

# Beryl Langley Sees All

by

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## Act 1

She cut herself. Blood seeped out and spotted the white room. She tended to daydream while cutting fruit. It kept her distracted. The immaculate room cleansed her of her evil past and the knife protected her from her evil future. She could no longer be trusted with her old tools, her paintbrushes, her pencils. Those large canvas where she could plot out the geographies of her earthly desires. Placing a plaster on her finger, she paced rapidly from one side of the room to the other mumbling saccharine incantations; prayers to an intimate god.

A crack in the door.

“Afternoon tea?”

A wide grin split her face.

“Please”

The doors swung open and a petite French maid wheeled in a squeaky metal tray into the middle of the room. The maid turned to leave.

“Please, stay. I’ve had little company these last few days.” She stirred the tea with wild abandon.

The maid, perplexed, flashed her long eyelashes at the Madame and clicked the door shut. The Madame never received guests in her quarters. She had told the journalists she felt safe here. She told them of her search towards a new kind of spiritual enlightenment, a purity of the mind, a virginity of the soul.

The locals were surprised that the famed American artist had bought the New Tripuria hotel. The name of the establishment was somewhat of a misnomer; the building was archetypal Jugendstil architecture from the turn of the twentieth century and had fallen into disrepair over a decade ago. There was nothing new about it. No one had paid the dilapidated hotel any attention as it was largely hidden, nestled in a cleft of the Swiss Alps. The Madame had

used a part of her enormous fortune to acquire and renovate it three years ago, painting the entire interior top to bottom in white. Leaving all of her belongings at her various other apartments, chalets and ranches, she moved in to the New Tripuria with great pomp and paparazzi - and that was the last they had seen of her. She had not set foot out of the building since the day she moved in, and no art had come out.

“Tell me all you know, Juliette”

Scraping of chair legs over the stained white wood. Bare flesh sticks to a faux leather seat.

“Amie arrived last night soaked to the bone. I took her things and locked her in the Cotton Suite. She still has that yellow raincoat you gave her.”

“I knew she would come sooner or later. In many ways she has had it worse than all of us.”

Porcelain saucers made a dull thud on the wooden side table. The Madame left sticky scarlet lipstick on the side of the teacup.

“She will thank me for this”

The maid gestured in the affirmative.

“You are so gracious Madame.”

“My thoughts exactly”

The maid’s hand reached for the pastel-coloured macaroons. A sudden stinging sensation.

“How dare you! Leave this instant”

The maid quickly vanished.

The Madame delicately plastered a scone with jam and cream. She would pay Amie a visit that afternoon.

## Act 2

“You finally made it”

Amie wearily opened one of her eyes and then bolted upright. She feared the Madame would visit her sooner or later. How could she have not heard the door being unlocked? It was sheer luck that she had decided to put on the long

silk gown before dozing off on the couch. The Madame towered over her like a marble Madonna. She too wore a snow-white silk gown.

“Thank you for taking me in Mrs Langley”

“No problem at all my dear, but please, call me Madame.” She smiled at her former student. “I’m sure you read the rules before arriving but just to reiterate: this suite is now your world. It will be locked at all times except for three times a day when the maid brings the meals. There will be no visitors. You will have no possessions outside of what you find in this room. If you find yourself lacking in any basic need you may call the maid directly by picking up the receiver by the bed. There is no way to dial outside of the sanctuary or to dial other rooms. Your things have been kept safe and will be returned to you when you are ready to rejoin the real world. I know these rules may seem aggressively stringent, but they are imperative for our rehabilitation.”

She wandered over to the large crucifix on the table and rubbed the forehead of Christ with her thumb. Amie dared not move a muscle.

“You have been incredibly kind to let me stay here Madame. I will repay you as soon as I am able.”

“Nonsense my dear” The Madame shot her a piercing stare. “You simply being here and my knowing that you’re safe is repayment enough”

Amie could feel the warmth of her blood trickling back into her veins. The Madame sat beside her and grasped her hand in both hands.

“I’ve walked this road. I know how hard it is to fight this addiction. But you are safe here. This really is a sanctuary, and the white is deeply affecting. You can be clean again.”

A slight fracture in the girl’s composure. Tears welled in the lips of her eyes.

“I did notice something Madame...”

She heard the turning of the key in the door and soft footsteps disappearing down the carpeted hall. She was alone in the white room.

### Act 3

Amie struck off the gown and explored her new surroundings. The reception

room of the suite was designed like a Nordic chapel. The sofa faced an altar, on top of which was a large modern interpretation of a crucifix flanked by two large candles. Hot flames tiptoed on fat wicks and stretched up towards the high, slanted ceiling.

On the left-hand side of the altar was a door that led to the bathroom and on the right was an open door to the bedroom where crisp daylight streamed through the enormous window. Every conceivable angle of the entire suite was white.

The bedroom consisted of a large wall mirror and a bed. She stopped a moment by the window. It would take hours for her to count all the snow-capped peaks, or minutes to shatter her fragile bones on the jagged rocks below.

Amie slunk back on to the sofa. Three rooms. Eat, sleep, pray. It was to be a minimalist existence, but it was this or the convent, living a quiet life under Mother Superior. She could toil away at her menial work amidst the rolling vineyards of Tuscany, basking in the tolling of the church bells. Most importantly, she could easily leave the sisterhood, but there was no escape from the sanctuary. She had always been frightened by Mrs Langley but there was no denying her unparalleled artistic talents. How could one so brilliant resign oneself to this clinical nightmare?

Staring blankly at the crucifix, she felt some of the darkness dislodge from her soul. What else was there to do on a lazy afternoon? She darted briskly to the bedroom and closed the door.

## Act 4

The Madame is surrounded by hundreds of screens. They sparkle like glass in the bottom of a rockpool. Her cameras hide behind the mirrors of every room. She is one they sing to every morning and brush their teeth with each night. Her lecherous eyes feed on their flesh. She knows the desires of their hearts; she sees the way they look at the maid. They all long to be held by her, feel the warmth of another. There is no cure for nymphomania. They will never be free.

The Madame's eyes are glued to one screen in particular. Her former student writhes in pleasure on the white mattress like a seal cub on the waves of an empty beach. She is safe here. Her Madame will protect her. She will be fed and kept warm. The Madame is her god. Beryl Langley sees all.

Amie breathes heavily. No one can blame her for such a minor infraction. She smiles to herself and lets the soft bedsheet caress her as she settles down to a late afternoon nap in paradise.

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