THE HIDDEN CIRCLE GAZETTE

AN INDEPENDENT 3DXCHAT NEWS PUBLICATION.

2024-10-30 ARTICLE CLIPPING — THEHIDDENCIRCLE.COM

EPISODE

Clarimonde - Part 6

BY **CURT ROSEWOOD** — 2024-10-30



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

Clarimonde - Part 6: Confession

Flakes of snow clung stubbornly to father Romuald's black robes as the landscape was slowly but surely being blanketed with a fresh layer of winter. The young priest was barely aware of the cold as his mind was plunged deep into thought. A withered tulip lay at the foot of a modest grave. He looked down upon the plain wooden cross that barely stood out amongst the trees. *Father Antoine* it said, in simple lettering. The unkept grave looked desolate and forgotten. Weeds crawled over it left and right. Romuald looked questioningly at father Serapion who stood unmoving, a look of contempt on the sharp lines of his face. Without facing the young priest he simply explained:

Your predecessor!

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

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

Of course, the previous parish priest! Romuald heard he had passed away. Some illness they said. A young man, such an unfortunate tragedy. But what did this have to do with him? The tulip! What was it about that tulip? A feeling of unease came over Romuald, he stammered:

How?

Father Serapion kept facing the grave. His face was a map of wrinkles, etched by the weight of years and the burden of his duties. His skin was pale and translucent, like parchment stretched too thin. The old man's hands, clasped together in front of him, were skeletal and veined. A few strands of silver hair, blown by the wind, clung to his balding head, giving him a faintly spectral appearance. As he spoke again, obvious disdain spilled into his voice:

He forgot himself! Shut himself into his room for days. Did not eat. Did not drink. Just wasted away. He lost his soul to the devil, my son. To the devil!

Serapion's piercing eyes turned to Romuald and with an accusing edge to his words he continued:

As will you!

Romuald staggered back. No! What did this mean? What was that old fool talking about?

Still not granting him one single glance, the aged priest handed Romuald an object he had kept hidden in his pocket. It was a wallet, made from high-quality, supple leather that had been carefully crafted to provide a sleek and slim profile. On the front of the wallet, proudly displayed in the center, was a beautifully etched letter "A" in gold.

A for Antoine?

With trembling fingers Romuald opened the worn bifold. It contained half a dozen yellowing leaves of paper, covered back to front in drawings. Feverish charcoal lines forming the delicate shape of a woman in different poses and bereft of any clothes. The lines that defined her form were bold and expressive, with varying degrees of pressure and texture used to convey the subtleties of her anatomy. There was a sensuality to these flowing curves that was an outright blasphemy, especially considering who had drawn these expressions of sin. Only few of the sketches had her face clearly depicted. Yet this face Romuald knew so well even the sparse charcoal lines could not disguise it. Clarimonde!

Romuald stared at the unmistakable depiction of the woman that haunted his dreams. "No!" It was almost a plea. He should have been perplexed that his obsession had been drawn by his dead predecessor. He should have come to the conclusion that there was more to this than just dreams. He should have realised he was out of his dept. But instead his mind was filled with only one thing, so blinding and painful it banished any other thought: *jealousy*!

It hit him like a wall. It was so plain to see on these pages: she had belonged to another! Another had touched her. Loved her. The thought of another man owning Clarimonde's heart pulled a red veil of anger over his eyes. The fact the man was deceased barely even registered. Had she longed for him? Had he been a *better* lover? How many others had there been? A knot formed in his stomach. The world started to spin. He suddenly felt sick and weak to the knees.

And what about father Serapion? How did he know? Who was he? Romuald searched for answers in the eyes of the old man but they were grey and cold, without compassion. A true believer and uncompromising inquisitor. The kind of man they would send to deal with the supernatural.

Dead! His predecessor was dead! His soul lost. It finally sank in. A shiver ran down Romuald's spine as he realised nothing would ever be the same again. His rage dissipated, sadness came in its place as he heard himself say:

I am ready now, for my confession.

To be continued...[3]

[3] https://thehiddencircle.com/clarimonde-part-7/

