

Paul Viersan was not much given to writing his thoughts. The private moments within his mind were usually best kept private, he believed. To dedicate anything to paper was to risk exposure but, with the turbulent events of the past, Paul felt compelled to record his current feelings. He wouldn't admit it, but he hoped that the concrete tools of pen and ink might enable him to impose some order on forces that he felt were overtaking him.

There is no point in trying to avoid fate, Paul wrote, and fate is a good enough name as any other for my circumstance.

When I initially met Yvette Collier, she piqued my interest. I admire strength, I always have. Anyone who could tolerate several hours of torture and still try to fight her way out of captivity is going to intrigue me. I am almost disappointed that I cannot allow her to remember our brief meeting in that dark hallway, but it is enough that I know she owes her life to me.

It's still a surprise to me how my life was almost turned upside-down within a few moments. I was willing to risk everything during those few minutes in Paris to keep her within reach – why let her escape into the uncertain future of the streets? I wanted to Embrace Yvette, then, and keep her hidden until the war lurched to the conclusion that I had already seen as inevitable in 1943. I was sure I could do it - the kindred population of that city was in such flux, there would not have been much fuss if an ancilla chose to create a few progeny.

But Verhoffen once again proved he could be an irritant by raising the alarm before I could take permanent action. I had only enough time to compel Yvette to remember me – even while she forgot the healing vitae I forced down her throat and the money I shoved into her hand. As I've said, it's a shame she'll never know the truth behind her unlikely escape. I would like her to know that we have met before, that I have saved her twice.

The woman I met in Paris appealed to me – I could sense that she would please me on a variety of levels. To be able to manipulate someone so strong – to find that strength is laid on a brittle foundation and watch the network of cracks seep throughout the psyche, like ice under a heavy weight. It's my favorite hobby, I must admit. Initially, I had high hopes of finding Yvette after the war, of taking what was still clay and molding it into whatever shape took my fancy. But it was too late, unfortunately.

The Assamites had taken that clay and fired it too long. Even while they thought they were strengthening her, they ruined her. They encouraged her to feel innately inferior to her own clan – simply because of an accident of blood – and turned that to their advantage. They didn't realize how vulnerable that made her – to me and to so many others, it seems – until it was far too late. An individual which exists to win the approval of her superiors, when lacking that approval, will seek it elsewhere, and look for others to lead their lives. The Assamites never understood the concept of gratitude – or even the need to sometimes simulate it. Thus Rachel was made susceptible to blandishments and a firm hand. Cassius took Rachel's heart (a fact that still surprises me) and I took her psyche – and a few other things...

She needed someone to fear, something to reassure her that she had a place in the natural order – someone had to keep reminding her of her vulnerability. For nearly thirty years, I fulfilled that need. It was amusing while it lasted, but it became tedious after a while. I kept pushing at her, waiting for her to push back, as she should have. I was anticipating that, looking forward to it, in fact – it would have moved the dynamic between us to a new level - but it never happened. Rachel had been too well-trained to accept abuse. A dog that never bites is not a challenge to kick.

Now that I can analyze the situation a little more clearly, I see now that I hastened the crumbling of Rachel's personality. That wouldn't have been a disaster – in fact, it would have

been a marvelous opportunity to rebuild her – but the outcome of the final meeting between Rachel and myself ensured I wouldn't be there to pick up the pieces when she shattered.

I wish I could repay Cassius for the scars on my back and this damned limp that I fear I will never be rid of.

But, as I was saying... I was quickly becoming bored with Rachel. Oh, she still had her moments - I think I still have that pink dress she wore at my insistence, somewhere – but they were starting to pall. Once I had recovered from my last assignation with her, I took my injuries as a sign that perhaps it would be best to avoid her in the future.

Then I learned that Rachel was dead – the clan that had been slowly destroying her since her Embrace had finished what they began. For the second time, I regretted not taking her for myself and saying to hell with consequences. Despite my flimsy resolution to spare her no more thought, the fact of her death infuriated me. What a waste of potential – wasted from start to finish! For nights I rummaged through my memories, my half-formed plans for the mortal woman, all torn to shreds by thoughtless butchers. I wallowed in regret – something I haven't done since my child was destroyed. Regret is a useless emotion, but it was impossible to avoid during those few weeks.

But one has to adapt to survive. I closed my memory-book of Rachel DuNoir and kept on with my life. California had lost a lot of its appeal and I eventually found myself in Colorado. The city didn't really capture my attention, but I needed somewhere quiet to recoup monies lost during my torpor and to establish new contacts within my current field – investment banking and online finance.

*I would have sooner expected the sun to rise at midnight than to see Yvette Collier – in the flesh and as warm as day – wandering through central Denver. It was as close to a dream come true as I could dare hope – although I have to question the validity of the 'coincidence' of my finding her. Although I'm not questioning it **too** closely...*

Of course, the truth will out, as it often does. Poor Rachel, buried within Yvette's mind, struggled to the surface and wailed questions at the heavens and imprecations at me. She declared that she could never be free of me, even while she clung to me for support – an irony I appreciated, even while her histrionics irritated me. It's never occurred to Rachel that I can't seem to be free of her. I could no more not adopt Yvette as my protégé than I could have stopped drinking blood. To once again be presented with raw clay instead of brittle stone...

Now I do not need to push her, only shape. And flesh is so much more malleable than the cold stuff vampires are made of. It's disconcerting, how quickly she has become devoted to me. She loves me, I suppose, although she knows it is not reciprocated. Oh, I'm fond of her, but she is a creature – a creation. I am not Pygmalion, although it seems she is my Galatea.

It's a little odd, perhaps. My Yvette is just as much a construct as Rachel DuNoir was, but I like to think that I have presented her with more valid choices. I always did – even in Rachel's time, although her then-fragile personality required much more careful handling. But now Yvette is free to choose her own path, and she has chosen to stay with me. That's not to say I didn't balk at a chance to share my opinion – particularly during that chaotic time when both Rachel and Yvette occupied the same mind. I usually will not interfere with a person's decision to take their own life, but I had to gamble that Rachel's attempt wasn't genuine, that it was a call for attention. I only gamble when I feel certain of success – and succeed I did, much to my relief.

We are a part of each other, she and I – although I will never admit that to her. Life without her would be so much less enjoyable. Every time I see her, I must suppress a wave of smug possessiveness – and the faint yet persistent worry that she might again be lost to me.

*Of course, I have considered Embracing her since our acquaintance has been renewed – if for no other reason to avoid losing another chance. But the **warmth** of her is something I want to keep a little longer. Yvette as she is now is given to passions and rages that I had only the barest glimpse of, more than fifty years ago. Passion is something I can appreciate – and it can be directed very easily. To know what turbulent depths exist within Yvette makes me admire her strength even more – that she lasted so long under the strictures of the Assamites and the others. And to hear Yvette laugh – making jokes, tease me for my many bad habits – is a strange delight. Rachel was far too stern and structured to have much sense of humor. It’s an unexpected benefit and the one I find most surprising of all.*

I have my Yvette, now. I control her. She is a weapon that only I can draw, and she will obey me implicitly. The question is, what do I do now? Do I make her into my childe? Do I allow her to remain my ghoul? Or do I devise a new game for which she is the only playing-piece?

There is no rush. I can savor her a little longer.