

VEIL OF BLOOD
by
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FADE IN:

EXT. ENTRANCE - BELLE VIE PLANTATION - NIGHT

A horse drawn carriage pulls off a dirt road and passes through an iron gateway. The arched top of the gates spells out "Belle Vie" in rusted, cursive lettering.

The two black horses clomp their way down a long allée lined with oak trees. Spanish moss hangs from the gnarled branches like wild locks of hair clutched in bony fingers.

SUPER: AVOYELLES PARISH, LOUISIANA 1874

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

CORALIE GRAVOIS, (17), wears a lovely polonaise dress over her shapely corseted figure. Her long, blonde hair is swept up into a knot, embellished with a fanciful red bow.

She glances out the window. The pale moonlight reveals the miserable condition of the plantation.

Overgrown weeds choke what were once lush, rolling lawns. Withered stalks of sugar cane stand like grave markers in neglected fields.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

The carriage pulls up to the huge Greek Revival plantation house. Its soaring white columns seem to groan under the weight of the massive gabled roof.

Paint peels from the walls. Except for a flickering gaslight on the portico, the house rests in darkness.

The carriage DRIVER, a grim-faced sort, removes a trunk from the roof and hops down to the dusty earth.

He opens the door for Coralie, but doesn't offer his hand.

She steps down, gazes at the sad state of the mansion.

CORALIE
(under her breath)
Belle Vie, indeed.

With a snap from the reins, the Driver leads the carriage away. Coralie stands alone with her trunk.

She grabs the handle of the large trunk and drags it up the portico steps. Her thin arms struggle with the weight.

She sees a small bell fastened next to the thick, weathered oak doors. She rings it three times.

Coralie watches as a light appears within the foyer.

The doors creak open.

ROBERT, (48), a black man dressed in a threadbare butler's tuxedo, holds a gas lantern.

ROBERT

Yes?

CORALIE

I'm Coralie Gravois. My uncle is expecting me.

Robert stares for several moments, as if contemplating whether to grant her entry.

ROBERT

Of course, Miss Coralie. Please come in.

Coralie walks into the foyer. Robert grabs her trunk, then shuts the front doors.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

Marble floors lead to a grand, sweeping staircase. A crystal chandelier hangs from the vaulted ceiling. Exquisite baroque paintings line the walls.

But a musty staleness pervades everything. A house cloaked in shadows of former glory.

LOUIS (O.S)

Robert!

The booming voice causes both Robert and Coralie to whip their heads to the top of the stairway.

A dark figure stands there.

LOUIS

I thought I told you to light the house.

ROBERT

Yes sir, Mr. Louis, you did sir. I apologize, sir. I'll commence with that now, sir.

LOUIS

And prepare a meal for my niece and I.

ROBERT
Right away, Mr. Louis.

Robert lights another lantern in the foyer before he scurries out of the room.

The figure at the top of the stairway slowly descends, finally emerging from the darkness.

LOUIS GRAVOIS, (48), dressed in the finery of a Southern dandy, opens his arms as he walks toward Coralie. They embrace.

LOUIS
How was your trip, my dear?

CORALIE
I apologize for the late hour, Uncle. I had to change coaches more than once. Some of these drivers seem to run on their own schedule.

Louis laughs as he wraps an arm around Coralie and leads her to a connecting hallway.

LOUIS
Yes, I'm afraid things tend to move with somewhat less rapidity here than in New Orleans.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Louis sits at the head of a long maple table. Coralie sits next to him. They dine on duck and wild rice. Louis pours her some wine.

CORALIE
My parents send their regards, and their regrets. Father's business in Savannah was unavoidable, and mother absolutely insisted she tag along with him. I do believe she had a desire to rub shoulders with Georgia society.

Louis chuckles as he drinks his wine.

LOUIS
It matters not, my dear. You are by far the most enchanting member of our clan.

Coralie blushes, smiles. Robert walks into the room and pours Louis more wine.

LOUIS
Thank you, Robert.

Robert bows his head and leaves the room.

LOUIS
A loyal one, that Robert. The only
loyal one.

Louis' face darkens.

LOUIS
They all left except for him. All
my workers. Not long after the war.
That damnable war.

CORALIE
I don't understand, Uncle. Have you
not been able to find replacements for
the negroes?

LOUIS
They didn't just leave the plantation,
Coralie. They salted the very ground!

His words carry such simmering vitriol that Coralie quickly
averts her eyes.

LOUIS
Nothing grows in those fields now.
I've tried everything possible.

He downs his wine in one gulp.

LOUIS
Everything humanly possible.

Louis looks to a framed portrait on the wall. In the painting,
Louis sits in a chair as DAPHNE GRAVOIS, a stunning beauty,
stands behind him, a delicate hand on his shoulder.

LOUIS
All those years of despair...my
poor Daphne. The doctors told me
it was consumption that took her.
But no, she'd grown melancholy
long before. It was the collapse of
Belle Vie, I tell you. She loved this
land. It was her soul.

Coralie meekly runs a fork through her rice.

CORALIE
I'm sorry for your misfortunes,
Uncle Louis.

Louis' face lightens. He smiles at his niece.

LOUIS
Your mere presence has brought more
cheer than this place has known in
years. Forgive my outburst. This
is a time for merriment.

He raises his glass. Coralie does the same.

LOUIS
To your visitation, my dear. May it
brighten this house and all who dwell
within it.

They clink their crystal goblets and drink.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Coralie opens the lid of her trunk. She reaches in, grabs a dress, then walks to a beautifully crafted mahogany wardrobe and hangs it.

When she turns back to the trunk, the lid is closed.

Coralie stares at the trunk, thinks about it, then shakes her head.

She lifts the lid, removes a camisole and walks to the wardrobe.

When she turns, the lid rests shut.

Her breath quickens.

A standing cheval mirror slowly spins on its axis, creaking as it turns until it faces the opposite direction.

Coralie screams and runs from the room.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

She runs down the candlelit corridor. Louis bounds from the master bedroom, runs to her and holds her by her shoulders.

LOUIS
What's wrong?

CORALIE
My bedroom! Things were moving!
The trunk...the looking glass...

Louis strides to her bedroom.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Louis walks in, looks around. Coralie sidles in behind him.

Louis walks to the mirror, which now faces the proper direction.

CORALIE
It turned! I swear it!

Louis gently touches the top of the mirror, causing it to move.

LOUIS
See that, Coralie? Even a draft
could make this spin.

CORALIE
And the trunk! It...

They both look to the trunk. The lid stands open.

CORALIE
Uncle, I promise you it--

Louis holds her tightly.

LOUIS
Now, now, cher. You've had a long
trip. The eyes and mind fall prey
to fatigue. All you need is rest.

He kisses the top of her head.

LOUIS
Dream well. We have quite a day
ahead of us.

He smiles, leaves the room and closes the door.

Coralie looks around the room uneasily.

LATER

Coralie lies under the covers within the darkened room. Her eyes dart to every corner. She lifts the sheet over her face.

EXT. GARDENS - DAY

Coralie strolls through the maze-like gardens, a network of stone paths leading through wildly overgrown vegetation.

She stops, bends over and sniffs a crape myrtle. She smiles, then runs her fingers over a magnolia flower and picks it.

She walks with the flower and approaches a decrepit fountain.

Coralie gazes into the shallow, fetid water. She tosses the magnolia into the fountain and watches as algae envelops it.

A rush of wind. Coralie looks up in time to see the train of a flowing white dress disappear behind a nearby hedge.

She runs to the hedge, turns the corner, but sees nothing.
A gust of wind from behind her.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
(whisper)
Run.

Coralie bolts through the pathways, wide-eyed and gasping.

EXT. MANSION - DAY

Breathless, Coralie runs from the gardens and steadies herself against the side wall of the mansion.

Her pale, shaking hands cover her mouth.

The SOUND of an APPROACHING CARRIAGE makes her peek around the corner. Two horses pull a coach to the front of the house.

Coralie watches through shrubbery as BROTHER OTTAVIO, (45), steps out of the carriage. He wears a brown, hooded monk's robe.

He regards the house for a moment, then turns his fierce gaze directly at Coralie. Even through a tangle of bushes and trees, his eyes lock onto hers.

She gasps and hides behind the wall. After a few moments, she turns back to see Louis shaking hands with Ottavio.

Robert grabs Ottavio's bags and the three men head into the house.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Coralie stands before the mirror, fixes the collar of her beautiful dress.

Behind her, the wardrobe door creaks open. She freezes, slowly turns around.

A KNOCK at the room door. Coralie nearly jumps out of her skin. She runs to the door to see Robert standing there.

ROBERT
Dinner is served, Miss Coralie.

She looks back to the wardrobe, then exhales deeply and gathers herself.

CORALIE
Robert, who was that man who arrived today?

ROBERT
Don't rightly know, ma'am. A
clergyman by the looks.

CORALIE
Very well, Robert. Thank you.

He nods to her, then maintains eye contact for a few moments.
His face carries a certain sadness. He turns and walks away.

INT. FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Coralie pauses outside the dining hall. She hears Louis and
another man conversing in a foreign language.

INT. DINING HALL - NIGHT

Coralie enters. Louis stands. Brother Ottavio, still dressed
in his robe, remains seated.

LOUIS
My dear, you look ravishing. Allow
me to introduce a friend. This is
Brother Ottavio. He comes to us all
the way from Italy.

Coralie walks to her seat at the table and nods to Ottavio. The
greeting is not reciprocated.

CORALIE
How long was your journey, Brother?

LOUIS
Oh, forgive me, cher. Ottavio
speaks only Italian and Latin.
Luckily, I still retain a certain
fluency in Latin from my school
days.

Coralie sits down, followed by Louis. She sips her wine.

CORALIE
What order is he from?

LOUIS
Oh, he was a Benedictine.

CORALIE
Was?

LOUIS
You might say he...worships in
a new church now. I heard of him
through my European contacts.

Coralie takes another sip of her wine. Ottavio watches her with dark, hawk-like eyes.

LOUIS
You see, he's come to restore Belle
Vie. To return it to splendor.

Coralie rubs her eyes, sets down her wine glass.

CORALIE
But how, Uncle? You said the fields
were salted. How could...

Her head sways, her eyelids droop.

LOUIS
When all earthly attempts fail, one
must look elsewhere.

Coralie slumps on the table, unconscious.

INT. BASEMENT - NIGHT

Six candles provide flickering light which sends shadows dancing on the walls of the dim basement.

Coralie sits in a large wooden chair that rests on the dirt floor. She wears a beautiful white wedding dress, complete with a veil which obscures her face. She remains unconscious.

Louis, Ottavio and Robert stand before her. An inverted cross hangs from Ottavio's neck.

Ottavio picks up a wooden bucket that lays on the ground next to him. He nods to Louis.

Louis turns to Robert.

LOUIS
Robert, your loyalty will never be
forgotten.

With that, Louis removes a long dagger from his jacket pocket and stabs Robert in the throat. Robert sinks to his knees as blood erupts from the severed artery.

Ottavio quickly moves in front of Robert and positions the bucket to capture the blood. Robert's eyes focus on Louis as the last spurts shoot from his wound. He falls to the dirt.

Coralie stirs awake. She tries to get to her feet, but stumbles. Louis lifts her up.

LOUIS
Please behave, mon cher.

She tries to pull the veil from her face.

CORALIE
What...what is...

LOUIS
Daphne's wedding gown. It
flatters you.

Ottavio pulls his hood forward, hiding his face.

OTTAVIO
Oportet sanguinem effundere.

Louis forces Coralie to her knees, then holds her face tightly.

Ottavio pours the bucket of blood over the veil. Coralie gags, fights it, but Louis is too strong. The blood spills through the veil and coats the wedding dress.

Louis kneels next to her, bows his head as Ottavio raises his hands over them.

OTTAVIO
Quae quidem unio in nomine tuo
infernalis Satan consecrate.

Louis turns to her and smiles.

LOUIS
Now we are married in the eyes
of Satan.

Coralie coughs, spits out blood.

CORALIE
Why, Uncle?!

LOUIS
Because God refused my pleas to
save Daphne and Belle Vie. God
watched me rot. Now Satan grants
me power!

Coralie struggles to remove her veil. Louis pins her to the ground.

CORALIE
You're mad! You're mad!!!

LOUIS
No, my love. Ottavio performs
miracles. He's done it before.
All he asks is a small price for
his Master.

Coralie squirms against his weight.

LOUIS
The soul of my virgin bride.

Louis picks the dagger up from the dirt.

CORALIE
No! No!

She claws Louis across his face and grabs for the knife. He turns to Ottavio.

LOUIS
Teneat eam!

Ottavio kneels over Coralie's head, holds down her wrists. Louis raises the dagger with both hands, grins fiendishly. The basement door SLAMS with thunderous force. A breeze blows through the dank room. The candles nearly die. Louis looks around, startled. The dagger flies from his hand and skitters across the dirt.

OTTAVIO
Quid agatur?

Louis shakes his head, looks around the basement. Ottavio pulls back his hood. Coralie rolls away from them. The inverted cross around Ottavio's neck rips free and flies across the room.

OTTAVIO
Spiritus!

Ottavio runs for the door. An unseen force pins him down. Three candles float in the air, then drop onto his back. His wool robe ignites and within moments he's a screaming torch. He gets to his feet and runs for the door, but drops in a fiery heap on the wooden stairway. A blast of wind blows from behind Coralie.

FEMALE VOICE (V.O.)
(whisper)
Run, child.

Coralie gets to her feet and runs up the flaming stairway. Louis peers into a dark corner as he sees a vaporous shape forming. It coalesces into a human figure.

