heavier, and looked drowsily across the table at the scowling man's sunken grey face. "*Bonjour*, M. Baltard," he mumbled.

Claude vaguely remembered striding through the narrow streets of the Latin Quarter towards the Pont des Arts, his gaze seeking solitude in the cobblestones, hardly glancing up at the familiar sights of his usual wandering explorations of Paris. Soon he felt the breeze from the Seine and stumbled into the decadent comfort of his favorite café, intending to disappear into the strange and distant worlds inside his head.

Alexandre Baltard ignored his student and foster son's forced formality. "If you want me to teach you how to paint as skillfully as your father did, you had better start showing up to the studio on time. Don't squander your life, Claude. Your father's legacy is the *only* reason you are not still enrolled in a proper school and sitting in class at this very instant. Well, that and the fact that the instructors claimed you spent more time staring at the murals in the

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lecture hall than actually paying attention, not to anyone's surprise, I'm certain."

Claude shrugged, having heard all this before, and stared at his surroundings. The Café Hugo had been renamed for the writer whose death three years prior still left a void in the heart of Paris, and aspiring artists and poets often found solace within its solemn interior. Deep red walls extended between the gothic details carved into the wainscoting and the heavy ceiling beams. Black and white etchings of gargoyles, medieval ruins, and characters from Hugo's novels hung on the walls behind dusty glass in simple frames with delicate gilded designs that were gradually flaking away.

Baltard continued to rant. "And stop wasting your money on bottle after bottle of wine before you have even made a name for yourself. Fortunately I'm managing your inheritance until your birthday. Your father, may his soul rest in peace, assumed you'd have *some* sense by the time you turned eighteen, I suppose." He grabbed one of the dark glass bottles from the café table and gave it a gentle swirl. "Empty! Hmmp!" He let the bottle slip back to the table with a *thud*, slightly startling Claude.

Baltard narrowed his eyes, fixing his foster son with the same icy blue gaze he employed for critiquing Claude's paintings. "What's going on, Claude? Are you upset about that murder at the Panthéon? If so, you're taking it worse than anyone I've seen yet today. Did you know the victim?" he asked, lowering his voice at the last question.

"Murder? No." Claude stared past Baltard's unshaven face to that of the dancing gypsy girl in a painting on the café wall. "Today I found my Salomé. She's the muse I have searched for my entire life as an artist. I found her and lost her within the space of a few minutes."

When Baltard did not reply, Claude looked back at him, and saw that the older man was regarding him with a slow shake of his head.

"*That's* why you swallowed two bottles of wine on a Wednesday afternoon?" It was more of an accusation than a question. "Any of my models can pose as a dancer carrying a saint's severed head—and would enjoy it, too." He shrugged and watched an elegant young woman with a black parasol stride past the café window. "Calais makes a fine Salomé, as you know," he said in a calmer tone, picturing his favorite model and longtime mistress. "You can draw her when she's not posing for me."

"Monsieur, you don't understand—"

"Isabelle! Coffee!" Baltard abruptly shouted to a young barmaid who was

idly adjusting her flaxen braids. He turned back to Claude, muttering something under his breath about this new generation of Romantics. "Is that her?" he asked irritably, gesturing to the table. "Not your best work, but I see the appeal of the lady."

Claude looked down and saw his open sketchbook. Amid a miniature labyrinth of meandering lines and a broken pencil was a small portrait of a young woman with wild hair. He had forgotten he had drawn it. "Margaret Rose Finnegan," he said dreamily.

Baltard sniffed. "What a name. Sounds Irish."

Claude shrugged. "I don't know."

The barmaid slid two cups and saucers onto the precarious table. She looked skeptically at the sketchbook, then at the younger artist. "We're not taking drawings as payment today, Claude," she said with a faint smile, one hand on her hip.

"Don't fret, Isabelle, he'll pay for that wine in more ways than one. Here." Baltard reached into his vest pocket and fished out a few coins for the barmaid, who thanked him and returned to her counter. "Drink," he ordered, pointing to Claude's cup and lifting his own. "So, where did you meet your *femme fatale*?" he asked before taking a sip.

Claude pulled the cup of filmy black liquid towards himself. "A hypnosis demonstration at Dr. Veysseyère's sanitarium."

Baltard almost choked on his coffee, burning his tongue. "The Sainte-Geneviève? That notorious asylum near the Panthéon? Claude, *please* tell me she was just a visitor. No? Someone's wife, then? No? Heavens, boy, a *madwoman*? You're even more of a fool than I thought."

Claude sighed. "The doctor will never let me see her again." He rubbed at a graphite smudge on his hand with his threadbare coat sleeve.

"Well, at least the doctor has some sense." Baltard sipped his coffee. "Hypnosis demonstrations and madwomen. Hmmp! We studied from professional models when I was your age, when your father and I were at the École des Beaux-Arts. What would he think if he were alive today?"

Claude decided not to anger Baltard any further by mentioning Dr. Veysseyère's chiding him for not attending the École des Beaux-Arts. He knew that Baltard coveted a teaching position at the prestigious art school, but his style was considered out of fashion. Claude sulked and closed his sketchbook.

"I am sorry, Claude, but you should consider yourself lucky if an unattainable lunatic is your biggest problem." He pulled a crumpled copy of

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Le Petit Journal from the pocket of his black coat and tossed it onto the table. “Haven’t you heard? Take a look at this.”

Claude clumsily unfolded the newspaper and clamped its edges to the table with his elbows. The headline swam slowly into his vision:

DREADFUL MURDER AT PANTHÉON VICTIM’S CORPSE A MACABRE WORK OF ART

He tried to read the corresponding article, but his eyes refused to focus on the minuscule text. He leaned his head in his hands and shut his eyes, but that only made the dizziness worse. He groaned. “What happened, Monsieur?”

Baltard swallowed a sip of coffee and grimaced. “A young man, an artists’ model, was kidnapped and turned into a sort of living sculpture. For as long as he managed to survive, at least. He was no one I know—Stéphane something. Probably one of the Montmartre crowd.” Baltard cast a nervous glance around the café and leaned closer to his student. “I dare say, this is rather incredible, isn’t it, Claude? Using the human body as a work of mythological art, I mean. It’s a shame that the ‘artist’ felt the need to torment and murder the poor soul, but there is something intriguing about the idea, don’t you think? Just don’t tell Calais I said so. She’s rather shaken up, being a model herself, after all. It sounds dreadful. *Look.*” He jabbed a finger at the wrinkled page. “The man’s eyes were burned out of his head.”

“Like Icarus staring into the sun,” Claude muttered, without looking.

Baltard raised an eyebrow. “Exactly. How did you know?”

Claude shrugged and attempted to read the article again. Slowly his mind latched onto the sickening details: a handsome young man’s body mutilated and burned alive. His eyes cruelly seared from his head. Wood and feather wings grafted to his body with melted wax. His figure lightly draped in ragged strips of singed fabric. The numbers “1:4-5” carved into his forehead. His body suspended in a cruciform position between the central columns of the Panthéon façade and abandoned there, a silent witness to the sunrise.

“The police cut him down this morning,” said Baltard after a moment. “It is always a shame, the death of a beautiful youth. Yet I would wager that such a death made him, well—immortal. He will be remembered as the boy who briefly lived and died as Icarus. Not such a tragic end for an artists’ model.”

Claude glanced up and saw Baltard's eyes glistening with what he feared was admiration. His own imagination abruptly presented him with images of bleeding, empty eye sockets and lacerated skin seared with candle wax, all left to rot in the blazing August sun. He slammed his fist on the table, splashing coffee out of his cup. "Well, maybe Calais will be next!"

"What?" Baltard snapped out of his reverie.

"With the murderer still loose in Paris, perhaps more people will have the privilege of becoming 'immortal' by being slaughtered. Do you want to see Calais's blood all over the Panthéon?"

"Of course not! Calm down, Claude, stop shouting. People are staring..."

"I don't care." Dishes rattled precariously as Claude grabbed his sketchbook and shoved himself away from the table, nearly overturning the rest of the coffee onto Baltard's lap. "I am returning to the atelier to paint something worthy of the Salon," he said in a calmer tone. "I cannot remain in my father's shadow forever. Nor in yours."

Baltard's halfhearted protests fell upon deaf ears as Claude stumbled outside into radiant daylight. The afternoon sun assaulted his eyes, filling his mind with visions of Icarus falling to his death, followed by fleeting images of fiery red hair and ivory flesh. His head throbbed with sudden, searing pain. He flung one arm upward to block the light.

Am I going mad? Is Baltard mad? Is everyone mad in this wretched city?

His scuffed boots carried him across the street to the Seine, where he leaned his elbows on the stone barrier and stared at the hypnotic reflected shapes on the glistening water. Bile rose into his throat and he remembered that he had not yet eaten today.

He tore his gaze from the river to study the cyclopean architecture that dominated the opposite riverbank: the massive former palace of the Louvre. Now that it had been transformed into an art museum, the French government kept promising that soon it would become the world's finest. For now, however, all of Paris was bustling about next year's Exposition Universelle, either raving excitedly about or lamenting the skeletal iron tower and other controversial modern structures that had been rising in the city's western horizon for the past year and a half.

If Claude could paint a masterpiece by next year and exhibit it at the exposition, the entire city—no, the entire world—would recognize his talent. He would receive government commissions. His paintings would be

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displayed in the Louvre. He would be a famous artist like his father, whose reputation had barely faded since consumption claimed both of his parents less than a decade ago. He would no longer feel like a passive observer of his own life, with only painting and books to stir his passions.

At that moment, the sunlight relentlessly glinting off the Seine became promising rather than painful. Claude resolved that he must paint his masterpiece, the canvas that would launch his career, in time for the exposition of 1889. To accomplish this, he needed an ideal muse to present to the world as he forged a new generation of Romanticism. He needed to paint Margaret Rose Finnegan. His art and his ambition would accept no other muse.

Baltard's concerned voice and lumbering footsteps hurried towards him from the direction of the café. "Claude! Come away from the river. Your father would never forgive me if I let you throw yourself into the Seine. I am sorry, Claude. You're right. What happened to that Icarus boy is dreadful. Sickening. Calais felt the same way. I am returning home to her now." Baltard extended his hand. "Come along, Claude."

Claude shut his eyes and let the warm breeze soothe his wine-flushed face. "The woman I saw today—I need to paint her for the world's fair, Monsieur. Even if I have to find her window and set up my easel in the middle of the street. Even if I have to steal her away from the sanitarium myself."

His instructor sighed. "That imagination of yours has always been your blessing and your curse." He let his arm drop heavily to his side. "I felt the same way about Calais when I first laid eyes upon her at the colonial exposition. I knew I needed her as my muse. Years later, I still would do anything for her. But a *lunatic*, Claude?"

Claude, transfixed by the water, did not respond.



Rémy felt like a shade entering the underworld.

He descended the stairs to the morgue of l'Hôpital Sainte-Genève and walked in silence through somber corridors, following the black shape and domed head of Inspector Marcel Percier.

An odd conductor of souls, Rémy thought idly. A blank haze still clouded his mind while the scent of formaldehyde taunted his senses, challenging his stunned state of shock and denial. He needed to see what the murderer had done to his lover despite every rational part of his mind screaming in protest, telling him to remember Stéphane as he had last seen him: alive, silhouetted in the bookshop door and smiling as he waved farewell, then stepping out to model for a painting class at the École des Beaux-Arts.

“Prepare yourself. His body is in here,” said Percier in a gruff voice, keeping an eye on Rémy. The younger man was aware that he was still a suspect. No display of grief would change the sharp-eyed inspector’s mind about that.

The coroner, a bald man with doughy features, greeted them with a solemn nod. He did not question the purpose of their visit to his subterranean realm, and immediately made his way to the covered table with an uneven gait.

Not even the cool cellar temperatures and chemical odor could completely suppress the putrid scent of decay emanating from the corpse under the white sheet. An odd wooden framework entangled with ruined white feathers and coils of bloodstained rope was arranged on a nearby examination table.

“We removed the wings,” the coroner explained slowly, noticing Rémy’s curious glance at the apparatus. “But some of the feathers were—attached to the skin.”

Rémy pressed his handkerchief to his nose and mouth with one hand and gripped the staff of his cane with the other, the knuckles bone-white beneath his gloves. He stepped closer to the covered body, fear and dread rising with each step and each pulse of his accelerated heart that it would indeed be Stéphane lying beneath it. The coroner gripped the edge of the sheet and flipped it back, exposing the mutilated face of Stéphane Desnoyers.

Uttering a faint cry into his handkerchief, Rémy was certain that his platinum hair had just turned completely white. Stéphane was barely recognizable, his dark eyes now empty sockets surrounded by charred skin and dried blood. Yet Rémy knew it was him. He knew every freckle and faint scar on Stéphane’s flesh, which was now riddled with much crueler marks. Rémy’s gaze kept returning to the narrow lines carved into the center of the forehead—1:4-5. He peered closer at them.

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Percier noticed Rémy interest in the marks. “Considering those symbols, and his relationship with you, M. Sauvage, you understand why we are considering an occult connection,” the inspector said, not quite achieving the gentler tone he reserved for family members identifying their loved one’s remains. “We’ve begun compiling sources, every occult text and epic poem we can find, and exploring the possibilities. So far, nothing has shed any light on the case. Do you recognize the reference or the meaning of these numbers?”

Rémy stared at Stéphane, then at the contours of the stained white cloth for a long moment after the coroner mercifully concealed the corpse’s face again. Rémy then emitted a soft, joyless laugh. “Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault,” he muttered, as if talking to himself.

Percier stepped closer. “What did you say?”

Still staring blankly at the white-shrouded face, Rémy dismissively shook his head at his companion’s ignorance. “It is a line from a detective story by the American writer Edgar Allan Poe, *The Purloined Letter*. Baudelaire’s translation—”

“And?”

“Genesis,” he said, nodding once at the now-hidden symbols on Stéphane’s forehead.

“Pardon?” Percier’s expression grew slightly alarmed. He wondered if the sight of Stéphane Desnoyers’s corpse had indeed shattered Rémy’s mind—and if the occultist’s grief was genuine after all.

“Shed any light, you said,” Rémy continued. “Genesis. Book 1. Verses 4 and 5. The reference is quite obvious.”

“Of course we thought of the Bible,” Percier insisted. “It was the first source we investigated. So far, nothing we’ve found makes sense.”

Rémy blinked, then looked up at Percier as if seeing him for the first time. “I cannot remember the exact verse, but it comes from the creation story, of course. The division of light and dark.” Rémy’s hand hovered over Stéphane’s covered face. “Icarus flew too close to the sun. The blinding light burned his eyes from his skull. The heat melted the wax sealing his feathers to his wings. He fell into the sea. Into darkness,” the occultist added quietly. A distracted expression crossed his features. He turned away and walked towards the door, moving as slowly as a somnambulist.

“But what does it *mean*?” Percier called after him, tightening his stranglehold on the already warped brim of his hat. “A murder like this could

be the work of a religious fanatic, yes, but I am not yet convinced. In such a case I imagine we'd find some sort of message at the crime scene, perhaps a madman's prophecy or warning, alongside the victim's body—"

"I believe Stéphane's death *is* a warning, Inspector," Rémy interrupted. "If we are finished here, I will see myself out." His voice was distant and flat as he strode away, idly twisting his cane in his hands while lost in thought. "Genesis," he repeated. "The creation of light and darkness." He paused on the threshold of the morgue's examination room, gripped the doorframe with one hand, and glanced back at Percier with an ominous look. "That was only the First Day."



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