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DORIS.

Below sounded the quick tinkle of the electric bell.

Doris turned half round, dropping the clasp still unfastened. The winding bracelet of strung pearls writhed slowly from her slender wrist. A tremulous, uncertain flush rested on her cheek. Her lips were parted by the nervous breath, and her bare white shoulders seemed all a-tremble. The lace of her black stikken gown fluttered faintly over her heart. She stood leaning a little forward, her hand a little raised, her eager, fearful eyes gazing toward the door.

A maid entered, holding in her hand a white box.

"For madame," she said, peering curiously at her mistress through her drooping lashes.

"There," said Doris, pointing to a couch by the lace-veiled window.

The maid placed the box where bidden and Doris waved her out. She went slowly, still peering curiously at her mistress.

Doris sat down upon the couch beside the box. Twice she touched it with trembling fingers. A third time she laid aside the lid and parted an inner covering of gauzy papers. Four white lilies lay within. She held one unsteadily to the light. It was white, pure white, but now the rays of the setting sun streaming through showed it mottled with pale leprous splotches, white, too, but with the whiteness of death.

She sank low in the cushions of the couch, and there lay while the dusk deepened into night.

When she arose, at last, her face was the hue of her lilies. But she was quite calm and steady now. And on her lips hung quivering a smile.

She paused before her glass and in her hair fastened one of the white lilies and on her bosom three. Around her wrist once more she wound the bracelet of strung pearls. It was all the jewel she wore.

In quaint cosmetic cups she dipped the freathery brush and lightly flushed her pallid cheeks and touched her ashen lips with rouge. Doris was a dainty artist. None would know her painting to be other than nature's own.

She went below.

In the drawing room a black-eyed man sipped red wine. He smiled—or was it a smile?—when she entered.

"Ah! Madame would attend the ball. Eh?"

Doris was silent.

"Come! Madame would dance. Come! Madame shall dance. She shall dance with the devil. Ha!"

He rang the bell sharply and the maid entered.

"You shall play the waltz, Mademoiselle Nannette," he said to her, "the quick waltz. Madame would dance. She shall dance!"

The girl went to the piano-forte and started a wild waltz, her dark eyes flashing first a light of triumph at her mistress.

The man seized Doris and dragged her into the waltz. She did not resist, scarce seemed to notice, though it was of a truth a devil's dance. Her partner pressed her close. He thrust his dark face full to hers. To his nostrils rose the perfume of the lilies.

Suddenly he threw her from him so that she sank to her knees.

"Diable! It is enough! You are dead. Even the devil must have a live partner. Eh, Nannette?"

He patted the maid on the cheek, cheek. Then twice he drained the wine glass.

"To the ball, madame! Go! I will have here my ball. Victor St. Hilaire.

Henri Faurot, la petite Aimee—all! And Nannette here. A merry crew of devils. Eh, madame? Go!"

He opened the door and motioned Doris to go. He bowed low as she passed.

• • •

How long was she lost in the mazy fantasma of the dance? She could not have told. Doris loved to dance. And tonight all was so beautiful; the silver lights, the fluttering silken dresses and flashing white shoulders, the sweet, sweet music—all so beautiful! Doris had floated in a dreamy splendor, forgetting all. Now she rested on a screened settee. Her face was bright, with the inner rouge; her eyes had lost all their pain; her smile was happy and gay.

On the outer side of the screen a woman was sitting alone. Doris watched her curiously from her concealment.

"Why will women try to seem young when they are so old?" she thought. "She must be at least forty. And so much paint and powder and falseness! Ugh!"

A man stepped up to the woman. His head was bald save for a priest-like fringe of gray hair. His bristling moustache defied all waxing.

"May I rest with you?" he asked.

She pouted grotesquely. "I hoped you would ask me to dance," she said.

"I have danced myself out for the present. You see, we are not so young as we once were," he returned with a malicious grimace. Then he added: "But I do believe there was more in that last dance than mere fatigue of age. It has stupified me. I danced with Madame d'Auman, and I'd swear she has absorbed some of her husband's devilish power."

The color faded from Doris' face. She remembered.

"Did you notice how she dressed—and what strange lilies?" the woman asked.

"But you should smell them. Their odor . . . But look! There comes Paul Landis wearing one of the same kind. Is it not strange?"

"Very strange," she returned with a significant raise of the eyebrows. So Paul Landis and Madame Doris wear the same flower. But how pale he is!"

Doris had started when the name was mentioned. She saw coming straight toward the screen a tall, young man whose curly yellow hair hung disordered over his pale brow. As he passed beneath a chandelier she saw in the center of his white shirt bosom a glitter of red as from a ruby stud. He came directly behind the screen and stopped before her. Doris half rose. The man and woman on the other side turned quickly.

"Come, let us dance," said the man, as they hastily rose to leave.

Doris looked up into the white face before her. Then her eye once more fell upon the tiny red spot on his shirt bosom. Her breath came quick.

"He is—"

"Dead."

They gazed into each other's eyes. Doris laid her trembling fingers on the lilies over her heart. Through quivering lips she asked:

"We, too?"

"It is the only way," he answered.

She sank back on the settee. Her eyes wandered to the screen that cut her off from the gay fantasma of the dance—cut her off, forever!

After a time she turned again to the young man bending over her. A firm, sad smile rested on her lips.

"I am ready—love," she said.

He kissed her softly, there behind the screen. Then hand in hand they passed out into the night.

The moon shone pure and clear. It wrapped in soft, still radiance all the slumbrous earth. Softest and tenderest

lay its silvery light on the fragrant garden into which they came. Slowly they wandered on amongst the sweet flowers on to the bank of the flowing river. The lights of the house waned as the distance grew; the music came fainter and sweeter. Very slowly they followed the flower-bordered pathway—she resting on his arm—very slowly, as though loath to go.

At the river bank a shell-like boat was moored amid the reeds and water lilies. He helped her gently to its cushioned seat. He loosed the moorings and stepped in beside her. The boat drifted slowly through the tangled stems and flowers into the silent river.

Side by side they half reclined pillowed by the cushions of their fairy craft. The lilies all were bunched upon her breast. They bent and breathed their tropic fragrance—so sweet, so rich! A dreamy stupor stole the senses of the two. They vaguely felt the onward gliding of the boat; vaguely heard the murmur of the distant sea; vaguely knew that on them lay the moonlight, cold and pure.

Fainter to their nostrils rose the odor of the lilies. Fainter in their ears rang the music of the sea. Fainter, ever fainter, breathed their parted lips. Yet even in their latest dream they knew they rested heart to heart.

The moon sank low. Its weird light waned. The gloom of night wrapped all in mystic veil. And in the falling shadow silently faded the boat. The river bore it on, out to the sounding sea.

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