

Win Scott Eckert: *Nadine's Invitation*

November 1795

Blakeney Manor, Richmond: Thursday the 19th of November

My Dearest Countess Carody,

I do hope Paris finds you well, although Hungary must be missing its sweetest flower!

Sir Percy has gotten a bug to winter at Blakeney Hall. It's a bit out of the way, situated near some sleepy villages—Would Newton, and Thwing, if you can believe it—up in Yorkshire, but that's part of the charm, isn't it?

In fact, it's to be a rather large gathering, and Percy and Alice and I couldn't help but recall the many charming—almost mesmerizing!—evenings we spent at your townhome on the Crescent last April. You were absolutely captivating, my dear, and all of Bath was abuzz with disappointment when you decamped for the Continent.

Nadine, you simply must join us for the Christmas holidays. Come earlier, if you can, as we hope to gather all around the second week of next month. The Darcys will be there, naturally—Lizzie is dying to see you again—as well as several others you unquestionably must meet... The Duke of Holdernes, Baron Tennington, M. and Mme. Delegardie—too many to mention, really.

Do write that you will come, my dear, and send news of Paris as well; I haven't been home for ages, for obvious reasons, and miss it so.

Believe me at all times with sincerity and respect,

I am affectionately yours,

Marguerite, Lady Blakeney

Rue des Filles du Calvaire: 21 Nov. 1795

Dear Colonel Bozzo-Corona

All is proceeding as planned. I have responded to Lady Blakeney accepting her kind invitation to winter at Sir Percy's estate in Yorkshire.

By the way, your man Lecoq eyes me a little too appreciatively when he delivers your missives. You know my preferences, and in any event his reach exceeds the grasp of his station. Please correct him accordingly.

Yours,

Countess Nadine Carody

Rue Thérèse: 22nd November

My Dear Countess,

Splendid, just splendid. The seeds you planted last spring in Bath have borne sweet fruit, indeed. I received my own invitation today, and of course will be in attendance, although circumstances may delay me one or two days beyond the time of arrival Blakeney prescribed.

Of course, I will chastise Lecoq with all due severity. I understand, after all, your ravishment last year at the hands of the Martinovics radicals dictates your current preferences.

Taking the larger view, however, I cannot regret those unfortunate events which have shaped your new destiny and brought us into accord. These Revolutionary sentiments must be suppressed. The last several years of instability on the Continent have shown that to be the case. We are now well-positioned to exert our influence at Blakeney's conclave, and to impose the order which will surely prove to be to our mutual profit.

Yours ever,

Colonel Bozzo-Corona (ret.)

Calyx Bar: November 22

Dear Colonel,

I'll come straight to the point. There's something a bit off about the Countess Carody. Her behavior is quite odd. Her townhouse is filled with floor-to-ceiling mirrors, in which she positively revels in

admiring herself at every opportunity, almost with an odd sense of triumph. She presents herself in long silky robes, and a flowing red scarf, which do little to preserve her modesty. Finally, she keeps a female servant who stands stock still and allows the Countess to manipulate her limbs and turn her head as if she were a life-size fashion doll.

Do you believe the Countess to be a reliable partner in our ventures?

Your most obed. servant, Sir,

Lecoq

Rue Thérèse: 22nd November

My son,

Your imagination runs away with you. She's a Hungarian noble. What more needs be said?

Kindly control your libido in her presence. She has taken note of your interest, and is immune.

C.

Rue Morgue: 22 Nov.

My Dear Sir Percy,

As you suspected, the Colonel and Countess Carody are in league. After shadowing Lecoq to the Calyx Bar, and thence to the Cordon Jaune brothel (he went there, apparently succumbing to his urges after delivering his master's latest note to the Countess), I took up a disguise as a customer. A few well-placed *sous* to the Madame garnered me a fast look at the contents of Lecoq's pockets. This Countess must be an alluring beauty indeed if he had to satisfy his base cravings immediately after departing her presence.

In any event, it remains to be seen if they will see things our way or constitute an obstacle. We shouldn't forget, though, that the Colonel and the Brothers of Mercy certainly came through in the de Musard matter by supplying Marguerite and Alice with the Heart of Ahriman.

Believe me, dear Sir,

Your obliged and faithful humbl. sert.,

Dr. Siger Holmes

Rue des Filles du Calvaire: 23 Nov. 1795

Dear Colonel Bozzo-Corona,

We agree, but Francis II is stirring strong opposition among other nobles. I'll attend Sir Percy's gathering to determine what the consensus is regarding French Revolutionary sentiment inflaming the rest of Europe, and what action they propose to prevent its spread.

Do you think there is any chance Blakeney suspects that the Brothers of Mercy were behind the de Musard affair, and thus you have, in essence, engineered his response to those events, this Yorkshire gathering itself?

Yours,

Countess Nadine Carody

Rue des Filles du Calvaire: 23 Nov. 1795

My Lord,

By design, I am in receipt of an invitation to England, as is Bozzo-Corona. The Colonel is pleased to believe that he and I are aligned in our reasons for attending this conclave, not understanding my service to a darker power surpassing his mortal concerns. It delights me no end that, despite this service, in other ways I am unlike you, or your so-called Brides; I am pleased to retain a modicum of my own free will. That I am able to deprive you, for an eternity, of any further impositions of the lustful behavior to which you originally subjected me, and continually remind you of this, brings me great joy.

In any event, I will of course report on the machinations discussed at this conclave, the possible influence on the political landscape across the Continent, and their potential impact to your long-term plans for expansion beyond your Transylvanian stronghold.

My destination is an estate far from the teeming centers of society such as London or Bath. The location is near the Yorkshire coast, nonetheless accessible by the ports at Bridlington or Scarborough or

Whitby. One or more of these may be of suitable use for your eventual migration from the Carpathians to Albion, understanding, as only those of us can, that such event is conceivably decades away.

But I digress. I plan on entry via Whitby, but shall investigate the other ports if the opportunity avails itself, and report back soonest.

Never forget that I despise you, and what you have made me with your dark kiss.

Nonetheless I remain, my dear Count,

Your unwilling servant,

Nadine