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EPISODE

Clarimonde - Part 3

BY **CURT ROSEWOOD** — 2024-10-09



Adapted from an original story[1] *by* Théophile Gautier[2]

Clarimonde - Part 3: Grief

Father Ranauld could not believe his eyes. Never had he thought he would see her again, the one woman that had made such an impression on his soul with but a single glance. Yet here she was. Starved of life!

For a moment he was unable to move, his body frozen in space and time. Even at the doorstep of the afterlife her beauty remained unparalleled. A face that could only belong to an angel. The shape of her slender body barely hidden by the soft sheets covering her. Her lips standing out invitingly. Calling out without ever moving or making a sound.

As she lay there before him he started to feel like he had made all the wrong choices. Oh how he wished things could have been different. To be able to taste the pleasures of life with her. Was his calling a mistake? No! And this could not possibly be the same woman! His mind was playing tricks on him! It must be!

[1] https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22661/pg22661-images.html

[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Théophile_Gautier

With that he was finally able to break his paralysis. But even then it still felt as if he was moving in slow motion. He had a duty to perform. Even though he had been too late, he felt compelled to give this woman, whoever she was, the last rites she had asked for.

The viaticum cabinet was set off on the table to the side of the bed, the hand-tooled case created for him by an artisan in Paris and given to him by a relative. Opened, the interior was seen, lined in purple satin, it held a crucifix, a silver candle holder and white candle with an ornate silver matchbox, a small bottle of holy water and another of blessed oil, as well as the items of communion. His hands found the bottle of sacred oil and with a soft voice he started the ritual.

Per istam sanctam unctionem et suam piissimam misericordiam adiuvet te Dominus gratia Spiritus Sancti, ut a peccatis liberatum te salvet atque propitius allevet.

With a soft touch his finger traced out a cross on her forehead, painting it with the holy oil. Touching her sent a strange sensation through his body. A tingle that crept up from his finger, raced up his arm and spread through his entire body where it transformed into a warm glow that rose up into his mind.



It seemed so unfair that such beauty should die, be ripped from this world forever. Never again to brighten the day. Suddenly a great sadness overcame him. His eyes filled with tears. His voice chocked. The young priest sank to his knees beside the bed and very softly kissed the dead woman's forehead.

A kiss meant as an expression of compassion. Or perhaps that was just what he told himself, for as his lips touched her skin, that same undefinable sensation spread through him. Her allure was hypnotising. And her lips, oh those lips: so beckoning.

Father Romuald only realised what he was doing when his lips touched hers. A tender kiss. Yet a kiss that represented so much. Longing. Regret. Yes, maybe even love for a woman he did not know. There was still warmth in those deep pink lips, soft and yielding under such a soft press of flesh. They felt...

...*Alive*

For her lips parted ever so slightly in answer to his growing passion. As the blasphemous lip lock lingered, Clarimonde's chest started rising and falling in her sable coloured gown. A warmth returned to her skin. A shiver of life ran through her body. Emerald eyes opened to stare at him with longing. In shock the priest backed away, stumbling as he staggered backwards. Her voice sang:

Romuald, you came!

Father Romuald screamed! Gone was the bedchamber! Gone Clarimonde! Gone the Palace Concini, the servant, everything! He was back in his own bed. Sitting upright, drenched in cold sweat. The sheets on his bed all crumpled and

partly thrown aside to reveal the healthy body of a young man in the prime of his life. He blinked his eyes in confusion and looked around, searching for answers.

His robes hung neatly on the clothes hanger he put them on the night before. The viaticum cabinet stood untouched, exactly like he left it before going to bed. There was no sign at all he had ever left this room or had received a visitor. And yet, her taste lingered on his lips. A faint scent of tulips haunting his senses.

Had he dreamt it all? Had any of it been real?

To be continued...[3]

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[3] https://thehiddencircle.com/clarimonde-part-4/