

Luna Aeternus

5th June

ETERNAL'S SCREAMS FOR help carved a cavern of despair in Edouard's pounding heart. Rushing from Henri's private quarters, he skipped several steps and crashed into the locked door at the bottom of the stairs. A moan of impatience escaped him, his frantic fingers searching pockets for the key. With trembling hands he fumbled the key at the door lock. He dropped the key. "Merde!" He snatched it and tried again. "Baise!" It wouldn't fit. "Ah." It slipped home and unlocked the damned door.

The moment he entered the sunny corridor his desperation to save Eternal hit a wall of screeching ravens. Her music seared its haunting melody into his mind.

A choking, unfathomable fear strangled his breath as if a bag had been placed over his head. He became so heavy he had difficulty walking. His heart and soul told him Eternal was fighting for her life. She was confusing The Count with her past struggles with him. Abrupt silence! He sensed a presence of pure evil. Its stench of death engulfed him in a cloak of putrid suffocation and the singular intention of sending another soul to the grim reaper sent terror into his mind. The murderous intent lanced him like claws raking his flesh. The need to breathe overcame him in a rush of panic.

Eternal's voice rang clear in his fevered mind, becalming him, strengthened his resolve, "*Oh brave knight, true and bold, protect me.*" Her words flooded him with purpose, empowering him with courage and honor to obey and protect his true love as he once was – Lancelot du Lac. There could be no escaping this responsibility. Edouard would never again run from this evil.

To his horror and amazement he heard the clanking of armor. In his hand was a broadsword, heavy and clumsy, dragging his arm almost to the floor – *of a forest!* His vision was limited by thin slits in front of his eyes. And what he saw

was impossible. The sunlight quickly faded to be replaced by the full moon – The Eternal Moon. He saw a hideous creature of swirling black smoke and glowing eyes charging at him on a black horse of demonic design.

He hefted the massive sword and marched at the charging Black Knight. Too late! The strike of the lance knocked him to the forest floor. With difficulty he struggled to his feet, battling the ungainly weight of the armor. A great pain cramped his chest. The Black Knight circled, laughing with derision and charged once more.

With the instinct of ages past Edouard, now Lancelot, swung the sword into the advancing beast, slicing straight through. The Black Knight crashed to the floor with a clatter of armor. It sprang to its feet and slashed with a black sword, a demon's blade. Edouard's sword of valiant silver clashed with the black, corrupt steel showering the ground with sparks and thick, acrid smoke. He forced the Black Knight back with each thrust and clash.

It spoke with a deep growl, "I am not finished with you, lover boy."

Edouard froze for a heartbeat in time, recalling similar words spoken by *Him* – the creature at the florist. In the blink of an eye, he hefted his sword and attacked. "You don't fool me, Count!" His sword sliced through the Black Knight. As its upper half slid away, its howl of rage rendered Edouard momentarily paralyzed and everything began to swim before his tearful eyes.

Can this be real? Perhaps he was hallucinating? The sun once more filled the corridor and her sweet lullaby abruptly ceased. He clutched his chest. Was this to be his last day on the 5th June, to die in this corridor, never to see her again? In the time it took for another painful beat of his heart to thump within his heaving body, all seemed normal again. At his feet was his tie. He must have removed it to breathe.

With a huge intake of air, he bent down and picked it up, stuffing it into his hospital gown. He swiped the sweat of fear from his brow. His legs moved of their own will, an overwhelming dread of ice cold terror gripping him. He halted

outside her room and could not sense her. Where was her music?

In his desperation, Edouard pounded the door. He heard a sneer of contempt and turned to stare into Nurse Marteau's hateful glare. "Don't just stand there ... open the door." His longing for Eternal to fill his mind with her insistent music left a pit of emptiness where his heart dwelled. Silence so profound crushed his soul. He slumped against the door and exhaled his misery. Get a grip.

"Move it, damn you." He stared at the nurse's hesitation to open the door. She seemed to be taunting him with her deliberate slowness. He slid back the bolt and twisted the handle to no avail.

But as Nurse Marteau unlocked the door, he heard a sound like the soft fluttering of ravens. He listened to her sweet lullaby of ancient whispers as though a gentle wind blew the pollen from a field of roses to suffocate his senses. He stood stiff as a knight in armor awaiting his destiny.

With a murderous glare of hatred the nurse stepped away. Edouard faltered, his heart trying to rip from his chest. The alluring music dissolved to a bleak nothingness. He placed a tentative hand to the handle.

Delicate Rose sat upon her bed with her knees up to her chin, gently rocking back and forth, muttering, "I am Eternal ... I am Eternal."

She dared to part the blanket covering the window just barely enough, but the searing light was too intense. Her anguish was immediate, clamping tearful eyes shut. The hideous daylight offered a fresh start to her terrors, bringing Eternal to the surface of her consciousness.

Eternal's power grew stronger, her needs forcing the weaker entity back into the shadows of her mind.

She stared wide-eyed with terror at the cruel stone turret chamber slowly blending to the prison-like room and wondered what was going to happen to her today. A jolt of stinging pain reminded her to pull the blanket shut. Wiping tears of anger from her eyes, she curled up into her favored fetal position and

stared blankly at the door. That was the only way out. She cocked her head and frowned. Memories of her ancestral lineage flittered across her fractured mind.

Wearing a magnificent gown fit for a queen, Eternal drifted through a garden stocked with red roses that stretched to the horizon. Ahead of her was Marie Antoinette, now completely addicted to Eternal's muse and totally insane. Eternal knew the cycle was complete. She needed to make good her escape. Eternal plucked a deep red rose, but its thorns pricked her skin. She gasped at the sight of her blood.

Marie Antoinette ordered, "Hold her."

Eternal tried to escape. She called out, "Edouard, my true love." It was too late. Palace guards gripped Eternal tight so the Queen could suck the blood oozing from her palm.

The garden changed to Madame Guillotine. Eternal stared up to the hideous sun. The steel blade sliced down with a hissing screech. This sound was replaced by a familiar scraping.

Eternal jolted awake, transfixed by the peephole revealing a green eye. Something deep in her subconscious told her the eye belonged to her savior. It vanished as the metal shutter was slid into place. The door opened and Edouard entered the room, wearing a white hospital gown and slightly flushed. She sighed with relief.

Edouard stepped into a vacuum of eternal love. He went rigid with shock for the patient was indeed the woman of his dreams. He recalled the strange feelings since his arrival and the reoccurrence of the word *Eternal*. This beguiling woman was connected to him as if fate had welded their souls together. He breathed deeply to calm his jangled nerves, but it was of no use. He was reminded of that first kiss and nervously cleared his throat.

The patient seemed oblivious to his presence, almost staring right through him with her wondrous black eyes. And that music filled his soul to bursting. He had a strong desire to take her from this place at that very moment.

His heart skipped a beat when her eyes changed to the sweetest umber brown and her hair took on a more reddish hue. The music stopped as abruptly as it had started. He chilled his mind into its rigid character best set for the purpose at hand. She began to chant monotonously, “Eternal ... Eternal ... Eternal ... Eternal.” Her eyes returned to their glorious coal black along with the lullaby.

Edouard scrambled out his notebook, put on his reading glasses with trembling fingers and used a pencil to jot down some notes – *“disinterested activity as in habitual chanting clearly displaying psychological automatism as in performance of unconscious acts.”*

Approaching her, he had no doubt she was the one. He walked as though treading on eggshells for she appeared so fragile, pale and delicate as a butterfly’s wing. He had to be careful.

The exquisite rendering of beauty before him, as yet unnamed, remained staring at the open door with such intensity, Edouard looked behind him. All he saw was Nurse Marteau, stern as a sadistic schoolmistress.

The patient screamed, “He’s coming.” She scrambled across the bed. “He’s so close ... he’ll take my blood.” She looked all around in a terrible state of panic.

Edouard visibly jumped, startled by her outburst. Cruel, taunting sniggers came from Nurse Marteau. He turned sharply and shut her up with a harsh glare. Upon returning his attention to the patient he noticed with alarm, utter terror etched across her face. He must leave – take her somewhere safe, hidden from this faceless menace known as The Count. The urge to flee with her overwhelmed him. Perhaps it was his destiny to run from this fiend.

Edouard stepped out of the room and spoke in harsh whispers to Nurse Marteau, in the hope she would leave them alone. He returned, closing the door behind him. The sound of the bolt sliding home indicated his means of escape had gone. With a miserable gasp, he turned back to see the petrified woman staring at him with those wondrous eyes, darkly ringed with lack of sleep or perhaps fear.

Edouard leaned down directly in front of her and observed her fixation on the door with frantic eyes. Waving a hand across her face, he shared her desperate need to escape this tiny prison. He loosened his shirt about his neck, breathing deeply to quell the dread slowly eating away his composure. She did not blink or flinch when Edouard clapped his hands in front of her face.

He grunted with recognition and jotted in his notebook – *“completely trance-like – traumatized – dissociative behavior.”*

He gently pulled her left arm from her knee and tested the pulse at her wrist. Her hair was much darker now. He frowned. She remained glued to the door and seemingly unaware of his presence. Her pulse was not normal at twenty beats a minute. In her heightened state of anxiety and stress, her heart should be racing out of control. For that matter, no one’s heart should beat that slow. This woman was indeed special in some way – *Eternal.*

Edouard replaced her arm at her side.

Her hand clasped her knee. She mumbled something repetitively.

Unable to catch what she said, he leaned in closer. Placing his ear almost to her lips, he listened, only then remembering he was still wearing his glasses. He quickly removed them and slipped them in his coat pocket and reached out with a shaking hand.

The bolt squeaked and the door opened. Edouard whirled around, realizing his actions made him look guilty of something indecent.

Nurse Marteau handed him a chair with a knowing smile. She glared with open hostility at the patient before ordered out with a curt nod from Edouard. She left the room, drawing the bolt across the door in a loud snap.

Edouard was so transfixed on his patient he jolted at the sound. “Bitch did that on purpose.” He breathed deeply to regain his composure. He sat on the chair to resume the examination only to be lost in a moment staring at his true

love. Yes, she was his true love. Had he known her in another life?

She started to rock back and forth. It was then he noticed her dress had slid up, exposing her thighs. He cleared his throat and looked away from her glorious labia, noticing for the first time the blanket hung as an improvised curtain. He frowned, but thought it an obvious thing to do as curtains were not allowed.

Edouard recalled Henri's story of a patient who had ripped a curtain into strips and used them to bind and gag a nurse. The man had managed to escape, only to shoot himself at the police barracks in Auxerre, after being charged with a double murder. Henri insisted the man was innocent and could not harm a fly, but the damage had been done.

Edouard got up and removed the blanket from the window. Sunlight poured into the room. He gave a start when she screamed with all her might. She tried to wrestle the blanket from Edouard's frozen hands.

He watched her scrambling away from the window, and before he could react, she slipped under the bed. Something else bothered him – her divine music had stopped. Completely perplexed, he stood motionless with the blanket dangling from his hand. The door bolt scraped open. His heart sank with that ominous declaration.

The door flew open and Nurse Marteau burst into the room enraged.

Edouard shrugged at her in his obvious confusion. Nurse Marteau shoved him aside and got down on her knees. She looked under the bed at the sobbing patient, demanding in her stern voice, "Now stop that at once, do you hear." The nurse tried to grab the patient, but she had curled up by the wall, and was out of reach. Nurse Marteau got to her feet and sighed.

"They're always doing this, you know. How many times have I said ... take the legs off, we're not running a hotel ... but does anyone listen to us nurses, of course not." She shook her head with dismay. "I'll fetch Bonbon."

Edouard panicked for that would end his first session before it had begun. “That will not be necessary, nurse ... I’ll handle it.”

Nurse Marteau looked dubiously at Edouard. “I don’t think that’s wise ... I can tell this one is going to be trouble.” Edouard angrily insisted, “She’s merely having a panic attack ... there’s nothing dangerous in that.”

Nurse Marteau sighed with a grimace. “Very well, doctor ... but don’t blame me if she takes out an eye with those fingernails.” Faltering at the door, the nurse turned and smirked wickedly at him.

He had the distinct impression she would enjoy seeing his face scarred for life. She almost seemed amused by this prospect.