

Legacy of the Phantom

Inside the underground catacombs of the Paris Opera House was a secret sanctuary. It had been constructed by an enigmatic genius who called himself Erik. Months ago in this year of 1881, Erik had perished. He had been buried secretly elsewhere in the subterranean labyrinth. Present at his funeral had been two women

One was Christine Daae, a young opera singer. Erik had envisioned her as his Disciple of Life, a woman who was the embodiment of his desire to celebrate existence through music. Christine's rejection of Erik had ignited a series of events that culminated in Erik's death.

The other female mourner was Darlla Rassendyll. Two years earlier, Darlla had been a trusted member of the French police. Her activities offended a member of the Black Coats, a European crime syndicate based in Corsica. The motto of the sinister brotherhood was "pay the law." This doctrine was interpreted thusly: "Give the courts a *guilty party* for every crime committed." In reality, the "guilty party" was a scapegoat, often an innocent person, whom the Black Coats desired to eliminate. After framing Darlla for treason and murder, the Black Coats left her to be drowned in the underground lake near Erik's sanctum.

Rescued by Erik, Darlla found herself faced with an unusual choice. Erik had roamed Asia years earlier as an assassin and a pirate. He had learned many lethal skills. Wishing for his murderous knowledge to be preserved by another human being, Erik had a parallel ambition to train a Disciple of Death. He originally intended his pupil to be a man, but his unexpected encounter with a woman presented an extraordinary opportunity. Darlla was given a choice. She could leave Erik's abode and take her chances in the outside world, or she could become the Disciple of Death in order to seek vengeance on the Black Coats.

Accepting Erik's offer, Darlla underwent vigorous training to become a formidable combatant. One condition of Darlla's tutelage was that she must never seek to view the face beneath Erik's mask. Under the alias of the Revenant, she became a masked vigilante. Scores of criminals were slain by her weapons, a Thuggee pickaxe and a Punjabi lasso,

Darlla fell hopelessly in love with Erik, but his obsession with Christine blinded himself to a fundamental truth. Unlike Christine, Darlla loved Erik without any reservations. As he lay dying, Erik removed his mask. A tearful Darlla kissed him on the lips. She revealed that she had secretly gazed upon his face two years earlier. As death overcame him, Erik realized he had squandered his one chance to find true love.

After Erik's death, Darlla questioned the violent trajectory of her life. While still pursuing her brutal war with the Black Coats, she sought to create her own Disciple of Life. This incarnation of the Disciple would temper the Revenant's justice with mercy. The Disciple would act as the Revenant's conscience.

Whereas the Revenant had only executed agents of the Black Coats in the past, she rehabilitated one of their most formidable assassins. The role of Disciple of Life was bestowed on Valorie Varno, a young girl who had been the subject of bizarre experimentation by the Black Coats. Injected with a rare South American poison, Valorie's skin was turned green. Valorie's mind had been twisted by the All-Father, the allegedly immortal patriarch of the Black Coats. With the assistance of a Persian sage, Darlla had re-instilled in Valorie respect for human life. In order to make amends for her earlier murders, Valorie swore never to kill another human being.

As the Revenant, Darlla wore a black and red costume consisting of a hood, shirt, pants, gloves, and boots. Inside her clandestine refuge, she had divested herself of her flamboyant apparel to wear a scarlet robe. The flame-haired Darlla has an attractive face with a singular flaw. Her mouth drooped slightly. When she had appeared in the stage during a brief stint as an actress, noted journalist Leon Fauchery had described her mouth as "the embodiment of cruelty."

Seated at a table, Darlla was writing in a large bound journal. Erik had advised to record all her exploits for future reference. These records were the private annals of the Revenant.

Valorie Varno was seated at an organ. As Darlla transcribed her adventures, her Disciple of Life had been playing one of Erik's musical compositions. Her dark hair was piled upwards in a bouffant style. A thin blade of hair was pointed downwards between her slanted eyebrows.

Valorie was clothed in green robe. A chain encircled her neck. The neckwear ended in a jade pendant in the shape of a seraph, an angel with three pairs of wings. The necklace was a gift from Laurent Remy, the secretary to the Director of the Paris Opera. Valorie and Laurent were passionate lovers.

"I'm going to my room," said Valorie. "You should retire as well."

"I only need to make a few more entries." Darlla scribbled a few more sentences. "I'm done!"

"You really should find some better way to secure those journals, Darlla."

"They're locked in a cupboard. Only you and I know where the key is hidden."

"Locks can easily be picked. Imagine if our sanctuary was discovered by an enemy. It's a pity that Erik didn't design a secret vault."

"Actually, he did, Valorie. It's way in the back of our sanctuary. I haven't been able to figure out the combination."

"Can you show it to me?"

"I can, but I'll need my pickaxe."

After Darlla had retrieved her pickaxe, she escorted Valorie through the corridors of the underground haven. Inevitably, they reached a wall containing a large circular illustration. A red skull with black teeth was painted in the middle of the circle. Hidden inside the lines between the teeth was a thin key slot.

Darlla's pickaxe was a three-pronged weapon vaguely resembling a crucifix. Unlike a normal pickaxe, this instrument featured a sharp blade extending from the head. Inserting the blade into the slot, Darlla twisted the pickaxe. The wall slid to the right revealing a chamber with a large vault.

"I found this secret vault shortly after Erik died, Valorie."

Valorie scrutinized the door. There were eight circular rings on which were inscribed the letters of the alphabet. Next to the eight circles was a large handle. Valorie tried to turn the handle, but it wouldn't budge.

"If you examine the door, you will discover an alphabetic lock," volunteered Darlla. "I don't know the correct combination."

"What combinations did you try?"

"Erik would have wanted me to open this. The combination must be a word made up of eight letters. I tried 'Revenant,' but it didn't work."

"But you were Erik's Disciple just as I am yours. 'Disciple' also has eight letters."

Valorie arranged the rings to spell the word "Disciple." Valorie was able to open the door.

Inside the vault was a painting on a stand. It depicted a young woman with blonde hair and blue eyes. The portrait bore the signature "Erik."

"I knew that Erik was a musician and an architect," stated Valorie, "but I wasn't aware that he was a painter."

"I didn't know," replied Darlla. "Erik kept this part of his life secret from me."

"The woman in the portrait. She's very beautiful. Who is she?"

"She's Christine Daae, Erik's Disciple of Life."

Next to the portrait were several sketchbooks on the floor. Valorie inspected them.

"There must be a hundred drawings here, Darlla."

"Valorie, could you please look through them while I get my annals."

Darlla left only to later return with a wheelbarrow containing her notebooks. Valorie helped her move the annals into the vault.

"I looked through all the sketches," said Valorie. "They're all of Christine."

"Please help me put Erik's sketchbooks in the wheelbarrow."

"What are you going to do, Darlla? These sketches are beautiful works of art. They belong in a museum."

"I'm going to burn them."

“Burn them! That’s not right! What are you going to do about the portrait! It’s a masterpiece! It’s worthy of the Louvre!”

Darlla picked up her pickaxe. She slashed the painting in half.

“The masterpiece is now firewood.”

Following a fiery conflagration that consumed Erik’s artwork, Darlla was alone in her bedroom. She held a red hood that Erik had worn to disguise his ugliness. Tears ran down her eyes.

“Oh, my darling, why couldn’t at least one of your hundred sketches been of me!”