

Mary Elizabeth Braddon's
LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET
continued.

Rinita Banerjee.

**Observation recorded by Monsieur Val, Maison de Santé,
Villebrumeuse, Belgium**
2 May 1859

That there is a past to Madame Taylor's incarceration is unknown to any, except myself, Mr Mosgrave and Mr Robert Audley. However, the fact that the interim, occasional silences on Lady Audley's part have begun to continue for longer periods of time and have instead taken the form of voluminous scribbles on random sheets of paper is alarming me. I have decided to assign her a journal where and to which she can speak. Her fragile state of health concerns me much since there are reports from the nurses that she seems to be disdainfully careless about the life she is carrying inside of her. She lingers on the edge of the stairs, and has also attempted to break open the glass window in her room wrapping her hand in the sheet given to her. I cannot decide whether Mr Audley should be informed of the pregnancy. He has, following her incarceration, severed every trace of reason to be familiar of what her future holds, except that he regularly sends the payments for her upkeep. This secret arrangement is becoming harder and harder for me to maintain. Even while employing Dr Lecter for Madame Taylor I have not been able to provide him with a past for her. I have had to inform him that she was found by a kindly acquaintance of mine in a nearby street in Belgium a few months back and was brought to me. Her name then, he had asked. A slip of paper thrust on the right-hand-side pocket of her skirt. I have implored Dr Lecter not to try and hunt for a past upon the flimsy excuse that she seemed, when found, not so much lost, as abandoned. I wonder if a man of Dr

Lecter's acumen would have accepted it without justifiable suspicion. I wonder how long the veil over her identity can be retained. I fear a vile storm may blow it off. Perhaps, it is to her advantage, that speech has deserted her and much of what she has written so far show traces of selective forgetfulness. She was brought here in the month of March. It seems like a lifetime that she has been here, as if she was meant to be nowhere, nowhere else.

This is not part of the Care's records

Madame Taylor's journal

3 May 1859

The “narrow streets,” the “dilapidated roofs,” the “feeble pile of chimneys,” how far the jostling world seems from up here. How silent inside it is. How suffocating like the rows of houses built so close together ... oh suffocating, closing in upon my throat, it chokes me, I cannot breathe! Mother! Mother! Where are you? Stop chattering! Your “ceaseless chatter!” STOP IT! Listen to me! STOP IT! I cannot breathe.

I look inside and see her. I look outside and see nothing but the “narrow streets,” the “dilapidated roofs,” the “feeble pile of chimneys.” Wretched, wretched, wretched. I see these during the day, I see these during the night ... And the lurid red light in the sky! I have seen it somewhere before, but what of the candle? I ask myself of the candle, where did I keep it? I must have misplaced it. The candle. I asked Judith as well that day. Tried to show her hers on the hallway, but she wouldn't reply. I wrote down Phoebe's name on a piece of paper, asked Judith to ask her. She would surely know. Yes she would. Judith wouldn't reply. The insolence! Does she know who I am! She stares at me, dare looks at me, the insolence! I wish I could burn holes where her eyes are ... I wish, I wish, I wish. Burn, burn holes into those spaces that contain those dull, grey eyes.

BURN

BURN

BURN

BURN

burn

Burn!

Oh how I choke! The red flame in the sky. But where is the candle?

PHOEBE!

Madame Taylor's journal

16 May 1859

They say I have a life growing within me. The ones who serve me ask me how I feel. They seem puzzled, almost worried that I will be the proud mother of an heir of ... I do not seem to know where. Just a glimpse of a lime walk keeps lighting up before my eyes and moving away like the shadows of mist clouding a walker's path in winters. They seem puzzled. No not puzzled. I sense a dread. Shouldn't they be elated instead? It is a life growing inside me. A life! Why do I feel as if they mean to take it away from me? Why do I feel the hushed whispers creeping up on me. Phoebe! Where's Phoebe? I search for her, call out for her. She has the audacity to not appear here when *I* call her! What have I not done for her and that brute of a drunk Luke! And yet she does not appear. I cannot call her very loudly of course. There is a face to be maintained. I am after all the mistress here. And there is a life breathing, throbbing within me.

This tangling of nerves, this gradual protruding of my belly, this feeling of someone being aware of everything that goes on within me - this, this burden! I have felt it before, some time ago. Where, I cannot recall. I try so hard, so hard, so hard, but cannot remember. This burden, burden! This life! Why did that Judith hold my hands back and scream out loud to get the whole of the Court assembled when I thought I could lighten myself of it?

Nelly had so kindly given me the pen knife. She is such a dear, Nelly is! This thing, this inexorable presence that is aware of me and I

am not even able to see, and it hides inside and I cannot even get to it - why, why, why! My dream, my dream, this hidden presence is breaking into the dream I have. I am crying now... Mother, Mother! Could you please stop your mumbling? It is making me MAD! I am sad and these are tears on my face - these that flow over the trembling eye lids ... do you see? Where's the mirror! Oh my blue eyes - I cannot see the blueness anymore. They seem like glass. What! You say you see through them? You do? What do you see? What, what, what ... answer me? Now! Another pair of eyes? Is that what you see?

The knife ... Judith! I implore you! Give me the knife! There are a pair of eyes looking out from inside me ... It is a burden! This life, from my stomach and now to the eyes ... it is moving, it is taking all over me! Please help me! I am going MAD!

Lady Audley sobs. The nurses had to run to the room hearing her screams from inside her room. It was quite a task, calming her down.

Entry from Dr Lecter's personal journal

24 May 1859

It is curious, the case of Madame Taylor. Monsieur Val refuses to give me any information on her past. It is curious, that. I am sure there is quite a past. Why the reluctance? I wonder. Why the polite request not to ask it of him? And yet why this placing her under my supervision? Madame Taylor does not speak. She has in fact ceased to articulate anything she feels. She writes. Fragments, pieces. She shows a paranoia about her beauty – I can see traces of what may have been. An acute sense of being possessed by what she remembers of her past. What little she remembers. These dismembered shreds – how can they be evidence of her past?

Evidently, there is an astute possibility of puerperal insanity. This disregarding every form of care that a would-be mother must want. Her physical tests reveal that this is the second time she will be pregnant. What of the first child?

I await. She is yet to look at me. But I am hungry. Lunch awaits. Peeling the potatoes and mashing them with milk and then a bit of salt. And the lamb – innocent, pink. Divine.

Madame Taylor's journal

25 May 1859

Nelly understands me. She is my friend here. Nelly Dean, a new entrant in the house. She wrote for me when I asked how she came to be here. Most unfortunate. She was tried for the murder and storage of the corpses of the dead family at Wuthering Heights. She was found insane. She says she is innocent. I believe her. She was like the daughter to Mr Earnshaw, the master of the house she was housekeeper in. She could never have done such a horrible deed to her own family. I believe her. She is an angel. Keeps referring to someone called Lockwood, how he could have testified to her innocence how he mysteriously disappeared and the police never found anyone by that name. Mysterious indeed, I say. Nelly is my friend. She does lie at times but she is nice. I believe her. I say she lies because the other day I insisted that she smelt my fair ringlets, I insisted took it closer to her ... she shrunk from it saying there weren't any! What a lie, what a lie. My "sunshiny", "feathery", ringlets ... how much they mean to me. But no she wouldn't. She wouldn't. Jealous creature. Jealous. Envious of my beauty, for she has none. Null, nothing. Void. Empty. But she listens to me. I mean reads what I ask her to. We converse like that Nelly and I.

Lady Audley does not possess those ringlets anymore. She only imagines she does. The golden hair no longer has the "glimmer" that it once did. It is plain, straight, dry and always tied into a bun at the back of her head. Yet, something of that beauty still remains. A to and fro between childishness and an extreme awareness about who she is, and sometimes was.

Madame Taylor's journal

30 May 1859

*Sweet and low, sweet and low,
Wind of the western sea,
Low, low, breathe and blow,
Wind of the western sea!
Over the rolling waters go,
Come from the dying moon, and blow,
Blow him again to me;
While my little one, while my pretty one, sleeps.*

*Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,
Father will come to thee soon;
Rest, rest, on mother's breast,
Father will come to thee soon;
Father will come to his babe in the nest,
Silver sails all out of the west
Under the silver moon:
Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty one, sleep.*

This is what Mother sings. Stroking the hair of that doll she has, she sings this every night. I do not know why. It sounds familiar. So I asked her to sing it slowly one day to me. I wrote it down. It is familiar, this lullaby. It is disgusting! Disgusting! Disgusting! She does not listen to me. She keeps singing it. She is singing it now! Mother, stop! Please! I implore you! Please do stop. It is full of lies, lullabies are full of lies! False, false, false. All untrue. Fathers don't return. They leave you to fend for yourself, while they hunt for gold! God! God, they want to be God! But they are not! They belong nowhere close to the family, they belong in the dead pits where darkness vomits darkness, the infernal holes of hell ... pushed into it, they

need to be pushed into it. They will know what being on one's own is, there in the pit. The darkness. All lies! These lullabies!

Don't come near me Mother! No no no ... nothing inside me wants to listen to these lies! Oh this burden inside me!

Just the drawing of a "loose iron spindle from the shrunken wood" and there he went into the "mouth of the well" ... a "dull thud" ... no splash of water. Just a dull thud ... where have I heard this ... this dull, dull, thud? The damp, dull, thud as if what fell would not wake up to look up. I look down. There is complete darkness, an empty, shallow, hollow darkness. Shallow, hollow, how it rhymes.

Lady Audley smiles to herself.

I can feel the cold of the iron in my palm. The darkness. The black, icy, quiet, darkness, which mocks at lullabies. And this burden! This life! This burden! Relieve me of it, Mother! Do!

Lady Audley begins to beat her womb, her hands rolled into fists. She cries aloud while she does it. Nurses run into the room after some time. It was her mother, says Madame Taylor. It has been two days since. No harm has been done to the baby. A risk to the baby's life, she has been placed in solitary confinement, her hands tied. A flicker of light only reaches the almost dark room. She sits there, awaiting her release into light. And all else.

Madame Taylor's journal

8 June 1859

His eyes. I can feel his eyes on me. The new doctor whom Monsieur Val has assigned me. Why do I need a doctor! Oh Mother! I wish they could bury you somewhere!

His eyes. I can hear the clock ticking every single day. I am losing track of time. I don't look up. What if he sees the eyes that look out of me? What if he sees inside of me? No, I won't look up. But he looks at me. I wish he could see my "soft," "starry," blue eyes. And my soft, white hands – but how. It has marks on them. Oh no. No. That cannot be. But I do feel his eyes on me all the time.

Entry from Dr Lecter's personal journal

19 June 1859

Piano. Seems like it interests her. Chopin's Nocturnes, Opus 9, No. 1 in B Flat minor. Between it playing in my chamber, her entering at the appointed time, and my stopping it, she looked up from the door. For the first time, I looked at her. Into her. I mean into her eyes. Blue.

Her eyes would often revert to the gramophone in my office through the minutes of my session with her.

For the first time in a month and half, there seems to be something like a breakthrough. I saw her. Those "exquisitely molded lips" parted as if to speak. I had leaned on the table urging her, but no words betrayed the silence. I let it be.

I let it be. I liked it that way.

Madame Taylor's journal

4 July 1859

Dr Lecter likes music. The piano. He plays it every time I am there. "Pensive," like the sonata of Beethoven's. "Melancholic melodies." Mother has not sung anymore of that pathetic lie. I play the chords of the piano I hear instead. Comes naturally. Seems as if I have had practice. I hum. But only I can hear what I hum. Nelly asked me one day why my fingers move voluntarily. Preferred not to tell her. Although Nelly is a friend, she is insane. She seemed to be more interested in my fingers than the music I played. Huh! What madness! She kept looking at them. The "ruby heart[,] ... the emerald serpent[,]... the gold bracelet," are alluring. But none of these would have suited her shapeless fingers or flat wrists. Pointless. Staring at them with an unwomanly gaze. I pity her. Even Phoebe is more sober. The pure and true do not lack virtue.

I await the music.

Madame Taylor's journal

9 July 1859

Dr Lecter observes me. While we sit across the table, he observes me. I can feel his eyes upon me. But I look down. Always. Always. Demure, that is how a lady ought to be. Quiet, reserved, demure, me. That is me. And while I was looking down waiting for him to play me another piece of Chopin's Nocturnes – he has explained that is what it is – I observe the terrible posture I have had to take while I sit. Terribly ugly. I cannot keep my knees together. They must be kept apart. How unwomanly. Unwanted. Unnecessary. An ugly affair. I complained to Mother the other day. She seems morose. Sits on her own and doesn't pay much heed to what I say until that day when I complained of my posture when I sit. My velvet dress does not sit well on my waist anymore – how imperfect that must be. Mother was silent at this remark and looked at me with those blank, and yet bright and innocent eyes, her lips a little apart. As if she had seen me for the first time. She came near me. She rubbed my head and while she stroked it, she pulled it closer to her until my head rested on her stomach. My hands wouldn't move. I did not embrace her. I did not remove my head either. Seemed like ages that someone had held me. I do not know why upon my complaining she would want to pull me close in that strange embrace. The touch seemed alien to me. As if I had found something lost to me ages ago, when I was small, very small.

My head was turned towards the window. It was raining. On the outside it seemed like someone was constantly pouring buckets full

of water on the window such that it blinded my view of the little bit of sky I could see from time to time. Then there was lightening. Cracking, it fell on the window, lighting up the glass for a split second. I saw my face. But couldn't find the figure on which my head leaned. How strange. What tricks mirrors play. There was my mother standing, holding me. And there she wasn't on the glass. I lifted my hands hastily surrounding her, gathering her, holding her with a strength that I had often felt emerging in me when I had a purpose. I turned my face away from the mirror. There, the matter was remedied. Why look towards something that couldn't show me what I wanted to see? Why look at such glasses? Why hold such mirrors to oneself?

Mother spoke: Sweet and low, sweet and low ... hmm hmm
hmm ... You were in my stomach once.

My eyes opened wide. Selfish, consummate evil! Je te tuerai! Je te tuerai! Je vais vous *bruler*! Burn ... burn ...

Lady Audley screamed these words repeatedly, repeatedly, till the nurses had to rush in to sedate her into sleep. The page on which she was writing had been torn in places from the scratches of her pen. She had clawed through the sheets and thrown the diary in the direction of the wall opposite her bed while two nurses had tried to contain her. Upon Dr Lecter's instructions the diary had been returned to her in the same state two days later. She is much calm now.

Madame Taylor's journal

17 July 1859

Exactly 6 pens. Six ink pens with golden nibs and shining black bodies on his table. Beside a neat pile of books on matters that he best understands. Sharp, pointed golden nibs with no stain of ink on them.

Entry from Dr Lecter's personal journal

24 July 1859

As I sit by her bedside looking at her closed eyelids, I still hear her screaming “this burden ... A pair of eyes looking out from inside me ... It is a burden! This life, from my stomach and now to the eyes ... moving, it is taking all over me! Please help me. Please help me.” Madame Taylor sleeps a noiseless sleep. The nib of the pen that she tried to violently poke and scratch her womb with has been rescued from her desperate hands. I shan't be able to use it anymore. A precious keepsake from a Swiss chef of international renown whose daughter I had helped save from lunacy of an acute kind had, immersed in my debt forever, gifted me a set of six rarities – painted by his wife, the eloquent Madame Reba. The very eloquent, somber, sharp, Madame Reba. Nonetheless. With one unusable from the set, I shan't be able to use them anymore. That reminds me, Monsieur Poirot, Belgian detective of high caliber, in charge of the disappearance of Madame, places the mystery of her sudden disappearance two years ago among his unsolved cases. She has not been found since the day she ... She was seen coming to my lodge. Apparently. I never received her. I have a faint remembrance of that day anyway.

She sleeps now. Her bosom at the mercy of life, breath, oxygen. Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise, sunset. Like every day. Restful, calm, serene. Beautiful.

The point at which I was called in on an emergency I was informed that Madame Taylor had tried to hurt herself, her baby; I was brought in to see, three hospital boys trying to stop her from ranting, trying to keep her still, while droplets of crimson had adorned the floor beside her. Some of them smudged by her feet, struggling to be freed of the clasps that held her, the burden she screamed of looking from within her. Some of the tiny droplets had coagulated. My ears had shut themselves off. Suddenly. Those droplets, tiny, small, crimson droplets, speaking to me. My eyes had met Madame Taylor's for a minute second. It had seemed like she had looked into me. I had shifted my gaze. Back to where they seemed to have belonged. The blur of the day of Madame Reba's disappearance seemed to be clearing at that very instant. My tongue had dried, had watered. There was an inexplicable longing inside of me. My eyes had been transfixed on the droplets. One droplet in particular. Strange, how inhuman, inanimate, colours have the power to bloom into recognizable shapes and figures from the recognizable past. As if that droplet knew the meaning of the forgotten remembrance my gaze had tried to draw out of it. Close, very close, to the brink of that recalling, the two blue eyes on me, piercing, ripping the corner of my left eye, like fire beginning to char little by little the corner of a sheet of paper, gaining in strength to turn it soon into cinders – had induced in me the conscious struggle to not argue with those blue, unrepentant eyes – unrepentant of what I wonder – and I had looked. Looked into hers. And she had looked into mine, into me. She had fainted with the knowledge that I knew that the pen had been in her possession the day it had left my table. Knowledge is essential. Essential. Knowledge of her past, I must have. To that task

I must devote myself while she “slumber[s] peacefully” through the lightening.

I await her awakening.

Dr Lecter smiles, an abstracted smile. His eyebrows raise themselves unconsciously as if. Anticipation often leads to such manifestations, unbeknownst.

A lull without repose.

It has been three months since this incident. A certain calm chooses to rest its weary head in the maison de santé. The corridors of the quiet place seem to have stagnated. The nurses are quiet. So are the inhabitants. The humming of Madame Taylor however keeps interrupting the spectacle of solace. The solace being expressed for Monsieur Val. He lies, deteriorating in his room. The sheets of his bed creased, wrinkled, sweating as if under the scorching wrath of the sun, the pillow under his head cupping his head with hands the veins on which swell with having to hold it endlessly. The head shrinks as if.

Madame Val is anxious. It has been three weeks that the fever arrived. Quite suddenly. The cough, the pain in the muscles, the vomiting. Ceaseless. Dr Dubois has been of much assistance, except that none of the remedies he has suggested has brought any relief to Monsieur Val. Mr Lecter has been insistent, however, that no one except Dr Dubois will do. He is a doctor of eminent repute whom he has known in the last few years. Dr Lecter's quiet presence exuding of the said confidence and his unflinching concern borne by the regular visits to Monsieur Val's chambers have been undeniably accepted as expressive of him being an individual of trust in the Val household. There have been even nights when Madame Val have been kindly retired from looking after her very sick husband by Dr Lecter. He brings flowers too, for her. And chocolates for the two children. Belgian pralines with praliné, ganache and gianduja. Dr Lecter makes it a point to handle them with care when giving it to the children. The milk ones are their favourites.

An incident merits mention here. One of these days, one of the two boys happened to have dropped one of the pralines. What should or could have passed as an innocent incident a cause d'enfant agité assumed a serious proportion in Dr Lecter's comportment. When after staring long with a slight frown at the piece of chocolate now lying abandoned on the floor, broken, tawdry, he had looked at the boy. The child, after a few seconds, had made it a point to dash to his mother, then holding her tight and bursting into a fit of wails. He had been unable to articulate why to his mother. Thereafter, he had also made it a point not to

frequent his Papa's room while Dr Lecter was in attendance. The chocolates had not stopped coming though. However, between him and the boy of 11, there had passed something inexplicable, of which one does not quite know the exact hue.

And now, back to the maison de santé. Another incident that ought to be placed here. Madame Taylor's baby is dead. She suffered an abortion in the womb in the fourth month. On the day this occurred, she had called out to the nurse complaining of an excruciating pain in her stomach. Thereafter, she had fainted. The doctor had been summoned only to pronounce the fetus dead. The cause had been communicated in hushed whispers to Dr Lecter by the doctor. Madame Taylor has recovered. She continues her visits to Dr Lecter. She has not yet spoken.

The music too plays on. So do a few other matters.

Entry from Dr Lecter's personal journal

11 September 1859

I was stupefied. Stupefied at the insolence. Stupefied at his undying composure in refusing me. Me.

Ah, the rack of lamb. Such a "slender frame." What it must suffer, how it sticks to the skillet, sweating to be freed. But how can I let it go? Ah, the slender frame. Just a bit more garlic I suppose. Et parfait! Calming.

Entry from Dr Lecter's personal journal

20 September 1859

The despair Monsieur Val's death has caused Madame Val is distressing. His health kept deteriorating. Not even the arrival of my dear friend, and the very knowledgeable Count Fosco could save him. The end was imminent I suppose. The constant rain, the dampness did not help either. How distressing. How very distressing.

Madame Val is set to return to Marseilles. To her sister. She says, perhaps very rightly, that she cannot continue to be in the rooms that witnessed Monsieur Val's demise. But what of the maison de santé, I asked. She was very kind to have arranged with her solicitor, a Monsieur Claes, to have bestowed upon me the responsibility of running the place. Astonishing, how one is trusted. So suddenly, so completely. And despite Monsieur Claes's earnest appeal suspecting the legitimacy of me as heir! Surprising. Pleasing. My sense of duty and humility, both affirmed and accepted this gracious offer. How

could I not? How could I not? How could I let it be, now that the opportunity had presented itself to me? A few more responsibilities, just a few more. Eh bien ça. Bien. Très bien. Le travail commence avec le table de Monsieur Val maintenant! Vite! Vite le docteur! Quelques lettres d'intérêts attendent.

Dr Lecter plays on his piano, a tune leaping from note to note hastily, not without deep cadence though, echoing a stifled cry, a wail forestalled at its emanation only to drown the eyes with a gush of colorless, nameless liquid ... Digging his tidy, small, podgy fingers into the keys of the piano, he shuts his eyes to a memory, a future of what is to be made a memory of, a score that requires much sacrifice from the note B on the fourth register. Imagine the piercing sharpness. Like the soft, pulsating tip of the vein on the inside of a wrist where the palm ends, under the butcher's shining knife – snipped. Like a mere paper-cut. And then, the oozing red, thick, velvet. No more a trickle. Assuming a spread and sway. To be contained in a glass. What if that were wine? A rarity. Vintage. Classic. Criminal. Human.

Dr Lecter smiles.

Entry from Dr Lecter's personal journal

19 October 1859

I had to let go of mon ami. The valiant man of “might and main,” and shall we say considerable weight! Hah! I had to let go of him. He has come of aid to me in the past, does so even now. I wish I could keep him – forever. But he has to return to Tyrol to meet his newly married dear friend, Sir Percival Glyde. How important could that be, that he had to leave here in such haste? Tut tut. I disapprove.

I do not understand him at times. Why did he have to be so nervous and leave the door open? All he had to do was transfer all the material from the valise into a bag and bring it here, and yet, he leaves the door open hearing the footsteps of an unknown person nearing the room. Where did all his cunning go? I wonder. I had to gift him a “whole family of white mice,” to calm him and bring him back to the composure that he is accustomed to. He said he is going to build a “pagoda of painted wire-works” for the mice! Quel idée! Who will see him and say that he is one of the “the first experimental chemists living, and has discovered, among other wonderful inventions, a means of petrifying the body after death, so as to preserve it, as hard as marble, to the end of time.” Who can associate this fat man fond of his cockatoo, with death and corpses, and life? Extraordinary. But I am unhappy, he had to leave. I had a few more tasks for him. Never mind, never mind. One has to let go, from time to time. You cannot have everything on a plate; it must look exquisite, when served, with a little of everything that tastes delicious,

ripe, tender, sublime, like it throbs with life! Breathing, delicious, dream.

An incident.

25 October 1859

Dr Seward, one of the doctors at the asylum, has reported Dr Lecter that he found the door of Monsieur Val's private chamber - the one that is supposed to be locked for it contains his private correspondence, which Madame Val had no purpose of anymore and that is why she had left it to the care of Monsieur Lecter - open last night. Seward had returned to his office to pick up a few papers he had forgotten to take with him earlier in the evening. So he was not supposed to be there that night. Wasn't the key of the chamber supposed to be with Monsieur Lecter? Monsieur Lecter expresses surprise for he had not given the key to anyone. Monsieur Lecter makes light of the situation and assures innocent, responsible, forthright, Seward that he will personally take care of the situation.

Madame Taylor's journal

27 October 1859

Was I awaiting this? Was my heart in a strange throbbing tumult in expectation of this? Of this! Oh I can hardly contain myself. Can hardly wait to scribble it all down, cannot wait to reach the end of a sentence for the speed with which my thoughts, the contentment of possessing them, is running stealthily in my head is – ah – I am in such sweet delight, such a tremor, an uproar, in my heart, my ears ... it rings in my ears, those words ...

And this, this violet ... where have I seen this? Oh Mother! Can you tell me where? Let me shut my eyes ...

She breathes heavily, the frantic eye balls moving listlessly as if trying to grope in the dark and then a sudden stillness and she breathes slowly. A dulcet flicker of a smile breaks onto those petal-like red lips. She had found it.

The satin cushions, the jewel box, the dressing room, the “marble dressing-table,” a “rich odors of perfumes in bottles whose gold stoppers had not been replaced,” a “bunch of hot-house flowers ... upon a tiny writing-table.... [The] handsome dresses ... and the open doors of a wardrobe.... with [j]ewelry, ivory-backed hair-brushes, and exquisite china ...” And ... and ... the gilded oval mirror! Ah! And the face in it, mine! Oh where have I seen it, where, where oh where! Mother? Do you recall? Don't you recall anything, anything at all? ANYTHING! Burn, you!

Ah, the mirror.

But, what does he mean when he says he knows of my past, one that I know no beginning to? What does he mean? Can he finally reveal to me the meaning of these fragments that like fire burns my head, my eyes, my soul! Oh should I dread what is to come, or drown in the sweet, benumbing delight of the violet ... oh where have I seen this! Why cannot I remember? Perhaps Nelly can help! Oh but how... No Nelly mustn't know. She is insane. She is jealous. She is a murderer. She cannot be trusted. NO no no. Oh, the mirror. My face, the glitter, the yellow flame of my hair, the soft blue eyes ... Now, his eyes will see it. He saw it. Was I waiting for this?

She shut her eyes. Her lips trembled as she wrote these lines. Her face, still that childish face with the soft blue eyes. On her bed lay two things. A "dark violet velvet dress," its skirt lined with white satin lace near the bottom rims, its shoulders sloping, the sleeves flaring wide till they came near the wrists where they gathered in frills. Le seconde était une carte d'invitation et une lettre dans une couverture.

The letter to Madame Taylor alongside the Invitation

Dear Madame,

I am writing to you regretting the days we have spent in silence. I am writing to you with a remorse that assails over me to see you the way you are, now, much removed from what you were before – what I gather of you from what I see of you now. I repented. I repented not having had a past before me. You see, I was given none. None whatsoever. You were a face without a story, an identity without a history, a frame that could be anyone, orphaned from ties. Negligible, perhaps, to another. Not to me. Not to me. I was troubled. Much troubled by this refusal I met with when I wished to know who you were. But troubles have a means to make trifles of themselves. I shall not entirely offer my gratitude to miracle. Nor shall I admit to the purpose my hands may have played into. I am cognizant that you shall not wish to be aware as well of the how that I do now know. For I do. Yes I do.

I have sent over to your room something that you may recall. It belongs to you. It must. It does not belong to the valise cachée. It belongs to you. And to it, you.

Chez moi, “Le Reichenbach.” Le 11 Décembre. Je vous en attendrais. Ne vous inquiétez pas de Judith, ou aucun, ou tous les gens dans le monde. On n’aurait pas une obstacle.

*Remerciments,
Monsieur Lecter*

11 December 1859, at the Maison de Santé

A Mademoiselle Hortense, on the express instructions of Dr Lecter had arrived to fetch Madame Taylor. A day out. As part of the treatment, as wished by the late Monsieur Val, as deemed appropriate by the duty-bound Dr Lecter. No one had questioned the departure. Although none had failed to closely observe and absorb the “graceful beauty” that exuded from the lady in violet. The colour itself had assumed a true significance on her having accepted it; before that it had not the life that it had now. It breathed. And beamed.

11 December 1859, at “The Reichenbach,” Dr Lecter’s house

The square room where Dr Lecter and Madame Taylor sat, at opposite ends of a long, oval table, was a starkly gathered yet well-lit room. This was the guest room, a room where guests were allowed. Cut off from the main house which had an equally stark and sparsely furnished living-, and a single bed-room alongside a kitchen of ample proportion, this, “The Reichenbach” was individuated. It contained the ivory white piano from Steinway & Sons, with a stool exquisitely carved, with a protruding back rest, also in white; the table on which sat the two; four chairs; a mantelpiece with candelabras holding erect the orange candles. And walls. Four walls of a dull fawn pastel shade. On one of the four, the one that lay to the right of those who sat, were paintings – five to be exact. Oil on canvas, capturing figures in various positions, the front of the faces elided. The colours varied. The colours seeming as if the bodies had belonged to them; the colours, impenetrable. The figures, raw. Undeterred by “des apparitions des vêtements,” as he put it. “Les purs and les deshabillees,” il lui dit. Dr Lecter’s own creations, or so Madame Taylor was told upon her ingress.

At the sight of the “apparitions,” her blue eyes had melted into a soft, shy glow, the bright curiosity in them suddenly losing the measureless curiosity, the approach of opportunity, that imagination of a surreal dream – that motivation that led to calculate even when to bat an eyelid for all, everything, had to be acknowledged, grasped, understood, drunk, digested. He had to Be. To her. The soft, shy glow had been robbed off her as Le Docteur had called her, “Madame,

voilà! Le dinner est prêt!” The mild baritone of his voice had as if assumed an usher of freedom – at least for that moment. Who knew what promises it wove in Madame’s mind for moments to come?

So they sat.

In between them lay: chicken liver pate, coquilles St-Jacques, winter salad with buttermilk dressing, blanquette de veau and chocolate mousse. Champagne, too.

Much on the table, like much else in the evening was to be savoured. Devoured too.

There was music, thereafter. Madame Taylor played. A melancholy melody from remembrance that had no history in her mind; a “pensive sonata of Beethoven’s.” Her white hands gliding softly through the keys, the round wrists – a passionate accoutrement to the arms that ascended from it, like music was to the piano or to any instrument.

Then came closure. Dr Lecter bent towards her with a candle. She looked up with those “melting blue eyes,” expectant of one knew not what. The distance between her eyes and the expectation was drawing near. The head that had earnestly lifted its frame had on it the “showering flaxen curls”. The eyes that feebly burnt in the fever of the blue and yellow, were a dull bottle-green and grey, the grey of the sky that is about to break open into unstoppable rain, cold and steel and piercing - blinding. The face that lay behind the candle’s glow clean-shaven, lean, with an aquiline nose set not very much above lips – thin, etched as if with blade - that spoke of an immoveable emotion and speechlessness – only aware of that which was coming.

No, there was no embrace. Nevertheless, she submitted.

On “[t]hat one quiet evening” Dr Lecter was to hear “[t]he low music of that gentle voice,” only through the following words: “I want him dead.”

He had showed her a letter posted from Essex, England. An old letter addressed to Monsieur Val. He had asked Madame Taylor if she recognized the

sender of the missive. If she remembered a Robert Audley. The mention of that name had caused Madame Taylor to take her hands off the piano, the music had stopped. The childish blush had in an instant vanished off that face; there was now, instead, a heightened sense of stillness, a corpse-like whiteness, the skin tightening around the bones underneath the surface that, an instant back, had been full of life. The eyes had opened wide and tears danced to a strange rhythm on the lower lids.

Dr Lecter had realized. There had been a return. Back to something. Some things. Fear. Admission. Loss. And identity. Lady Audley. Lucy Graham. Helen Talboys. Helen. And ROBERT AUDLEY! What had stood out most, though, was the suffocation of the time lost.

Hatred. L'haine. And memory. The former often ignites the latter.

For now, however, madness must be prolonged. Or so Dr Lecter has counselled his subject. The subject has acquiesced.

In the meantime.

26 April 1860

A “black-edged letter written upon foreign paper” comes to Robert Audley announcing the death of a certain Madame Taylor who has expired peacefully at Villebrumeuse. A long illness, *le maladie de l'angeur*.

The letter that Robert Audley received was Monsieur Val. Curious. Impossible.

A year has passed.

17 June 1861

Robert Audley receives a letter from Monsieur Val, Villebrumeuse. A letter stating that it is of the utmost importance that he comes to Belgium on the earliest train. A matter about Madame Taylor needs attention. A dangerous matter.

Address: Rue des Histoires 3
B-666, VILLEBRUMEUSE
BELGIUM

Articles of interest.

15 March 1860: An article from a local newspaper in Villebrumeuse (Translated)

On Monday night, a private asylum on Rue de Rivoli, Villebrumeuse, was consumed by a disastrous fire. The fire burst out at approximately 9.10 pm, the cause behind which is still being investigated. It being an asylum for the insane, most of all the windows of the rooms of the inmates were shut, owing to which the fire that seems to have spread rather rapidly has left none alive. A Dr Hannibal Lecter responsible for the upkeep of the asylum expressed his utter astonishment and regret at the appalling and unfortunate incident. A total of 15 lives perished in the fire, and not much, in terms of bodies, could be retrieved from the site. The firemen only succeeded in dousing the fire that caused the building to lie in a heap of blackened ash. The correspondent at the site spoke to one of the firemen who said that the fire must have burst inside at a voluptuous intensity and could have been caused by the bursting of a gas cylinder; the building being old and rickety, the fire would have taken no time to devour it in an instant. A calamity of despairing magnitude that could have been avoided if proper precautions had been taken.

13 December 1858: An article in the *Yorkshire Post*

DREADFUL MURDERS ON THE YORKSHIRE MOORS

On Sunday evening, a group of three English gentlemen out to explore the Yorkshire moors upon stopping to ask for directions in a derelict house called the "Wuthering Heights" found a woman by the name of Ellen Dean, popularly known as Nelly, sitting by the door with a hatchet in her hand which was covered in dry blood. On encroaching the threshold, to their horror, they discovered two inert bodies, those of 18-year-old Catherine Earnshaw and 24-year-old Hareton Earnshaw. Ellen Dean had, as per neighbour's reports, served the Earnshaw family and

also the one residing at Thrushcross Grange, another household a few miles away from the Heights since the past several years, her mother having preceded her. She was apparently considered to be like one of their own in the household, as was told to the correspondent by the inn-keepers.

The bodies of the newly married Earnshaws were discovered in a mutilated condition on their bed. The hatchet had struck their hearts and abdomen repeatedly.

Upon the arrival of the police, Ms Dean was heard imploring to the police to find a Mr Lockwood who could have sworn to her innocence, but no trace of any gentleman by that name was found. As if this was not enough, more horrifying to the neighbourhood was the discovery that the police made in the cellar at Wuthering Heights. A decomposing corpse of an older gentleman, identified to be Mr Heathcliff Earnshaw, the adopted son of senior Earnshaw was found there; it had been covered by a white sheet and initial investigation of the cause of death by the doctor on the scene was pronounced to be poisoning by cyanide. Given the state of the body, he was reported to be dead for over a week. The woman Ms Dean claims innocence in the matter. Due to the overwhelming nature of evidence found against her and the murder weapon in her possession, she has been taken into custody and shall be presented at the inquest. A straightforward case, and Ms Dean will be fully committed for trial, said Detective Inspector Japp, of the Yorkshire constabulary.

Madame Taylor's journal

23 June 1861

I remember. A French story of a beautiful woman who had committed some crime and had managed to keep it a secret for nearly half a century. All the good she had done, all the poor she had helped, all the laughter she had bestowed, all forgotten – in a blink of an eye, all forgotten, trampled, torn, when the secret was revealed. Her hair white, her eyes almost blind with age, she was burned alive. Everyone else remembered her as a wicked sorceress. That is all. Nothing more. Nothing of that beauty, nothing more of that beam that lit lives, just the crime, the secret. A wicked sorceress. I remember, the beautiful woman who once was.

She sat in front of the oval mirror with her chin cupped in her delicately, small palm, the glow from the four wax candles on the dressing table fell on her demure face, lighting up the rims of her blue eyes, still, distant, drinking as it were the "caskets of Indian filigree-work," "fragile tea-cups of turquoise china, adorned by medallion miniatures" of great kings and queens, "cabinets of buhl and porcelain, bearing the cipher of Austrian Marie-Antoinette," "statuettes of Parian marble and biscuit china," among others. Her little, red mouth, slightly ajar, in anticipation, awe and.

What if she had found a way to leave behind the trial? Far, far, away. In a land far, far, away. Imagine that to be in a book. A story of the sensational escape of the beautiful sorceress.

She laughs aloud.

I must tell her. I must, must. Nelly. I must tell her.

*She goes in search of a Ms Dean who stays as the lady's maid at Rue des
Histoires 3.*

*Besides, neither she nor Nelly were consumed by the fire at the maison de
santé.*

Madame Taylor's journal

24 June 1861

The sorceress shall be free. Yes mother, she will be. I will tell you a story tonight, at least the beginning. You shall hear it from my lips.

Entry from Dr Lecter's personal journal

25 June 1861

I will be honoured by his presence tonight. He informs me that he will be reaching Verviers by the 5.30 coach. How very perplexing human beings are. How very very perplexing. Why be anxious about a lady who is unhinged? Elle, qui est folle! Why the inquietude, the restlessness? Tut tut. This does not bear well with me. No no no. What should this mean? Does it mean there exists conscious knowledge that she is not? But his letter to Dr Mosgrave? That has evidence of the lady's own confession to madness. What of that then? What of it? Why the concealment then? Why the changing of names? Why? Questions. I do not like questions. I shall have answers. He will like the arrangements. The lady has had a say in it too – the arrangements. Ah, the arrangements.

It is about time. The sun is about to set.

Madame Taylor's journal

26 June 1861

I saw him. He saw me too. That is important. More important. He had risen and come towards the piano while I was playing it, with a glass of sirop de cassis that Nelly had served him upon entering. He had been requested to await the hosts. The hosts! The sheets of music scattered on the floor by me. I had turned feeling his presence behind me. Upon seeing me, his eyes had had the brightness that bewilderment, utter, inexplicable, shock sometimes induces. I could see the fine veins in those eyes, the tremble in those lips, the colour that rose in his cheeks. I did not bat an eyelid. Not once. He had shouted, Monsieur Vall! Monsieur Vall! Agitated, troubled, confounded – until Dr Lecter had entered, smiling. Dr Lecter had asked him, Monsieur Audley, come let me help you. I had laughed. Laughed aloud. Mad, mad, mad! I was MAD at that moment. MAD! I continued to laugh looking at him, but it seemed as if he was suffocating at the sound my laughter, the sight of me, my living, my breath, my being, my hatred, my madness! For he was losing speech, beads of sweat broke out on his brow, he held his throat as if thirsty for water – but I would not quench his thirst.

I took out the knife from under the folds of my dress and piercing it went inside the opening of his left ear! In one thrust, just one single thrust his life was mine. The red twilight that I recalled from a few years ago at a distance, I could see burning, the lava of all that he had taken away from me flowed endlessly in vein-like tributaries through the left side of his face, his neck, the white of his

shirt unable to combat the hold that the red spread across it. He tumbled to the floor, near my feet. My feet. His mouth gaping, he choking, gurgling. The front of his face had a certain iciness, severed from the head, thanks to the interruption of the knife. What an ugly corpse he made. Ugly. Dead. Piteous, I will not be able to use the knife again for filleting fish. I WISH I WISH I WISH at that moment, I wish I could have thrust that knife into his ear! Just imagination. Mere imagination. Huh! But where was I? Yes, he held his throat as if thirsty for water – but I would not give quench his thirst.

He fell, his tongue in a state of stagnant tremor as if wanting to articulate something. Surprise perhaps! I laughed again! Yes, I did, when Dr Lecter's gentle hand touched my cheek, and I stopped. He said: "It is time." I went back to the piano to end what I had started.

Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum, New Southgate, London
5 February 1862

A new patient has been admitted by the name of William Smith.

Dr Lecter, long-time friend of Dr Edgar Sheppard, has entrusted the care of this very destructive lunatic to Dr Sheppard. Solitary confinement has to be exercised. Dr Sheppard listens with wide-eyed amazement as Dr Lecter recounts to him the patient's successful attempt at severing his own tongue a few weeks previously. What recklessness, what lunacy! He was increasingly becoming a danger under Dr Lecter's care and at the mental asylum he works; there is no room for such lunatics who mean self-harm there. It affects the calm of the other patients. Hence, under the influence of a very strong opiate, he has had to be transferred here. His "file" too, Dr Lecter has given Dr Sheppard. A case of acute persecution complex and seeds of a multiple personality disorder. Robert Smith is one of the many selves he holds on to for longer periods of time. The other personalities adorn the following names: Robert Audley, Walter Hartright and Thomas Tulliver. He writes rigorously trying to tell everyone the person he is not. Some story where he sees his own doctor, Dr Lecter as enemy, weaving a story of being drugged and severed of the capacity to speak. Of all the most unbelievable things he believes he is nephew of a Sir Michael Audley of Essex! Dr Lecter took personal care to inquire about this although this was impossible given that William Smith was a patient under his care for the past two years; the papers were proof. Anyway, Mrs Clara Audley had responded to Dr Lecter's inquiries through a letter informing him of Mr Robert Audley's death in an accidental fire that broke out in the house of a friend of theirs who her husband was visiting a year before in Australia, during the month of June. How unfortunate! She did not

even get to see the last of her own husband. The resemblance in the names - pure coincidence. How common would this name be – a Robert Audley.

Dr Sheppard takes charge. Dr Lecter must not worry. Dr Lecter is known for his powers of suggestion and persuasion.

Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum, New Southgate, London
17 February 1862

On a quilted rug, William Smith lies in a side room, his eyes open, still, dim, afraid, weary, submissive. No bed or pillow. With almost no clothes on him. It has been two weeks since he has been put in this room for he tried to bang his head on the bars of his cell, trying to say something. No one is ready to listen. Or read what he writes. He is insane. And now, devoid of the means to a voice.

Banished. Haunted. Buried Alive.

To be noted.

The papers presented to Dr Sheppard does contain a correspondence from Mrs Clara Talboys. Strangely neither did she receive any letter of inquiry, nor did she write any response. Before Robert Audley had left for Villebrumense, he had not spoken of the real reason driving his sudden visit out of Essex to either Clara or George with the intention that they must not be unsettled by the mention of Lady Audley and the Asylum. He had in fact left hastily saying he was going to meet a sick friend in Liverpool and will return in two to three days. He had not returned. He had disappeared.

Mrs Audley Alicia, and her brother are crestfallen and they have almost given up on their search of Robert. The household which had been "all happy and at peace" with its "good people," is now "a hush that succeeds [a] tempest."

**Madame Taylor's journal, at Rue de la Vie 4, Verviers,
Belgium.**

25 February 1862

The sorceress is free.

Restored. At Peace.

An inventory of Monsieur Val's valise in possession of Dr Lecter

A few "silken dinner" dresses of Madame Taylor (folded in brown paper; given to him by Robert Taylor at the time of Lady Audley's incarceration)

A few belongings that Madame Taylor had brought along with her during March of 1859: Fragile tea cups, covered vases of Sevres and Dresden, jeweled and golden drinking cups, her furs.

A letter from Robert Audley to Dr Allwyn Mosgrave attached to a letter from Dr Mosgrave to Monsieur Val explaining to him the history of Lady Audley's diagnosis, and his "doubts."

From one of the many pages from Dr Lecter's personal journal that are folded and kept in a plain, tin box in his private casket which is always locked.

**Excerpt from one of the many pages on Madame Reba.
1857 (Undated)**

Her delicate, dulcet silhouette through the white, silken gown – with red roses painted all over – touches me deeply, to the core. With her hands lifted, resting crossed on top of her black, luscious scalp, her hair flowing on her back as if innumerable fingers had dipped themselves in very black ink and scattered themselves on it, drowning her in their caress, she would often wonder. Wandering into the forest of her mind, a beautiful mind, she would wonder. The white canvas in front of her gasping for life, as if, waiting with baited breath to adorn, embrace, clasp the story she was in search of.

She would often know of my arrival. Even without my announcing my presence. I wish she would not turn, I always wish she would not. But she does. Why should that face unsettle me so? Those large eyes, wistful, the whites with a painted center neither the grey of the wrathful sky about to burst into violent rain, nor the green of spring, under the shadows of her eyebrows etched perfectly on that wide forehead; the little nose which as if God had placed with such care amidst the face – small, neither cruelly pointed, nor inadequate and flat; the mouth, red, dry, characterized by a calm deportment which even smile could fracture. That oval face. Why would she turn it towards me? Oh why should it unsettle me so? It was not until this morning that I realized the reason. Not until this

morning when she came to me. She wanted to surprise me, and how. A likeness. Of me. She had painted me. ME! And she had called it a likeness. Nothing could be far. A likeness! A cruel joke it was. The eyes from the painting looking out at me scoffing at me. I could not look at it. None, none, nothing of my face was in that reflection. Except, except, that something that I had seen in her face.

She had come closer to me, I could feel her breath on my face, her eyes looking into mine, her lips parted in a smile of triumph. There had been an incisive passion, a belongingness in that embrace that day. But my heart could not remove my eyes from regarding the eyes that looked back at me – those eyes newly painted, they had as if turned animate. My hands had decided. I could feel a sudden surge of power in them. A strength that could defeat the cloistered embrace, the vile taste of that which she had repeatedly called love! Bah! She had suddenly stopped cold as my hands had gained control of her breath. That puny neck, like that of a chicken's throttled to its inevitable end! That slender neck in my grasp. For the first time, her face had ceased to unsettle me, unsettled in itself though it was. She had stood there unable to escape my embrace, immovable. The blood had drained from her face, as if it had stopped from flowing any further up than her chest. The neck had felt thinner and thinner in my hands, until her eyes had shut and she had submitted. I had unclasped her. She had fallen like a tousled, unwashed piece of linen on my fine carpet.

I, in the painting, had to burn. I could not look at it anymore. What was that unimaginable cruelty on that face, the look of hunger,

the demeaning absence of colour on my lips, huh! It could not be mine. Abominable, abominable.

I looked at her hands, delicate, long, fingers with a peachish hue – like rose trellises. I called her, but Reba wouldn't answer. Earlier she would come to me even without my telling, asking. And now, she did not move. There were tears in my eyes. Oh, how could she be gone? How? Why? What had I done? But she deserved it. She did, she did. I will forgive her. She will still be mine. I will keep her. She will remain mine. Only mine to keep.

Dr Lecter's house, and an observatory he would often work late hours into (situated into the innards of Villebrumense), had no mirrors in them. A noticeable absence.

A lavish kitchen, yes. A locked, refrigerated cupboard yes. Repositories of ice, yes. A surgical table, yes. A state-of-the-art toolkit with surgical instruments alongside a well-furnished stock of opiates and other medicines, yes.

In the medicine cabinet, are four small bottles made of glass that befuddles one. One with the label: "Mme Tayl./Fosco," and three others labelled "Mr Val/Fosco." They are empty. Used, most certainly.

Records of classical music, yes. A piano, too. And him.

There is Madame Taylor too. Not very far.

The “no end.”