THE HIDDEN CIRCLE GAZETTE

AN INDEPENDENT 3DXCHAT NEWS PUBLICATION.

2024-10-23 ARTICLE CLIPPING — THEHIDDENCIRCLE.COM

EPISODE

Clarimonde - Part 5

BY CURT ROSEWOOD — 2024-10-23



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

Clarimonde - Part 5: A New Life

Romuald woke to the feeling of her fingers moving through his hair, touching gently at the side of his face. His head was cradled in a lush pillow covered in silk and she looked down over him, leaning on an elbow. She was fully dressed, her hair done up in a cascade of waves, pinned and coiffed, an almost healthy look to her pale skin. The dress was a charcoal black, just like that first night. It gave her a certain pallor, the neckline constructed to show off more creamy skin than not. He had fallen asleep on one of the couches, dressed and ready to head down to the ballroom hours ago it seemed. Men would never seem to discover just what took so long for women to get ready, but here she was, crouched beside him, on her knees, her dress billowed out around her slightly.

Our guests are waiting...

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

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

The ballroom was filled with people dressed just as well and having taken just as long to get there. There was music and dancing, drinking and eating. The french doors opened to the balcony, the sheer curtains blowing on the night air. The gas lamps were lit, flickering and throwing shadows as people moved in and out of the large room, some trying to hide, others trying their best to be seen. There was tinkling laughter where a group of women sat and deep conversation where the men stood in a circle. Couples danced across the polished floors, some a little closer than convention would ultimately like, but no one said a thing about it.

They moved down the hall and the elegant curved stairs, her hand sliding over the gilded banister as she moved beside him. She smelled once more of tulips, as if the scent was simply natural for her. In her hair, on her skin, her clothing, just the lightest twinge of that soft perfume. It somehow matched the whisper of the fabric she wore, the feel of her arm linked with his.

When they entered into the ballroom, just about every set of eyes turned to greet them, to say they had seen them. There were no formal announcements, all knew whose house they were in. Couples and groups of people parted to let them through and Clarimonde acted as if she saw none of them. Her arms slid down, away from his, her hand coming to hold his as they came to the center of the floor and the music started up a hauntingly slow song, as if the instruments themselves cried.

When she turned into him, facing him, it took a moment for her eyes to look up to his. That seashell pink in her cheeks like an inner glow, as if there was a fire within her, warming her, yet her skin was cold to the touch, as if she had been out standing in that knee-deep snow. He could feel that cold contrasting against the flickering, wavering heat of the fire. The music faded softly into the background, as if he were hearing it from a mile away.

The priest, he had never learned to dance. But Romuald, this newly reborn Romuald, he danced like he had danced his entire life. Flowing with the music like a leaf flowing with the wind. There was no other but her in his universe. The music and the dance melting them together into one being, moving as if directed by a single spirit. A feeling of belonging, of finally coming home washed over him. A joy he could not put into words. He was not dancing on cold hard stone, he was dancing on a cloud. Soaring high above this mortal world with the love of his life. A love, he was now sure, he could not bear loosing. A love he would fight for. Even if it condemned his soul to burn in hell for the rest of eternity.



As the music draw to a close, he pulled her close into his embrace. Not caring about what was proper. Not even noticing the stares of her many guests. A whisper went through the crowd of spectators as the handsome young man he was lifted her up. Her arm around his neck as she lay cradled in his strong arms. She seemed like a delicate pale doll as he carried her back up those stairs. So effortlessly it seemed, as if she weighed nothing at all. His eyes never left hers as he carefully ascended the stairs. Below them the whispers finally died away as the music and the dancing recommenced.

Alone once more in that room they had first met. He gently laid her down in the very same bed he had seen her in that evening, bereft of life. But this time she was full of life. And so was he. And this life, this glorious life, they would share from now on. He leaned over her as she lay on the soft covers. His hand running over her pale cheek. He did not notice the coolness of her skin. For his was burning hot and his warmth radiated onto her, making her glow with their shared desire.

The world of the priest seemed so very far away. A distant memory of an even more distant dream. The whirlwind of conflicting feelings that had tormented his soul for so lang had dissipated. Gone was the guilt for wanting a woman. Gone was the desire to serve a god that would not be seen nor heard. All that was left was her: Clarimonde. She filled him completely. Like an intoxicating liquid pouring into him through all of his senses. How could she not be real? How could a dream bring such love to a man's heart? No, this was were he wanted to be. This was his reality now.

Every night the dream world embraced Romuald. Every night he found her there, waiting. The vividness of this new life was such it became impossible to tell which was dream. Was he really the fallen priest, dreaming of a life with Clarimonde? Or was he instead Clarimonde's lover, having nightmares of being trapped in the life of a cleric?

Night after night, the lover flourished while by day the priest wasted away. Serving mass became hard. Too hard! More and more, he just skipped the day entirely to stay in bed, waiting impatiently to return to his beloved. His appearance became unkept. His eyes shunned the light of day. Inevitably, his parishioners started to notice. Rumours started to spread, complaints were made. A letter was written to the bishop.

Finally one day a stranger showed up at his door. An older cleric in a worn out cassock. There was a strictness to his lived out face that inspired respect, if not fear. His voice was sharp and clear:

My son, I have come to take your confession! My name is father Serapion.

To be continued...[3]

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[3] https://thehiddencircle.com/clarimonde-part-6/