



Copying a Master

By Candy Ray

This story was channelled by Candy Ray from the chaos muse Ino

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Chapter 1

The artist painted a lilac line. It undulated around the edges of the canvas and wandered nonchalantly towards the middle of what was to be his new painting- or would it be a sigil today?

He liked to paint both: compositions that were for no other purpose than to celebrate art, and sigils for the purpose of manifesting his desires. After a brief moment of thought he decided to make it into the former kind, and at once the red came in and fought with the lilac, nudging it at many points like a racing car trying to overtake its rival without making the driver crash.

Now he was going full tilt: yellow! Blue! Purple! Diamonds and crosses! A face in profile with an expression of despair, while another face nearby looked exultant. He was a servant of the great mistress Art. Everything he did was to please her, and himself, and (just incidentally at first but later gathering momentum) the audience.

Art has always been held to be a noble pursuit, by every one of the variegated human civilizations that have existed. So the artist had been granted leave by his peers to think himself noble, should he have wanted to. Like so many other artists he preferred to think of himself not as noble but as driven by madness. His art was a reaching out to others from the insanity within, to which he had been driven by the force that pressed down on him from its wellspring in the lands beyond this Earth. On looking at his works the audience glimpsed, even if only for an instant, the storm inside him that raged outwards, towards the external world.

None of us can know whether what we see is only a function of our own eyes, and peculiar to us as individuals. Maybe he saw a world of razors ready to cut him, and when his audience looked at his works they saw their own dysfunctional world equivalent to his world of razors, and just as eager to garner attention for itself.

He found that his skill increased when he did spiritual exercises. They fed the technical side of his art, and his abilities now were so refined that he could even copy other painters' works and make his own look exactly like them. At the moment he concealed this ability because he did not wish to enter into the dangerous waters of art forgery. There was a lot of money to be made, but also libel suits and prison sentences, and worst of all a compromising of the purity of art. The stream of art descends from a mountain where plagiarism is unknown, and its motives are not understood. The grand masters and goddesses of beauty never lie- at least, not when the truth pertains to art.

The artist, whose name was Maurice, was not completely happy with his present canvas. He thought he should be painting this composition on a board made of a different material. But no other materials were to hand, so he carried

on with broad, slanting brushstrokes, and with feathering the paint a little at the edges as if he was a home decorator instead of a purveyor of pure art.

The door opened softly, and Maurice's wife came in. She had actually been a common-law wife for the majority of their time together, like most of the wives in the artists' quarter of the town, and they had made it legal as an afterthought. They lived in a small town in western France and the year was 1954.

Maurice's wife Patti had unwelcome questions for him about meat and vegetables and fish, items which belonged to the world outside the fine country inhabited by his art: the mundane streets full of shops and markets and dull houses with their ovens. He didn't want to hear about that world today, nor at any other time.

Patti began arranging flowers in a vase on the table. Now that she had finished talking about the shopping she turned her mind to more creative activities, for Maurice had originally married her for her artistic flair. She placed a tall rose at the back of the arrangement in order that it might tower above the other flowers like a Madonna, unreachable above other women. Patti wanted her flower arrangement to speak as well as simply to look pretty on the table.

"Hand me some paints, Patti, will you?" said Maurice. "I'm in the middle of an important painting."

"If both of us are occupied with it, the housework will never get done", she replied tartly.

Maurice turned his back on her and carried on painting. He regretted the loss of those days when she would not merely hand him his paints but sit at his feet enraptured, or model for him for hours, and of course share her own paintings with him. Now she never painted, and seemed more interested in placing pictures by others strategically around the house.

For Patti her 'moving on' had been active not passive: an eager and strenuous engagement in new hobbies that were either sporting in nature, like exercise regimes, or domestic arts like flower arranging and decorating, and then there was also her work.

Maurice withdrew into himself and into a private world of art, as he did every day. There had been a sigil once to induce Patti to share his interests again, but his will had faltered a little amid the belief that she should follow her own road, and the result had been abstract rather than concrete. She thought more about his interests and told him what she had been thinking, but did not join in with them as she had done in the past.

Later that day, on reading the newspaper, Maurice discovered that a colleague of his, Benoit, whose work he had often proved to himself that he could copy exactly, had just sold a painting for over a million francs. He was the new darling of the art world, and Maurice found himself sorely tempted to liven up his monotonous life and marriage by forging a Benoit.

He shook away the thought along with the strands of hair flapping over his ears; he was forty and his hair was already starting to become thin. Violin music on the gramophone was in order, and also sweets from the round candy tin on the sideboard. These two things were what usually restored his equilibrium, but today he continued to feel unsettled, and even while painting he kept pausing and gazing out at his landscaped garden. He was proud that he had been able to afford to have his garden done professionally, financed by his painting and jobs as an illustrator.

Patti had jobs as well, at one time as an illustrator like himself but more recently cleaning and doing odd jobs in the offices of beneficial organizations whose work she agreed with- although not outright charities who would have requested her services free of charge. She belonged to several committees, and knew people who knew people who would pay her a little, while yet being outside the rat race, and helping others.

Maurice was thinking of turning in for an early night when the phone rang. It was his English friend Ed, the one he secretly called ‘my shady friend.’

“Hey, Maurice! Have you heard about Benoit? And you’re the man who can copy him so well.”

“Yes, yes, of course I’ve heard.” Grudgingly he added, “I’ve been thinking the same thing myself, but it’s a forbidden idea. We mustn’t go there.”

“Mustn’t go where? To the Costa Brava, you mean?” Ed’s tone was insinuating, mocking. Maurice glanced into the hallway to make sure Patti wasn’t near enough to hear the conversation.

“Ed!” he said sharply. “Let’s have no more of this. It’s off limits to serious artists like myself.”

“Oh, you’re serious, but you were still thinking about it. Can’t we discuss this over dinner?”

“I’ll have dinner with you, but I’ll still say the same. I’m not going to avoid you because I’m frightened of being persuaded. I’m my own man and I make my own decisions.”

“Done, then. I’ll see you at the Abraxas lounge suite, Friday night. Be there at seven.”

Maurice enjoyed getting ready. He buffed his suit and slicked his hair, and put just the right white handkerchief in his breast pocket. His tie was expensive and suggested a successful man; although Maurice was only moderately successful there was no need to tell that to the gentlemen who frequented this well-to-do restaurant. Ed would be paying today because Maurice had paid the last time they went, on which occasion they had both had buttered sole with market vegetables.

Ed was there early as if waiting to bait Maurice and stuff him into a net, for although they were friends and had been for a while, Ed always had his eye on what might be of profit to himself. Maurice ignored his friend's expectant manner, sat down and ordered drinks from the waiter.

After a little bit of small talk Ed sat back in his chair, cleared his throat and said, "what about my proposal?"

"Let me get you drunk instead," replied Maurice.

"Get ME drunk when I'm paying this time? I'll be the one getting you drunk."

"Either way we'll have a merry time." Maurice grinned at him, unfolded his napkin and began to skim through the menu.

"But Maurice," Ed persisted. "You're the one with the skill to copy."

Maurice glanced around him quickly to see if any of the other diners had caught the word 'copy.' They all appeared absorbed in their own affairs.

"I shall be copying only myself," he said in an exaggerated tone of grandeur. "I copy the master- myself. Just as if I were a Zen monk I would copy my master, who I would ultimately find out to be nothing other than myself."

"Ha. Very profound. But there's no money in it."

"There's no money in most things. They're worth doing, though."

By the time they had dined and had a host of further drinks the conversation had become a little less coherent. Giggling, Ed returned to the theme Maurice had started.

"Copy an OLD Master," he slurred. "It must be an old one- I only do it if he's old. A really OLD Master."

"You're drunk!" Maurice jabbed a finger at his friend.

"So are you, old man. Or should I say, Old Master? Ha, ha, just think; you, an Old Master."

Maurice slammed the bottle down on the table. "I'm going home."

The waiter hovered, having rushed over, and said, "don't forget the bill."

"Charming. His, I believe." He pointed at Ed.

"Done!" said Ed, then added when the waiter had gone, "I only pay you for being my Old Master. Otherwise, nothing!" He made a noise halfway between a burp and a hiccup.

They lurched out of the restaurant, and somehow found themselves back at Maurice's place. Ed began to go through Maurice's papers that were lying around on various shelves and desks, at first jokingly but then in earnest. He eventually found the 'Benoit' sketches. They looked like first drafts- a clever way of preparing for a future time when Maurice might want to pass them off as Benoit's own work.

"I'm taking these!" he cried belligerently.

Patti was in bed. And Maurice had suddenly reached the point at which he did not know what was going on, and would not remember tomorrow. He was near to passing out, and fell down onto the sofa.

The next morning, he remembered nothing about Ed having taken the sketches. In fact, he didn't even remember which pile of papers the sketches had been in, or when he had originally put them there. He fancied his Benoit sketches were in the cabinet in his studio, along with the early drafts of his own most important paintings. Like many other painters he was quite untidy and disorganized.

Chapter 2

Maurice was scanning the art and literature pages in a bulky weekend newspaper when he found the story: ‘Edward Hyerman Sells Early Benoit Sketches For Undisclosed Sum.’

To his credit he did not immediately wonder when Ed was going to give him a cut. His first thought was, “when did Ed get hold of my sketches? And won’t Benoit himself refute them?”

As he read on he could tell the journalist was convinced about the source from which the sketches had come; apparently there had been some art fair at which a number of aspiring painters had sold some of their incomplete drafts before they were worth very much, and these had since circulated, and their progress had been verified between different vendors. How had Ed managed to invent a whole history of imaginary transactions for the drawings he had got hold of? He must be more ingenious than Maurice had suspected.

The mood of the art world was cautious excitement. This development had pushed up Benoit’s works to an even higher value, and had also encouraged relatively new aspiring painters to have another look at their early drafts and keep them carefully in case they should be worth much more at a future date. Some dealers complained that it would make this type of material scarcer, as people would hold onto it.

Maurice phoned Ed, but there was no reply and eventually an answering service took over his calls. Maurice didn’t leave a message. A few days later a cheque arrived in the post with an accompanying letter:

Dear Maurice,

Here is your share of the money. Our little secret! Hope to meet you soon enjoying the high life.

With kindest regards from Ed

As Maurice stared down at the letter and the cheque, a picture flashed across his mind of himself and Patti in one of the more expensive resorts. He could contemplate at his leisure what to do about this debacle while drinking iced fruit juice through a straw.

But then Patti came in, and he realized it wouldn’t be as simple as he had thought. She was always in these do-gooding institutions, and it would conflict with the ideals that she had adopted wholesale from them to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle overseas.

Patti’s eyes dropped to the letter. “What’s that?” she asked.

“Only business,” Maurice said hastily, and he swept up the letter and cheque and put them in his bureau drawer. He made his expression inscrutable and did not show any excitement.

Patti bustled out, on her way to some household rearranging which interested her far more than Maurice’s affairs. He would have to be circumspect, to keep all this a secret, but he felt vulnerable here in this cosmopolitan town. It would be far safer on the Riviera, or some such place where people like himself and Ed might go to hide out.

“Contemptible!” he muttered to himself, and fingered the edge of the canvas of the painting he was working on today. How would he like it if someone were to copy him? Although it wouldn’t be worth the risk because they wouldn’t gain very much financially: only enough to be noticed and not enough to get away. So they would be framed in a beam of light for him to get revenge upon. He wasn’t a vengeful man, but they wouldn’t know that. Was Benoit vengeful, he wondered? If so, what form did his revenge typically take?

He left it and went out to the market, wandering at random between the stalls, but he couldn’t resist buying a few delicacies that were more expensive than the ones he normally bought. Was this how it was going to go from now on? With the best intentions in the world of not spending Ed’s money, would he soon find himself spending it? Then if they were discovered at some time in the future and he had to pay it back, it would all be gone.

Later he took the cheque to the bank; after all it wasn’t safe to leave it lying around the house. The cashier there knew him well. “A present from my friend Ed,” he said by way of explanation.

The man’s eyebrows rose, and Maurice wondered whether he would think that Ed was his lover. Men don’t like to be seen giving a bunch of flowers to another man, but they will give a cheque, sometimes one almost as generous as this. He looked away so as not to catch the cashier’s eye, and tried to recall whether he knew Patti very well too. He didn’t think so. Her benevolent institutions did most of the banking that she was involved with.

Now that it was his money, so to speak, Maurice was going to find it even harder to retract and get out of this deal: a deal that he didn’t remember making; in fact, he was sure he had refused several times, but who knows what he could have said when he was drunk?

These British Ed’s were all rascals, like the famous Edward Kelly, and his Ed could easily slip back to his native England and wriggle out of any legal action. Of course, the law should rule everywhere, and people should in theory be able to be arrested anywhere, but in practice it never seemed to happen and anyone who had a family, or a hideaway overseas somehow escaped the arm of justice.

He brought his mind back to the present, and his dilemma of what he was to do next and what to tell Patti. No solution immediately presented itself, so he stopped off at a coffee house and procrastinated, drinking coffee and half

wishing for an unexpected mate to turn up with whom he could discuss his problem. Yet having more people know about it would complicate matters further.

At length he decided to lie. He would tell Patti that Ed had inherited some money and had benevolently given some of it to them. He would tell his friends and acquaintances the same and keep Ed at a distance, hoping they wouldn't connect him with the Edward Hyerman in the newspaper, or that they wouldn't have bothered to read about it as they had no interest in the art world. Very few of their social circle knew Ed's surname or that he was English. He was simply Ed or Eddie, Maurice's friend from somewhere who didn't divulge much about his affairs. With hindsight Maurice realized this had been a deliberate plan, in case he should embark on some rascally scheme one day. The day had come, and Maurice found himself uncomfortably involved, but he was reluctant to give up the benefits now that it had come to it.

When he got home, Patti was playing the piano. He opened his mouth intending to say something mildly complimentary about her playing, but due to all the tension something totally different came out.

"Why did you give up painting?" he snapped. "If you'd stuck to it instead of going off into distractions like music and decorating, we could both have become rich and successful in time."

Patti glared at him and slammed down the lid of the piano. "That's irrational, Maurice! Why do there have to be two of us doing it for it to be a success? What you can't do on your own you still couldn't do with me."

Maurice was shocked at himself for starting a row, and he didn't continue it. He muttered something and left the room, and went to smoke a pipe and read. He didn't feel like painting that afternoon. Later he managed to collect his thoughts and didn't allude to his outburst again, but Patti watched him guardedly for a couple of days.

At the end of the week he told her about the 'gift' from Ed, and suggested they should go travelling. "I see now why you were angry with me," said Patti. "Now that we have some money it was a gift and didn't come from your art. It hurt your pride. But I really don't want to go travelling- my work is here, helping people. And even before we got the money we could manage without my getting a proper salary for what I do."

Maurice frowned, but he didn't want to look too anxious to escape from France, so he said mildly, "I could go alone, or I could arrange it in a few months' time, and you can see how you feel about travelling with me then. If you had more time to think about it and to make arrangements, you might start to like the idea of having a luxurious holiday."

"Maurice, if money is no object for this journey, I think you should go on a short trip alone first. It will do us good to be independent of one another for a little while. Then if everything works out well we can go on a longer trip together later in the year."

What did she mean, if everything works out well? Was she thinking of going separate ways just because of his comment last week when she was playing the piano? Or did she have a lover?

Maurice had to admit that their lives had been pretty separate for quite some time. She was also closer now to the people in her benevolent institutions than she was to him; none of them appeared to have become her lover, but you can never tell with women. They may appear to prize moral virtues very highly and all the time be thinking and feeling something quite different.

“All right,” he said grudgingly. “I’ll go to a centre of art that I know and paint and paint for a few weeks- really immerse myself in it. I shan’t be mixing any wild social life with that.” He shot her a look, but she didn’t appear to have any reaction.

“It’s in Italy,” he continued, “in Valenza. I’ve only been there once before when I was a very young man, but I know it’s still going and the teachers there are well-respected.”

Chapter 3

A few weeks later Maurice set out on his trip to Valenza. He took with him several paintings on lightweight canvas rolled up into tubes: the comments that the masters at the art school would make on these paintings would form the basis of his studies there. He hoped that they would like his work now that he was a mature artist, and with a touch of irony he hoped that no-one there would steal any of his ideas.

Part of the journey was by ferry and on the boat Maurice got talking to another painter who was travelling, although not to the same place. A boat is such a closed community that sometimes an intimacy develops much more quickly than it normally would, and Maurice's conscience was burdened which was also a factor. Despite having sworn not to confide in anyone Maurice found himself confessing to the other painter, Janni who was Dutch, everything that had happened before he had come on this journey. They were sitting in a secluded part of the deck drinking, although not drunk by any means. Maurice's situation weighed on him so heavily that he didn't have to be drunk to start talking.

Janni was shocked. Before Maurice had started his confession, he had assured him that whatever the problem was he was bound to have come across it during the course of his painting career, and would be able to give advice. But he hadn't been prepared for anything of such enormity: illegal, unethical and not to be easily controlled, because it was instigated by the actions of another who was at liberty to do something stupid and make it even worse.

Janni thought about it for a while, and then he said, "you have two choices. You can go to the police and then you will feel better, but you will also feel that you are betraying your friend. Or you can be a fugitive, an accessory to a crime, and try to become smart enough not to be caught. That would include telling no-one else about this. You've told me, and Ed knows, and who else? Your wife?"

"No, she doesn't know," said Maurice.

"That is good for you, but not so good for your relationship if she ever finds out. But I'm sure you know that."

"We've been distant for a while," Maurice said, pouring himself a slightly larger drink. "We were both illustrators at one time, but she gave the painting up. Now she decorates the house and calls that art, and she works for charities and is more interested in them than she is in me."

"Time to move on then, perhaps? Lead separate lives more openly? But you must be the judge of that."

"It's strange; I came on this trip to be happy, to concentrate on my art. I don't want to sit here being miserable, talking about all this."

“You will never be happy with this on your conscience,” pronounced Janni, and he too poured himself a bigger drink.

The boat arrived in Italy, and Maurice began traveling to the art school. He didn’t say anything to anyone else he met on his travels: only pleasantries about the weather and suchlike. He had agreed with Janni that they would start writing to one another. Between men of letters like themselves there was no language barrier; they could write in French and maintain their friendship from a distance. They could even send one another sketches; but that was straying onto the subject that he was trying so hard to keep his mind away from.

Sketches should be currency among artists without the vulgarity of real money intruding into their world. They ought to be a shorthand for ideas about line and form in art, and about form, and new trends in fashion and in the various arts. Stealing should be something artists never need to deal with. You might as well steal a sigil, and bow your head as the invisible world smacks your face.

A sigil: now that idea had begun he liked more and more the prospect of using one to solve his difficulty. If he could sigilize for a favourable outcome to the theft, so that it would end happily like a children’s fairy tale and no-one would get their fingers burned or be thrown into jail, that would be a solution. He would have to distil all these ideas that were flying around in his head (and presumably in Ed’s too, unless he was truly irresponsible) into a short phrase that could be diagrammatically expressed. It could be drawn first in charcoal and then painted over in a vibrant paint like electric pink, and made to look like part of a field of flowers or a lady’s hat. He liked that option.

Maurice settled into the art school and turned in his paintings for commentary from the tutors. His room was a little bare for his taste, and the furniture and equipment were basic. He thought about removing to the nearest expensive hotel, but didn’t want to draw attention to himself by doing that. He supposed the simple rooms were in keeping with a romantic ideal of the artist, and were also meant to eliminate distractions. At least there was a fine view of boats on the river outside.

After the evening meal on the first day Maurice began to work on his sigil. In the end he painted it by itself rather than concealing it underneath another picture, because that resonated better with its purpose. It astonished him and tried his patience when several of the other students drifted into his room at various points during the evening, and asked him what it was. There were no locks on the doors, only on the bathrooms that were one between three or four students.

Maurice explained to each visitor, and felt he had to tell the truth that sigils were for solving a problem, in case any of the visitors should know that already but hold the information back. Just before lights out he heard one man remark in the corridor, “wonder what Maurice’s problem could be? I bet it’s his wife!”

Maurice felt rattled but said no more about it, and the next morning he put it aside for a while and began working on a landscape; one of the boats he had seen outside was in it, very small and in a corner, and the rest was from his imagination.

The tutor to whom Maurice was allocated spotted the boat immediately. “You are thinking that surely everyone here must paint the boats they can see from the windows. That’s why you hid this boat in a corner of the canvas. Remember that to position the boat according to your thought processes is not completely correct; there must be a visual reason, from the viewpoint of the human eye, for the positioning of everything within the painting. You must say to yourself ‘visually, this must go here. Visually, this must go there.’

For example, do not position a lady in order to spare her embarrassment at people seeing her thigh. Where does her thigh go for visual reasons? If it needs to go in plain sight because of the visual needs of the painting and the lady is posing for you, ask her if she minds everyone seeing her thigh. If she minds, do not do the painting at all.”

Maurice found his advice interesting. Of course, there had to be some reason why these tutors were considered masters in their field. He thought about paintings he had done in the past and wondered how often he had violated this rule that the tutor spoke of. There had been a friend he had painted once who smoked a great deal; had he painted too small a pile of ash, so that his friend wouldn’t say it looked as if he smoked excessively?

The tutor walked all around the painting, tilting his head and examining how the light fell on it from different angles. In the end he said, “good.” He tapped his thumb on the corner with the boat and returned to that subject. “Paint this corner again and pretend the boat is something else. Don’t think about the others saying, “ha, I know where you got that. You saw it from your window.””

Maurice was rather glad he hadn’t shown him the sigil. “Never mind which letters of the alphabet it has to include- what should it look like visually?” He laughed to himself.

But Maurice did complete the sigil the next day, and when it was dry he covered it with a dust sheet. The case was too urgent not to finish it. The more time that had elapsed the more chance there was of discovery, and although he was here in the rarefied atmosphere of this school he had left a signature in France in the form of intangible things like his bank account and his practice as an illustrator.

No-one could fully disappear nowadays. A caveman could disappear; he could run away to another tribe, and no-one would be able to find him. Yet even he might have a family, disappointed that he had gone and hoping he would decide to come back. Going away to find yourself, or to free yourself from entanglements as Maurice was doing, was selfish in any society. If he was afraid to return home Patti would think he had gone to free himself from her. If he came home boldly he could be arrested as Ed’s accomplice, and even if he

was deemed not to be guilty of any actual crime there would still be an enormous scandal. Maurice needed some higher force to direct the interlocking threads of events, and make the tapestry turn out to his advantage.

A couple of days later Maurice was actually on one of the boats, not just painting them. The boat tour was quite expensive, and wonderful: this really was the high life, something he would never have done before the money arrived from Ed. He had never been extravagant, always careful to live within his means. The courier on the boat pointed out many features of Valenza and the surrounding area which Maurice vaguely remembered from his visit when he was younger and would like to have explored more fully then. To be sure he remembered his resolve not to spend much of the money in case he should have to pay it back, but after all he was on holiday. At least he wasn't buying the boat itself.

Altogether he spent six weeks painting at the school and having his past works evaluated; and sightseeing, and dining well, and drinking well. He was in a much more relaxed mood at the end of that time, and he was beginning to miss Patti. It must be that absence is genuinely good for a relationship.

He strolled back to his room after dinner (dinner at the school this time, for it was sometimes good,) and he saw two young English students Herbert and Thomas standing outside as if they were waiting for his return.

"Monsieur, we would like to examine your diagram painting again please," Herbert said politely.

"My diagram? Oh, you mean the sigil. All right, come and have a look." Maurice attempted to appear welcoming to his fellow students, even though he didn't want the sigil to attract too much attention.

They tramped solemnly into the room, as if it was some sober occasion. "Sir," said Thomas, "we know a collector in England who would pay a large sum of money for that."

How like an Englishman, Maurice thought. If he had been French, he would have been laughing and jumping up and down as he made this remark instead of appearing so serious.

Maurice took off the dust sheet. "That's all very good," he said, "but I don't want it to be too widely known that I paint these things. That's why I covered it up, you see. It's a private interest. Your buyer would have to be quiet about it, and I hope he doesn't display his collection in some large public gallery."

"Oh, no," replied Thomas. "It's a private gallery, I assure you. Admission is by invitation only, and it doesn't happen very often. But I know he will want to add your piece to the collection."

"What's his name?" Maurice asked cautiously.

"Lawrence- everyone just knows him as Mr Lawrence. He lives near Oxford."

“I’ve never heard of him, but he’s welcome to buy it if he wants to. I would rather take it to him personally, and if he ever takes it down he ought to chop it up or burn it- though I don’t suppose he will if it has become his property.”

“Chop it up? What a notion!” exclaimed Herbert. “If he had paid you for it he would be chopping up his money. He likes to look at them. He’s a good friend, and a sort of patron to us.”

“I’ll take a detour on the way home and visit him with you,” said Maurice. Suddenly he liked the idea of going to England even though he was missing Patti. It would keep him away from the French police for longer.

“All right then, done,” said Herbert, shaking his hand. “You can name your price; I’ll tell you that much.”

Maurice was surprised, and then of course he wondered whether he could ask for the sum that himself and Ed owed to Benoit and give it to him in a private arrangement. But it wasn’t as simple as that because in reality the sketches were valueless, so Benoit would not have received that money for them. Maybe he would accept a lower sum of money as compensation. But you can’t compensate for fraud or a scandal.

Maurice shook his head and stopped trying to work out a solution. He fetched a bottle of wine and invited the two Englishmen to stay for drinks and they drank and even laughed a little, but one of them said he would prefer whiskey and Maurice didn’t have any. They didn’t say much about their enigmatic friend and Maurice didn’t want to ask them. He supposed the sigil must work by generating money for itself to solve the problem; but now he was back to that conundrum of how money could possibly make up for a fraud. He would have to think about it more in the morning.

When that morning came, Maurice found himself more preoccupied with packing for his detour to England and with making travel arrangements than pondering what to do about the Benoit sketches. When practical work is to be done, there is no leisure for thoughts that go round and round and return to the beginning without having found an answer. He did however find time to write two letters. One was to Ed thanking him for sharing his ‘bequest’ and advising him that he would be unable to thank him in person or even to see him for a very long time, as he would be travelling. The second was to Janni suggesting that they should meet in Holland and spend some time socializing and painting together. That would mean that when he returned to France he would have an excuse for going abroad again soon afterwards.

Maurice had a provisional ticket for going back to France at the end of the week, but he managed to change it without too much difficulty for a ticket to England instead. He got on the same ship as Herbert and Thomas, although due to his late booking he was placed in a cabin right on the other side from theirs. They arranged a meeting place on deck by a certain funnel, and this time when they sat together the two men did tell Maurice more about Mr Lawrence. He was apparently a wealthy eccentric who lived in a large house near a marsh, and

although he was their patron it wasn't as much of a tied arrangement as that word suggests and they were pretty much free to do as they wanted.

"I think he's a Satanist," Thomas said, when they had got to know one another better.

He's probably just studied the same materials as me- not a Satanist, Maurice thought. Out loud he said, "the occult encompasses many things; it's not all about Satan. I'll reserve judgement until I meet him."

Thomas leaned over the side of the ship. He looked as if he had got seasick, but he hadn't drunk enough for that and was only attempting to view some of the seascape they were passing. He bobbed his head back up and explained to Maurice and Herbert that he didn't want to traverse the whole English Channel without seeing it properly.

Maurice agreed. "We painters should always be on the lookout for scenery that we can use in our paintings," he said. "Although not everything is a still life; I once did a series of abstracts. When the emphasis is all on colour combinations and patterns it makes you think in a different way."

"I love doing those," said Herbert. "I've got several on my wall. I wouldn't want to part with them, and no-one is ever going to buy my paintings anyway."

"Don't say that," said Maurice. "You're young- you've got time."

"My patron Mr Lawrence says that too, but I fear I'll always have to rely on his charity if I want to be an idle artist; otherwise I'll need a second job which won't leave me with any energy to do the art."

"I'm moderately successful as an illustrator, but ONLY moderately," Maurice said, and then regretted it in case it started to become evident that he had a lot of money in the bank.

Chapter 4

The quay at Southampton dock was of a drab concrete, and Maurice thought of the last French fishing village he had seen and hoped he wasn't about to disembark in a place where everything was ugly. He had always suspected that the English liked everything to serve a practical purpose and not necessarily to look beautiful. If he stayed too long in a place like that it would start to reflect in his paintings, which would be full of dull steam ships and grey paving stones.

Herbert, however, looked happy. "Ah, back in the old country," he said. They walked along the quay and to the station where they took the train for Oxford. None of them had very much luggage and although they could have afforded a taxi to the station they preferred to walk. Maurice was travelling light apart from his canvas rolls which were in a briefcase, and the other two had only one suitcase each.

On the train Maurice observed the birds in the sky. There seemed to be many that were migrating in V-shaped flocks; if he didn't see anything in the landscape to inspire him he could always paint some of those birds.

They soon arrived in Oxford, and this time they did take a taxi as they had to travel further. They went through endless country lanes which all looked the same to Maurice, and the house when they finally saw it was large and intimidating, standing in its own rambling grounds and casting dark shadows over the garden.

Herbert rang the doorbell- he always seemed to take the lead in everything while Thomas followed.

A wizened servant opened the door; he looked like the butler from a horror story. "How can we be of service to you, good sirs?" he asked.

"We have something to show to Mr Lawrence," said Thomas. "Don't be formal with us, Charlie- you know us."

"I do indeed, but I don't know the other gentleman here. Who shall I present to Mr Lawrence?"

"This is Maurice Chevan, a well-respected French painter," Herbert informed him. "We would particularly like to show Mr Lawrence one of his paintings, and as it's late we're hoping you will put us in our usual rooms and find a room for Maurice as well."

"I'm sure I can arrange that. I'll tell Mr Lawrence you're here." Charlie's voice croaked a little, and he looked rather bent over as he walked away, increasing the impression that he was the butler in a place like Dracula's castle.

They sat on wide seats in a hallway paved with flagstones; there was not a carpet in sight on this level of the house and it was quite draughty. Maurice had always heard that England was draughty, and damp too.

After a few minutes echoing footsteps could be heard descending the stairs and Mr Lawrence appeared, with grey hair and a handlebar moustache and wearing a neat grey suit.

“Herbert! Thomas!” he exclaimed.

They stood up and shook hands with him.

“And this is the French painter?”

“Yes, sir,” said Maurice, in English. He could get by in several languages: Italian, English, and of course the French with some Dutch words that Janni used.

Mr Lawrence’s eyes bored into him, and Maurice suddenly felt like telling the truth, although not as much of the truth as he had revealed to Janni.

“I painted a sigil, and Herbert and Thomas say you will want to buy. It is to stop trouble with the police.”

“Ah.” Mr Lawrence nodded with understanding. “And you would rather be in England at the moment. Mais, sigil aussi, oui Monsieur?”

“Oui,” replied Maurice, not sure now which language to speak.

“C’est bien,” said Mr Lawrence, and then went back to English. “May I see it, please?”

Maurice unrolled the portable canvas that the painting was on. Mr Lawrence assumed a pose, leaning back with one hand on his hip and his back slightly bent as he observed the painting critically. He even screwed up his eyes at one point. He had very large grey eyes.

“Very good,” he said at length. “You’ve got the movement there, making it flow as a command rather than a depiction. How long have you been practising at these?”

“Practising?” Maurice wasn’t sure whether he meant practising a magical technique or working to get the painting right, and he had said ‘practising at’ which made it even less clear.

“I’ve been painting these since I was young. You hear it first from other artists, then you look in the magic books, yes?” He gave Mr Lawrence a knowing look, as if they both shared the same secret.

Mr Lawrence clicked his heels as he leaned away from Maurice. He was wearing expensive shoes. “I would definitely like to buy this painting,” he said, suddenly business-like. “May I keep it here, please? It will still work for your little affair with the police; it will just be hanging in my private gallery.”

“If you ever get tired of it I would like you to burn it,” Maurice said.

Herbert and Thomas raised their eyes to the ceiling: that again!

“I don’t get tired of my paintings. They stay, and will never be burnt- unless the whole house was to burn down.”

“All right,” said Maurice and they agreed a price, and once that was out of the way everyone was smiling and making plans for a lengthy stay, in which the three guests would partake of all the hospitality of the house including the wine cellar and gentlemanly pursuits like cards and shooting in the extensive grounds.

In return they would provide lively conversation about art for their host, and would produce further paintings while they were staying there.

Maurice didn't know why the prospect of a long stay filled him with feelings of foreboding. He wanted to be away from France for as long as possible; in fact, he was now thinking seriously of settling elsewhere and having his furniture and paintings sent on, even though earlier that week he had been wanting to see Patti again.

Patti would just have to accept that their marriage was over. He didn't even feel desires for women much anymore. Some of the men of Maurice's acquaintance had a healthy interest in sex right up until old age, but Maurice's feelings were already declining in middle age, and he didn't want to start swallowing concoctions. He supposed it was because he had become more interested in the life of the mind.

A life abroad was what he wanted, but not here. The damp was still bothering him as it had on the train journey, and he didn't think he could easily get used to that. This house was near a marsh which made it worse. Also, it seemed a very grim house to Maurice, not a place to inspire the arts.

Chapter 5

Maurice had now been three weeks in one of the grand guest rooms at Mr Lawrence's house. The hospitality was wonderful: all that free food and drink on top of the money Mr Lawrence had paid him for the painting, although at that moment he scarcely needed money with that large sum in the bank. During the day, there were frequently other guests besides themselves and Charlie was not much to be seen; the visitors were served meals and attended to by a staff of three or four younger servants.

Herbert and Thomas were thoroughly enjoying the aristocratic pursuits of shooting, fishing and card games, but after all this was the 1950's, and Maurice would have liked at least some films and recorded music to have been on the agenda. Were all English gentlemen this old-fashioned?

Then there was the house; it was spooky. There was no other word for it. Floorboards creaked, and many parts of the house were in shadow, or cold, in addition to the pervasive damp. There were several bathrooms and toilets between the three of them in the guest wing where they were staying, but they were separate from the bedrooms, and you had to walk along the corridor during the night.

Maurice got up and put on one of the heavy red dressing-gowns that were provided in the closet. Too much wine necessitated going to the toilet, and he wanted to wash his face and freshen his hair as well.

On the way through the corridor he felt as though an icicle passed through his left arm, and then he heard a voice. He strained to hear, hoping it was Herbert or Thomas. But it was a younger, reedy voice with a whine to it, as if the speaker was distressed and asking for help. He couldn't make out the words.

"It's a ghost," Maurice thought, and then he saw movement, a curtain being pushed to one side at the end of the corridor. He was glad the bathrooms he was heading towards were in the middle and not at that end. But Thomas was sleeping at that end- what would he think, that is if he was awake to hear the sounds?

There was no stirring from Thomas' room, so Maurice continued to the bathroom. It was not the sort of bathroom he would have wanted in his own house. Everything was colourless: the bath and other fittings were solid and white and the walls and shelves a stark dark grey. Not much light filtered through the small window which had dark, heavy curtains, like many other windows in the house.

His face in the cabinet mirror looked pasty and grey, as if he had gone the same shade as the bathroom. Maurice was afraid that this house would suck all the bright colours out of his art and leave his mind dull and cold. To him, that

would be Hell. That was how the whole house felt: like Hell, and judging by what he'd seen tonight there were even troubled spirits dwelling here.

He tried to shake himself out of this mood. Why should Mr Lawrence be evil, any more than he was himself for studying occult subjects? Yet he still felt uncomfortable.

The next morning the day guests were sitting in the grand drawing room on the first floor, like aristocrats assembled for drinks before a cross-country hunt. Today it was a party of three wealthy-looking men from Oxford and six ladies. Herbert and Thomas looked delighted and were talking avidly to two of the ladies, obviously hoping to escort them for the day and see if it would lead to them becoming girlfriends. Maurice was wearing an old brown suit, and felt himself not as smart and sophisticated as Mr Lawrence's set. He sought an opportunity to speak to Mr Lawrence alone, so he could express his intention to leave soon.

Mr Lawrence seemed equally eager to speak to him, for he waved at Maurice and beckoned him urgently into a small smoking room to one side of the drawing room. The room was furnished with green cushioned divans and round coffee tables made of walnut, and the high rectangular sash windows let in a flood of morning light. They sat down at one of the coffee tables, and Mr Lawrence said the complete opposite of what Maurice wanted to hear.

"Monsieur Maurice, I hope I may expect the pleasure of your company for quite a few months to come?"

"Sir, I am planning further travels," Maurice replied. "There is a friend from Holland who I would very much like to visit."

"That would be a pity," re-joined Mr Lawrence coldly. "The entertainments here do not come cheap, and I am not a man of unlimited resources. I was hoping you would be interested in taking some commissions for the Mayor of Oxford. He is a collector in a small way, and I've dealt with him before when I've had painters of a good reputation staying here at the house. I know from comments I have heard you make that you wouldn't need the money he would pay-which I suppose is due to that little escapade which made you flee from France. But the money would be very useful to me, to pay for at least part of the extravagant hospitality I offer."

I knew he wasn't evil; he's simply a businessman, Maurice was thinking. But that didn't help his predicament of hating the environment and the house. He could offer to pay for the resources he had used during his stay and then leave quickly, but he sensed that would cause ill-feeling. Mr Lawrence was looking at him very fixedly.

"If your Mayor likes my work I would be flattered, of course. But the damp here upsets me. I do not want to stay for a long time."

"I am so sorry the climate doesn't suit you, Monsieur Maurice. Just one painting for the Mayor? I have promised him at least one. Our mutual love of art

has made us friends, and he allows me certain freedoms: to have public ceremonies here for example, without needing a license.”

Maurice switched back to Herbert’s ‘Satanist’ theory. What would you need a license for – slaughtering animals? Unusual marriages?

“I will start a painting for the Mayor,” he said. “Will he meet us to explain what he would like?”

“Yes, he’s coming for dinner next Saturday.”

That would mean another week here before meeting the Mayor, and then at least a few more working on the painting and getting it to him. Maurice felt as if he was sinking into a quagmire.

The days before the Mayor’s visit passed pleasantly enough, with all the usual diversions. Herbert and Thomas were not much to be seen because they were taking out the two ladies who they had met on the morning when Maurice had his conversation with Mr Lawrence.

It was the nights that were unbearable. It wasn’t just because of the ghosts. Maurice was not afraid of ghosts; he’d had dealings with them before, and once he got used to the ghostly movements and sounds which took place every night in their wing of the house, he accepted their presence (although he did hope the one that made the unhappy wails had not been treated cruelly when he was alive.)

But what he hated the most was the atmosphere of oppression, and of every colour having been drained away leaving only a stark black and white. It made him feel as if he would never be able to paint properly again. He was planning to paint a riot of colours for the Mayor to try and counteract it- provided of course that was what the Mayor wanted. But he felt it would be like a solitary candle in a lake of stagnant black water, and would soon be put out as the slime and silt oozed over the top. It was as if he was that lone candle, condemned to be encircled and snuffed out to punish him for betraying his art when he allowed Ed to get away with the fraud. The guilt about what he had done kept trying to burst through the dam of repression as he strove constantly to push it to the back of his mind.

Saturday was quite a stiff and formal occasion, even though the drink flowed. Mr Lawrence looked on approvingly from his position at the head of the long dining table as Maurice appropriated the Mayor and asked him to come and examine his studio, such as it was in a corner of the guest bedroom.

“So, I have a commission to do for you Mr Mayor, yes?” said Maurice. “Come and see how I paint and choose what you want.”

Mayors always look rotund in their robes of office, and this Mayor was especially so because he was plump and going bald. He must have notched up quite a few years of service as a bureaucrat before being appointed as Mayor.

He studied Maurice’s most recent painting, which was part jagged abstract lines and part a charming coastal view, a little like the scene at Southampton dock but with much more greenery in it. The hard, abstract lines were meant to

express Maurice's fear that all the art in him was being crushed. He had put his feelings into the lines, and had then made a recovery and reasserted his art with the pretty coastline.

The Mayor stood with his hand on one hip, but it was nothing like the assured and expert stance Mr Lawrence had assumed when he was appraising the sigil. "Yes, it's good," he said, a little too quickly. "But I don't want a pattern and a picture together; I would like you to do one or the other, please. Which would you say you do best?"

"I usually paint pictures, and sell pictures," replied Maurice.

"Good! I'll have a picture, then." The Mayor struck his hands together once, almost as if he was applauding. "I like indoor scenes best. Could you do me a lounge or drawing room, with a dog and armchairs?"

Maurice thought his tastes rather mundane, and he certainly didn't appear to be an occultist like Mr Lawrence, just a rather staid official. Maurice agreed to do the painting and they were soon back with the rest of the party, joining in once again with the feasting and carousing.

Maurice contemplated whether getting very drunk would make him forget about the oppressive atmosphere, the damp and the ghosts. But the pleasures of drinking were beginning to pall; there was so much alcohol here all the time that it had become a bore. Maybe Mr Lawrence had some drugs he could try out for the first time- opium or something? But he didn't like to ask, and he feared descending into a stupor that would get him into even more trouble. He was in enough trouble already.

In the end he excused himself early, went to his room and started on the Mayor's painting. The guest wing was quiet; Herbert and Thomas had not come home.

He stood the canvas on its easel and began to sketch out a room with two large armchairs. The canvas was one that he had purchased here; he'd had them sent over from Oxford along with new supplies of paint, because the canvases he had brought back from Italy were all portable ones that rolled up.

Maurice mixed some blue paint from a tube in his palette and began to brush a little onto the sketch. But he didn't feel the way he normally did; he felt as if the paint was poisoned with some corruption that flowed through his blood, in his veins that were the same blue as the paint. He had betrayed his great mistress Art when he colluded with Ed's fraud and did not report it, and even though reporting it would have lost him Ed's friendship, it was worse to offend the immortal Muse. He was sure the poison would solidify more and more until he could not move his arm, and could not paint. This house would slowly paralyse him, and this would be his Hell, the punishment for his transgression. The damp would choke him and stop his breathing, and then he would die.

Mr Lawrence must surely be the most dedicated Satanist, and he had brought Satan here to punish sinners like himself. Maurice was shaking. He left the painting and went quickly to bed, but sleep was a long time coming.

The next morning, as Maurice was ascending the broad main staircase from the drawing room to the dining room, Mr Lawrence called to him from the hall. "Hey, Monsieur Maurice! Charlie has brought in a letter for you."

Maurice turned, puzzled, and began to go down the stairs. "Who can it be from? No-one knows I'm here."

"My friend Mrs Radcliffe does. We often chat on the phone about what goes on here. She is travelling in England this week but normally she lives in France, and I understand she knows your wife. Your wife gave her a letter to bring when she passed by here."

Maurice felt irritated. He had enough trouble trying to get away from this house, and now Patti had found him and was no doubt asking for money or accusing him of neglect.

"How can these women all know one another?" he blustered.

"I really don't know," Mr Lawrence replied smoothly. "Theosophical Society- or something? I can see you would rather not hear from her, but here's the letter anyway."

Maurice had reached the hall by now and he could see Mr Lawrence, wearing a red velvet dressing gown although it was already half-past ten, and with some cigarette ash tangled in one side of his large moustache. He held out the letter.

Maurice realized he had misjudged Patti, thinking her not intelligent enough for the Theosophical Society and failing to notice that they were one of her benevolent societies. He sat down on the window seat and opened the letter. Better to get it over with before starting on his late breakfast.

Dear Maurice,

I miss you and I hope you are well. I need to ask you frankly: are you planning on coming home?

I understand that you may not want to come back. If that is the case what shall I do about the house and all your possessions in your studio? What about your clothes? Are you sending me some money, or am I to finance myself? Such practical things must be sorted out.

Hoping to hear from you soon,

Patti

As Maurice ate his breakfast he reproached himself for having become so irresponsible. Everything was in his name, and poor Patti had nothing apart from the meagre wages from her little jobs.

He decided to spend the rest of the morning writing letters himself: one to his lawyer, asking him to sign over the house and its contents to Patti, another to Patti explaining what he had done, and the third to Janni in Holland. Suddenly he knew what he wanted to do. He would move to Holland and live near Janni, establishing himself as a painter there. With the money he could start a brand

new life, and he dared not give any of it to Patti because it was tainted: it could get her into trouble with the law. If he stayed abroad he could carry on spending the money with far less chance of being detected. He had travelled to Holland before; not to the exact part where Janni lived, but enough to know that he liked the country and its people.

Patti would probably be upset. Her pride had allowed her to write only those three words 'I miss you', but he was sure she still retained more feelings for him than he had for her. It couldn't be helped; it would have to be a clean break now- that was for the best.

Maurice got on with the letters. He felt mean as he told Patti that 'for personal reasons' he had decided not to give her any money; however, she was free to sell the house for a smaller one if she wished and to sell the paintings that he had left in his studio. She would have quite a task on her hands to sort out the disorder in the studio. That led to the thought that if only the Benoit sketches had been in the locked drawer in the studio where he thought they were, none of this would have happened and he wouldn't now be leaving Patti. Still, no regrets: he must move on.

To Janni he wrote that he was now planning a much longer stay in Holland, and he hoped that they could be friends while he was there. The word 'friend' rang a little discordantly now after Ed's behaviour; Maurice wasn't sure he deserved the friendship of an honest man. But Ed had tricked him into the crime; he would never have agreed to it, so perhaps he needed a new start with nobler friends.

Holland was where he would find them. Just as England and this manor house had become Hell, Holland now became Heaven. Everything would be all right if he could only get to Holland. Art would flow, its stream made pure again; light and colour would be back, and he would be able to paint freely like he did before. The stain of the crime would be gone whatever happened, and he would never be found there; if necessary he would change his name.

After sending the letters Maurice felt better for a while. He also contacted his bank by telegram; so far he had always managed to have some of his money sent to a local bank without much difficulty, whichever country he was in. Now he needed to make it a more permanent arrangement.

But in the evening when the shadows grew thick he began to feel the forebodings again. Whenever he painted now his arms moved slowly, as if something was holding them back. At this rate he would never get the Mayor's painting finished, and would never be able to leave. This grim, monochrome house would consume him before he ever got to Holland to taste his salvation.

Chapter 6

Another five weeks passed. The Mayor's picture was coming along very slowly. Maurice had painted far more complex subjects than a couple of armchairs and a dog, but somehow he couldn't get on; it was as if he was unwinding and losing momentum.

Patti didn't write again but her lawyer did, and described in the most formal and turgid language how closely he would be keeping an eye on her interests, to make sure she had a fair settlement. It was a divorce in all but name. Maurice realized he was bound to feel stressed at such a time, and he shouldn't be too hard on himself about the lack of progress with the painting.

Herbert and Thomas were no longer staying at the house; they had gone to Oxford with the ladies, but they assured Mr Lawrence they would be making use of his generous hospitality and patronage again in the spring. Maurice wondered if they would both marry. In the 1950's no-one officially had a mistress; you were married or not. But in reality, everyone had them.

Janni wrote back, for Maurice had given him the address where he was staying this time. His tone was cautious. He wrote that while he was pleased that Maurice was now planning a longer stay, they must remember that they had only met very briefly and didn't know one another well. It might not be a firm enough basis for introducing Maurice to a whole new country and way of life, and perhaps a short stay there first would be more appropriate? Janni must have sensed that Maurice was thinking of running to him as a refuge, and although he would be independent financially he wouldn't be socially, and would need a slow introduction to the new social circle.

"Am I being too hasty, and putting too much onto Janni?" Maurice asked himself. He hadn't felt at home anywhere since leaving France, and yet France no longer felt like home either after all that had happened.

Back in France, Benoit was sitting in his office surrounded by his lawyers, with a journal open on the table that showed a small photograph of the sketches.

"Why was the discrepancy not spotted before?" he demanded. "I thought these sketches were mine. But the history of transactions that has been attached to them belongs really to Flaubert's sketches; someone has fraudulently attached it to these. Now I look at them and they are not even mine- I didn't draw them."

"What will you do?" asked the chief lawyer. They all waited expectantly, looking very serious.

“I could direct you to open a case today and prosecute,” said Benoit. “But I have decided not to. I am angry, but I am also thinking about the financial side of this. I do not want the sketches to be declared valueless. What I will do is this: I will buy the sketches back, but I will also earn the same amount they cost so that I don’t incur a loss.”

“I would advise you, sir, not to let the criminal get away with this,” said one of the other lawyers. “And how do you propose to buy the sketches back without incurring any loss?”

“I am the Master,” Benoit pronounced proudly. “I will paint two pictures together in tandem; they will be my best so far. With one I will buy back the sketches, and with the other I will replenish the money I spent doing that.”

“You will still lose,” said the chief lawyer. “The new pictures you paint could have earned you double. And we can get damages from the criminal by prosecuting. It shouldn’t be too hard to find him.”

“No, listen,” said Benoit. “I am doing this the artist’s way. If the sketches are still believed to be mine they will still retain the price tag, and I can go over the lines with charcoal and sell them again once I get them back. So I still get my double, and I prove myself the highest valued painter in France.”

“If you wish,” grumbled the lawyer. “But some criminal is out there spending money that isn’t really his.”

“So what? He has done me a favour by doing the first draft of my draft. Now I will go over it and it will be worth a fortune, and it isn’t even a proper painting, just a few sketches. Think of the sensation the two real paintings will cause, when I finish them.”

Flushed with pride in his fame, Benoit chose that plan and refused to be moved.

One afternoon it struck Maurice that he had never been in Mr Lawrence’s private gallery, not even to see how his sigil painting looked hanging there. He knew that entrance was by private invitation, but surely if he had a painting on display there that entitled him to a visit?

He ascended the main staircase to the floor above the dining room. The drawing room and dining room were both richly carpeted, but higher up in the corridors there was once again a theme of cold, damp black and grey flagstones.

Maurice knew roughly where the gallery was; he would just have a look to see if the door was locked, and even if it was maybe Charlie would be around to let him in. He often cleaned the upper storeys of the house. As Maurice was heading towards the gallery door, which turned out to be carved and painted pleasantly in light blue and white, he heard stately classical music playing at a low volume.

Walking stealthily and following the sound, he observed a small chapel ahead of him from which the sound was emanating. The chapel wasn't locked; the door was slightly ajar. It must be Mr Lawrence who was in there, and he wasn't expecting to be disturbed.

It occurred to Maurice that he could creep in very quietly and observe the proceedings, to see once and for all whether Mr Lawrence was doing anything Satanic. The negative feelings he had experienced in this house were so strong, and the compulsion to get away- which was taking interminably long to happen.

He squeezed through the door without pushing it, and found himself in a narrower stone corridor which led to the chapel itself. The music was definitely coming from the alcove right in front of him, which was around a corner, so he was able to flatten himself against one wall and peer inside.

The chapel was decorated with Kabbalist symbols: a full-sized mural of the Tree of Life on one wall, a black and a white column representing the pillars of form and force, or severity and mercy, and a permanent circle drawn on the floor with Hebrew divine names written around it. At the four corners of the chapel were statues of the four Archangels of the quadrants, Raphael, Michael, Gabriel and Uriel.

Mr Lawrence was standing within the circle wearing a white robe, and reading from a scroll. He was reading out the words from the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus, the famous passage which begins with 'As above, so below.' When he had finished he sat down cross-legged on a cushion on the floor inside the circle, and began to meditate.

"As I thought originally, he is Hermetic, not a Satanist," Maurice mused. "Then what can be the explanation for the atmosphere here?"

At that moment he kicked something that was lying on the floor, a lid that must have fallen off some item, which made a noise. Quickly he retreated, went back the way he had come and left the chapel. He returned to his original quest to go to the private gallery and check whether it was locked.

Just as he reached it he heard Mr Lawrence's voice behind him, which made him jump. "Were you watching me?" The music was still playing.

Maurice's English deserted him. "Pardon, monsieur! Pardon!"

"It's all right. But why were you watching? Do you have a question?" He looked like a priestly aristocrat in the plain white robe.

Just as he had when he first arrived, Maurice felt compelled to tell the truth. "The feeling here is bad," he said. "I looked to see if there was any black magic. Sorry. Please do not be offended."

There was a strange light in Mr Lawrence's eyes, so different from his usual look of a pleasure-loving rich man, with a head for business as well.

"Oh, Maurice," he said. "Don't you realize it's your sigil? It has done what you specified. You wanted to get away with whatever your crime was, not to be punished. That's what is happening, in the physical world. But you still punish

yourself. The mind is a strange thing: it punishes itself. So you feel that the atmosphere here is bad: the guilt, the remorse, makes it bad.

But what happens to the soul when you die? First it goes to Hell. Then, after any punishments that may be needed, it goes to Heaven. That's why you are thinking that in the place you go to when you leave this house, everything will be perfect. I know you think that- I've heard you say it at the table to my other guests.

It is the mind which makes Heaven and Hell. Your mind has made Hell for you here and Heaven when you leave- it has made that real and that is what will happen. But you will escape physical punishment. That's how your sigil works."

Maurice hung his head. He almost wanted to cry. "Thank you, Monsieur Lawrence," he said.

Mr Lawrence suddenly pulled a large key from his pocket; he was wearing a shirt and trousers under the robe. "Come and see your painting in the gallery. The sigil is full of movement: it lives! It delivers your purpose! That's why you've been feeling the way you have."

Maurice reflected that the description of the soul passing first through the Hell spheres and then through the Heaven spheres is found in Theosophical books. Mr Lawrence probably belonged to the Theosophical Society like his friend Mrs Radcliffe, and probably to other societies as well. For as long as he stayed here Patti would be able to find him through them, and that meant that Ed would as well, because Patti wouldn't realize that Ed shouldn't be told where he was. When he left this place neither of them would find him; he would make sure of that.

He followed Mr Lawrence into the gallery, and all four of the high, sweeping walls were covered with beautiful paintings: landscapes and abstracts and still life's, all with rich and splendid colour and form. Half of one wall was devoted to sigils, painted in different styles by various magician-artists, but every one of them vibrant and pulsing with life, like Art itself. Maurice's was a particularly well-proportioned one when seen beside all the others, and he felt proud of it.

"A wonderful collection, Monsieur Lawrence," he said. "Thank you for showing me. But I do have one question about this house. Why are there restless spirits here?"

"Oh, the ghosts." Mr Lawrence smiled thinly. "One of my friends was doing table-tapping here once. He didn't close down properly- just slammed some books down on the table and left it. I told him that was wrong, but he didn't listen. The ghosts settled in the guest wing. I have tried to send them on their way, but they are obstinate; they don't want to go. And one of them wails very miserably I know, but none of us here have done anything to distress them."

"And your public ceremonies?"

"Kabbalist, like the one you witnessed me doing, but on a much larger scale. We hold them several times a year and many people attend. Strictly It isn't

allowed; stuffy church officials have specified that you need a special licence to be a place of worship. But the Mayor makes sure we can hold them.”

“Yes, the Mayor,” said Maurice. “I will finish his painting. I will even paint two for him. I have not been well, but now I will finish them. But after, I still want to leave and go to Holland.”

“Of course. There is no problem with that- leave, and Holland will feel like Heaven to you. Just wait and see.”

Chapter 7

The lawyer beckoned Benoit into his office and said bluntly, “you may have to report that fraud after all. The buyer says it is irregular for an artist to want his work back, and he would like to keep it.”

“I’ll sweeten the deal,” replied Benoit. “Throw in a couple of doodles free of charge. Who would ever have thought my doodles would become so valuable? It’s like a fairground ride!”

At the manor house Maurice was working on the Mayor’s painting. It was almost complete now: just a few minor but vital final details, like a glint of light off the windowpane and some wet fur on the dog’s muzzle. His arm was once again moving freely, and his fingers directing the brush to tiny details and feathering. As the light began to go, he left it and went for a walk around the house. It was November now and the light went early.

Everything looked so different to him now. He glanced into the smoking room as he passed it and wondered how he could have failed to see the strong colour and light in there; it was a house of contrasts certainly, and other parts of it were of plain stone and lacking in colour, but that was just Mr Lawrence’s unusual taste. The drawing room was very ornate and even had a ballroom section at one end; there must be dances here sometimes, although there hadn’t been any since he arrived. Maybe it wasn’t the season for them, and that was why Herbert and Thomas had looked for partners among the party that was going out rambling and shooting in the grounds.

As darkness fell he returned to the guest wing, and noticed that the ghosts had started to make clattering sounds and movements by the curtain at the end of the corridor.

Slowly he walked nearer, and began trying to communicate with them. He thought the words, “Don’t you want to move on from here?” Then he said them out loud.

There was a pause in the clattering, and then the curtain jerked in a deliberate manner. Maurice could see what was happening; they were enjoying the attention, and defying him. He turned and walked away, looking in the other direction. No wonder Mr Lawrence hadn’t managed to make them leave.

The next day he finished the painting, and he asked Mr Lawrence if he could use the telephone and phoned the Mayor’s office. He explained to the Mayor’s secretary that the painting was finished and ready to be collected. “Tell him I would be happy to do a second one as well,” he said. “I was asked to do a few,

and thought I would be leaving too soon. But I am still here, so I can do one more.”

The Mayor arrived the next day in his large official car. He was delighted with the painting, and his chauffeur took it out and placed it on the back seat of the car, wedged with a baton so that it wouldn't fall over. The Mayor asked Maurice to paint another indoor scene of a drawing room, but this time a very grand one that was more like a banqueting hall, with food laid out on the table. He must have been quite familiar with halls like that, and Maurice pictured him putting the imaginary one on the wall of the real one, and failing to see any irony in that.

The painting, although more intricate than the previous one, only took him a couple of weeks to complete and the rest of the time he spent in making arrangements for his emigration to Holland. He had decided now not to burden Janni with his problems, but to settle in Amsterdam and buy or rent an art studio there straight away. That would be the best way to get established. He would visit Janni quite soon and they would have more chance of becoming good friends that way. He did not speak very much Dutch, but he found languages easy to pick up, and when he had visited Holland before a lot of people had understood some French or English.

“It's a shame you can't be with us for Christmas,” said Mr Lawrence. “We're having a grand Kabbalist ritual for the winter solstice- followed of course by the usual lavish celebrations for Christmas, with many guests. You could meet a lady, as I believe both Thomas and Herbert have done; it would take the sting out of your divorce.”

Maurice adjusted his collar, hoping he still looked reasonably virile, and answered, “I'm off women at the moment. But when I get over the divorce, who knows? Your invitation is very kind, but I would like to be out of here by the first of December and well on the way to Holland. Patti knows where I am while I am here, and I have had a couple of unpalatable letters from her lawyers. When she cannot find me, they will settle it however they like between themselves, but your house is too well-known among her friends.”

“If you insist. Still seeking your Heaven in Holland, I see- well, may you find it.”

Mr Lawrence strode away, and Maurice found himself wishing that in some way he could still be part of his future; however, he knew this was likely to be one of the last times they would speak to one another.

Benoit looked in the mirror. He was an unconventional soul, and his suit and tie did not sit well with him: jester's stripes of red and yellow would have expressed his personality better.

Another meeting with his lawyers today; that thief, whoever he may be, had condemned him to a series of boring business meetings in which no splurges of colour and line featured, only the grey ceiling above the room and black and white ledgers on the table bearing amounts of francs in plus and minus.

Despite the cleverness that had been shown by attaching the wrong catalogue entry, under the noses of meticulous record-keepers, Benoit still never dreamed that it had been two thieves working together, one who was cunning and the other one skilled in copying art. He thought he was looking for one man; that's if he wanted to find him, for even after a few weeks' reflection he still preferred his scheme to seeking revenge. But should the thief make an error and reveal himself, of course he would be interested in the outcome. The thief could even be a woman, although the way the lines were drawn suggested to him a man, and he had an expert eye.

Had he known Maurice, who was just one of many names in the art catalogues to him, the situation with Patti would have amused him. He was always one step ahead of his own mistress, Céline, and would never have ended up buying her off with their house. If she found the sudden wealth refreshing, that did not make him forget those years during which she had found the obscurity decidedly un-refreshing, and had told him repeatedly that it was only his handsome face and svelte figure which made her stay.

He dealt with Céline with the same aplomb as his other assets, and unlike Maurice he did not regard himself as one of the magician-artists. For Benoit they were a curiosity who attempted to force themselves into an attitude to life that to him came naturally.

He was sure the deal was about to be concluded now and he would soon have his sketches back. Monsieur Bertand who had been the last person in the chain to buy them had thought it rather suspicious that it seemed to be a lawyer who was sorting out the sale back to Benoit rather than a normal administrator, and he asked openly and not very subtly whether there had been a scandal connected with the time in Benoit's life when he had drawn the sketches. He must have suspected a love affair with some aristocratic woman, although the drawings were not of a woman but of some houses and grounds where a love affair might have been conducted. But Monsieur Bertand could not resist the charming sketches that Benoit offered in their place.

However, that did not immediately settle the deal. Benoit's chief lawyer Monsieur Piccard had immediately called this further business meeting to which he arrived early, clutching an unnecessarily large sheaf of papers marked with motifs that were neither sigils nor art and had more in common with business trademarks. Monsieur Piccard was middle-aged and going bald, in contrast with Benoit's young, sharp expression, his angular head and brown hair pointed to one side.

A frown creased Monsieur Piccard's forehead as if everything was going to be extremely difficult- purposely perhaps, to extend the time the case would take so that the lawyers would receive larger fees.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Benoit," he said with a brief bow of his head, as if acknowledging a legendary artist, but his next comment was not at all deferential. "Since you have denied me the pleasure of prosecuting the art thief, I shall be suing the catalogue producer who did not check the details properly before publishing them in the catalogue. They accompanied the sketches on their journey and misinformed every dealer who read them. I am hoping we will get substantial damages for that. As you have requested, we won't disclose what the entries should have said- we will simply withdraw them."

"Do I have to appear in court?" asked Benoit, slicking back his hair. "I would rather avoid it in favour of more salubrious environments."

"Still thinking about being in places that feed your art, instead of places where it is your duty to be? I have to tell you, Monsieur Benoit, you are like the temperamental child of famous actors. It is inappropriate now that you are wealthy."

"All the wealthy seem to do is become permanent officials, rubber stamping this and that," said Benoit. "I like to have fun, and I am planning to have fun with this case. When I get my sketches back I will shade over them quickly and put them up for sale again, and then I will very much enjoy painting my two new pictures."

"There is much to be done first. Even though the buyer has agreed to sell the sketches back to you it will have to be presented in the form of a legal contract that his lawyer signs, and I sign. It will take a few months to go through."

Benoit raised his eyes to the very grey ceiling, and visualised what the ceiling would add if he was to feature it in a satirical painting.

Over the next few weeks he wandered restlessly along the boulevards, seeking cameo scenes that provided inspiration for both line drawings and oil paintings and entering any exclusive club that presented itself along the route- not to dine and drink immoderately but to dominate the conversation and hold forth about his favourite subjects. He wasn't thinking about revenge; his every step and gesture proved him superior to the art thief, and his life itself healed the rift on the ideational plane without any effort on his part.

He came one Monday night into a club where Ed was dining: a far more expensive one than his old haunt the Abraxas Club. Ed was about to order a bucket of champagne, but recognizing Benoit he immediately switched to a menu that would keep him relatively sober.

Benoit was dominating the conversation not only with what he said but also with his demeanour; something that would in later times be called body language. Ed, despite his decision to stay sober and disinterested, was affected by this language because it always made him jealous. He was a master of crafty manipulation behind the scenes, but in person he did not appear charismatic:

merely secretive about his background. He had been hoping that Maurice would make contact soon after leaving France and offer to meet him somewhere and join him in further scams, for it was not only Benoit who Maurice could copy accurately.

But the single letter, with no address and informing him that Maurice would not be available, told him that Maurice had no interest in taking part in a string of similar crimes. He was disappointed because in his mind he had already spent the money acquired from further frauds.

He heard Benoit speaking about the state of the painting world in Italy, and glaring at his back it was all he could do not to interrupt and declare that the Italian schools were all frauds who taught their students how to plagiarise, under the guise of increasing their accuracy at copying life. He wisely held his tongue, but decided that now the avenue of defrauding painters like Benoit had been closed to him he too would leave the country and embark on a protracted period of travelling.

Chapter 8

In his studio Benoit propped up a canvas on the easel and began to line up tubes of paint. He might as well start one of the two new pictures; to wait would hold up all his creative processes and they waited for no-one, certainly not for lawyers with clipboards who failed to realise they were like comic figures in a play. If he had genuinely intended to paint the two pictures in tandem he would have had to work on first one and then the other each for a few hours, but when it came to it he stuck to his normal method of producing one picture at a time.

He painted a lilac line which undulated around the canvas.... then he overbrushed it in maroon and added the beginnings of a bush behind it, for these would be dark maroon flowers. How common these were in nature he did not care: he had seen a rough approximation of this colour and form and now it would be a Benoit, his bending of nature to the blaze of rushed paint not at all in his mind but rather in the physical world here on the board.

Windows threatened to open where the edge of the blob met empty space, but primly drew veils instead: curtains and blinds to be supplied by the human viewers in the gallery who would look at it in a few weeks' time when it was finished. For now, the vista hid behind the painted area even though the paint did not overlap it: a paradox on the plane of form. Foolish businessmen thought that money had made Benoit great by hyping him to fame, but the truth escaped them, for the world was still too young to foil the muses and would probably perish when it came of age for that.

As he began to fill in the park and the stately home in the distance, (his favourite theme, and it does no harm to repeat a theme,) Céline stole into the room behind him and glanced at the painting. "What are you working on, Felipe?" she asked.

"Oh, don't look at it, my girl, these are only the first few brushstrokes!" he teased, lightly enough that she wouldn't take any real offense. "Better you supply the artist his fuel and get me some supper."

"It looks good already. I should have continued with my art studies."

"It would have been a huge amount of work for you, my dear, to drag yourself into those rare echelons of translators of the mystery for the common man. You would have had little time left for womanly pursuits and none for children; where are the brats, with your mother and sister again?"

"Shush, Felipe, they love their Grand'Mere. They'll be back tomorrow, running all over everything with muddy feet. We could have a romantic evening in their absence."

"So we will, but it will be a romantic evening that starts very late, after item number one on the agenda- my new Earth-shattering painting."

The next day found Benoit once again in the wandering mood as he walked up his street in the mid-morning sunshine. He walked on to the fruit and sweet market, and began examining a block of fudge with relish. Should he buy some? Céline would like it for sure, but he wanted to keep his handsome figure and he could think of nothing worse than to become a portly artist with a pot belly, one at whom the journalists would smile indulgently as they interviewed him for the arts page.

Perhaps a little bit of fudge, just for Céline? They were supposed to be rich now, but after all what is wealth if all it buys you are toys that a child might be happy with? It was true that they travelled more now, and went to art exhibitions and theatre plays of a rather different character than before. But he was certain that he wouldn't let it change his life very much, and he was definitely not going to become obsessed with record players and cameras like some wealthy men he knew, or spend every evening at a cinema. Technology left him cold- after all it was not its day yet, it was still near the beginning, and Benoit was a man of his times.

The sweets marked a watershed in Benoit's journey. He looked upwards along the street and saw chestnut trees shedding their leaves, a blaze of tawny and golden shapes outlined against the sky, and at once he knew that those had to go in his painting. The country estate he was imagining must have just such chestnut trees, and he marvelled at the bark with its crusted jigsaw surface fitted so expertly together. That would be the crown of the scene he was going to depict. He felt in a hurry, as though excited by an invitation to a party on the seashore during the holiday season; this excitement always took hold of him, and he felt a pressure and haste to capture his vision. He spared but a few seconds' thought on those morons who would think he was finishing the first of the two paintings quickly in order to make money from it. He almost felt sorry for them, that they would never know that fervour that consumes an artist; all they would ever do was nit-pick about sous.

Over the next few weeks Benoit was carried on a wave. He was enjoying this creation so much that he didn't want to stop, and yet at the same time he was looking forward to finishing it and starting on the second, and seeing the crest of a new wave approaching perkily from a joyous horizon. When he was a child and used to play in the fields he had felt like this, and he the most fortunate of men had come to spend his adulthood in the same way and recently even to earn good money from it. He almost forgot the sting of someone defrauding him and his own sting, to play the thief at his own game and make it profitable.

From the lounge below Mr Lawrence's private art gallery, Maurice wrote another letter to Janni. Janni was not on the phone but there was no hurry to make arrangements as he was not now going to his address. "I have come to

think that staying with you would be taking advantage. I plan now to take a hotel and then move straight to a studio in Amsterdam, and start exhibiting and selling from there. It does help to have money and I've got a few possible studios lined up; it's just a case now of viewing them in person."

Janni wrote back, "You need an art agent too, who understands the Dutch market. I will recommend you to several of them, and when you arrive here you can choose one." Maurice was grateful for the help because he was increasingly aware of how easily he could be found at the manor house and was already making moves to change his name, although that would be awkward regarding his bank account. Fortunately, the banks were used to artists doing that kind of thing. He settled on Patrick Tunisse: he liked the sound of that, and it hinted at some Dutch in his origins.

Patti's friends at the Theosophical Society had been quick to tell her that after the way he had behaved Maurice wasn't worth crying about (especially as some of them, in the tradition of Annie Besant, were feminists). Still Patti could not help some tears in her eyes as she began the enormous task of clearing out Maurice's abandoned studio. Some of the pictures would be worth a little money when they were sold, but that was like a bribe.

She would have thought it would be a wrench for an artist to leave his work behind and never return to claim it, and his distaste at seeing her again must be considerable for him to do that. Yet apart from one or two stray remarks, like that one at the piano, she had been a perfect wife. She could not fathom how that conversation at the piano could have tipped him over the edge; there must have been stronger contributing factors that she simply had not recognized for what they were.

As she worked at clearing the studio she began to find here and there samples of Maurice's copies of other painters' works. There would be a little bundle of papers with at the bottom the print he had copied, and above it several drawings or watercolours on paper. These were from the time when he was practising, and original paintings in the style of someone else were the next step and harder to spot unless you knew the style of the artist in question very well. The main distinguishing feature was that these works were on sheets of paper rather than a canvas.

Patti knew enough to be a little suspicious, but she never thought he might be a plagiarist, only that his illustrations of books may not have been as original as she had thought they were, and he may have developed ideas he had got from others. Could you get away with that? Her own career had never got as far as commissions: she was always an assistant to the main illustrator and sometimes ended up with technical duties not unlike the printer's.

She contemplated making something of this: discussing with others in intellectual circles that Maurice was that kind of artist, and mentioning it in letters. They would no doubt understand the implications better than she did. But ultimately it seemed petty- a form of malicious gossip, and she thought it would be better to put everything like that behind her and concentrate on the future. She was still young enough to start again, having no children and no ties.

In the end she gathered up all the copies and any developments from them that she recognized, and placed them at the back of the large wooden cabinet where Maurice had intended to lock them in the first place. When all the rubbish that surrounded them was thrown away there would still be plenty of room, and the canvases that could potentially be sold could be displayed in the middle of the room.

Patti's behaviour, and Ed's, was exactly what you would expect if you knew their personalities, and yet it fitted in perfectly with the intent expressed in Maurice's sigil that hung in Mr Lawrence's private gallery. Such are the mysterious ways of art and magic. Austin Spare who was nearing the end of his life would have understood this; the milieu that had given birth to him had already existed for many years before and would continue into the future, washing up people like Maurice and Mr Lawrence in every generation.

The first of Benoit's two pictures was soon finished, and was put on display in his personal gallery and photographed for the art catalogues. Monsieur Bertand was convinced it was the house where the affair had taken place again, seen from a new angle at the far end of the estate near a country road, where it would not be so easily recognized. He commented about this to his close family and tried to ascertain which lady's house it might be, but publicly he said nothing.

Meanwhile Benoit was in quite another place mentally as he sat before his easel making preliminary drawings for the second picture. It would be on a completely different theme this time, he decided: a street market with many vendors selling fruit, and fruit piled high in bowls at the back of the stalls where the customers could not see it. The painting would be a slight parody of those still life's which every art teacher in schools gets their pupils to draw, and yet would pull the viewer into a higher dimension where Plato's 'ideal fruit' multiplied itself, often in duplicate and other times with minute and telling variations in the form. "And how would that interact with the taste?" - the viewer's subconscious mind would ask as he looked intently at the fruits, like a child looking at a sweetshop or a lady fixated on a clothes shop displaying this season's fashions.

It was a simple form of image manipulation but one which needs to be addressed, for the simple is often the best and in good quality art there is no

need to be too obscure or self- preoccupied in order to be taken seriously. Benoit had once been that viewer intent on a work of art, and did not wish to talk down to him but to talk directly to him and stimulate that in him which had contributed to Benoit becoming an artist later in life.

It was while he was working on the delicate peel of a lime that Benoit received the message from his secretary that his lawyers had concluded their complicated arrangements and the sketches were ready to pick up.

They did not look much for something that had so completely altered the course of Maurice's life. Benoit was ready with his charcoal and he wielded it almost nonchalantly, shading and pencilling over to impart his energy signature which miraculously added zeros to the value of mere dots on paper; or was it not the value but only the price? He had imagined he would spend a while studying the drawings for clues about their originator, but in the end his eye was so good that he had already seen nearly all of it just from the tiny print he had originally noticed.

There was only one feature that had escaped his notice before: a seal of a spirit in one corner where an artist might have signed it, with one circle in the design left slightly open, presumably so as not to invoke the real spirit. So it was one of the magician- artists. He hadn't managed to magic up any success for himself, then; only as a thief could he find any. And regarding value versus price, the drawings had some value simply as art and would have found a natural happy home on the perpetrator's bedroom wall above a vase of artificial flowers.

Benoit called his lawyers and told them the fraud was over: the drawings were real Benois now and could be sold again, and reluctantly they closed their case files on the subject. So Maurice could have returned to France. But he never found that out, for he was in transit to Holland.

Just as Mr Lawrence had predicted, his new life felt like Heaven to him: personal freedom, artistic freedom and surroundings that he loved. Janni was a friend, and he made many other friends as well and even met a girlfriend of sorts, though the relationship was more mental than physical.

He felt that he had everything he wanted in life. The sigil had worked; he had got away with his crime and in time he ceased to think about the crime very much. His great mistress Art had forgiven him, and was happy once again with the service she received.

About Candy Ray

Candy Ray comes from London, UK. She is passionate about the occult and religion and has a university degree in Religious Studies. For many years she worked in office administration, and on retiring she discovered internet forums and Chaos Magic, and adopted a new identity as a fiction writer. She lives in the south of England with her small family.

Other Books by Candy Ray

All available as free eBooks.

Novellas

[The Wizard From Vahan](#) (Fantasy/Science Fiction).

Jasper is an apprentice magician in a society of the future where chaos magic has become the dominant religion. He does a time-jump which is supposed to be a meditation, but it goes wrong, and he finds himself in a parallel world about to embark on a mission as a heroic knight: a mission that he does not want, as he is more of a mystic than a warrior. He encounters Emin, an advanced magician who offers to help by swapping places with him, leaving Jasper in his Retreat up in space. The story explores the role of magicians in society, and the contrast between a great adept and a junior magician.

The Rescue Circle

A magician undertakes a dangerous quest to become a psychopomp, a guide of the dead, and afterwards to find his true love who has gone hitchhiking without him. During his trance he encounters angels, gods, djinn and troubled souls, and joins a rescue circle of Spiritualists who are more advanced than he is.

Short Story Collections

Chaos Dreams Part 1

These short stories were channelled by Candy Ray from a non-human chaos muse called Ino. Each one creates a vivid and enchanting world, sometimes in the past. Some of the stories have a narrative style that roves around observing. The tales are a showcase for Ino's unique views about human beings; her observation of people is very sharp, yet with a motherly quality.

Chaos Dreams part 2, Astral Tales

The common theme in this collection of Candy Ray's short stories is the astral plane, which is both the realm of the dead and the plane of dreams. In each story

the action focuses on a different aspect of this plane: mediumship, lucid dreams, life after death, visionary alchemical experience and esoteric magic. Dive deep into these other worlds and you will find that they intersect with your own.

Chaos dreams Part 3: Fruition

This is a compilation of three chaos magic stories. The first one 'Eoss and Bidskimmer' was part of an ambitious servitor project, which was carried out by chaos magicians in an online group. It is about a servitor and an egregore who make life much better for a group of young people.

The second one 'Arcana' is a hypersigil, a chaos magic spell, and it is the story of a lady chaos magician and game designer, her cute servitor, tarot cards, an angel and a demon.

The third one 'Beads Falling, Falling Into A Design' was channelled from Ino, and the main character is based partly on herself. This story is narrated by a spirit from the mineral kingdom who finds herself within a bead in a ladies' necklace, and through this becomes closely involved with a human family

Chaotic Dreams

Five short stories of surreal and slightly dark fantasy. An ancient legend meanders into strange directions. An inner demon seems to depart- but has he really gone? Alchemical fantasies sweep one man's world into disarray. A living doll yearns to escape. Trading in crystals leads to an unexpected magical drama. /the last two stories are channelled from Ino.

Novellas under the pen name Lena Chere

The Eoss Trilogy

1. Platara Mountain: (Paperback: only available from the publisher)

Imagine magicians of the modern-day internet becoming involved with a parallel world where human beings are still in the Stone Age. Imagine this involvement precipitated by a kind but much-feared Horse Goddess who was created on Facebook.

Alexandra has just left school and is looking for love and a vocation in life when that scenario becomes her reality. She comes to care deeply about both the Horse Goddess and a young family in the parallel world; it dramatically reveals her past and changes her future, transforming her into a magician.

2. Mount Clexa: (Self -published, paperback and eBook)

This is a book of serious occult fiction told in the first person by Clexa, the daughter of the Horse Goddess Eoss.

Bound to a magician in service, she finds herself forced to explore the aethyrs of the Enochian magic system with him, and to carry out a revenge curse on a girl when she would prefer to spare her.

Clexa thinks for herself about how to interact with the human beings she meets and also the aethyr guardians, and this results in her being chased and harried across the inner realms, so that she has to evolve much faster than she anticipated.

3. Silver Manes: (Self -published, paperback and eBook)

Arran is a Kabbalist, a young professional man from the UK, and his accident comes at a critical moment in his love life. It also serves to deepen his emerging connection with one of the kingdoms of Hell.

He enters into an extended coma, which becomes a test of character both for himself and for his secret enemy, Jez. As Arran learns lessons about love and about the phenomenon of archetypes, many of the people around him get the opportunity to petition a Wishing Horse for three wishes- or for anything else they want.

Non-Fiction

Alchemical Journey: (Autobiography)

Now available as an eBook, Candy Ray's popular account of her six past lives, and the times in between them. She has been a demon, a warrior in ancient India, a sacred cat in the time of Moses, a scholar in Medieval England, a witch during the English Civil War and a Quaker in the era of slavery.

The account is a concise summary of many events covering the past five thousand years. It focuses on how the Law of Karma works, and gives insights into some important world events. This edition has added end notes which give more details about consequences in the present day.