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### THE NIGHTMARE ROOM

It was a luxurious room, large and furnished with utmost thought of expense and dark beauty. It was dark mysterious, terrible! From ceiling to floor it was twenty feet. Parallel walls circled this room, and around the walls a high gallery ran. Expensive tapestries hung from this gallery. Below there was scant furnishing, but so luxuriously dark and foreboding looking that a feeling of dread seemed to grip you as you entered. A ten-foot brownstone fire-place reared itself at the north end of the room. Two heavy candle sticks and a heavily framed picture of the master of the house adorned it. A huge fire flamed on the hearth and ast weird shadows around. Two long, heavy couches, a massive table with its dark shaded lamp and oddly contrasting vases of beautiful hot house products, a few heavy chairs and a dark rug of Persian-make upon which no footfall could be heard and one bronze statue constituted this sinister room.

The small, slight figure reclining on the couch before the log fire, contrasted greatly with its surroundings. Cecilia Bedford, for it was she who lay there, was one of the most beautiful and most talented women in Paris just two years ago! Two years! This last year had seemed like a century. The first had been perfect happiness. She had given up her career as the most popular dancer in gay Paree to marry George Bedford, the coal mine king. How she had loved him! But to go back to Cecilia in the nightmare room, that is what it was—a Nightmare Room—it was too terrible looking, and yet too wonderful to be true. At first sight Cecilia was the most beautiful woman imaginable—great, dark eyes; long curling lashes, straight black brows, low forehead and lips made to be as red as blood and perfectly shaped. Oval cheeks tinted to the exact right shade of pink and a mass of curling black hair. She was dressed in black with only a string of magnificent pearls around her neck and falling below her waist.

She toyed with these now and then, and could you have seen her with that look of thought on her lovely face you, too, would have fallen in love with her just as George Bedford had. But on close examination there could be seen a look, sinister and serpent-like in her eyes and a smile of hate and scheming on her lips. At this observation you would shiver. She was just like the room, dark, beautiful, terrible!

The door opened and a man stood there looking in at the scene just described. At sight of the woman his face softened, then, as if on second thought, it hardened to amazement and anger. A second look and all changed to just—hurt. Silently closing the door George Bedford crossed over to the side of his young wife. Cecilia looked up and gave a slight smile; slowly rising she started to speak softly as she always did, but he silenced her with a gesture of command—a gesture unknown to pampered Mrs. Bedford. She looked up, startled, amazed, yet innocently. She smiled, but no answering smile or loving word as usual came from grim-faced Bedford. In his hand he held a glass bottle and a crumpled piece of paper.

"Why did you do it?" was all he said.

"How did I do what?" innocently enough from Cecilia.

"Why did you do it? Oh, how could you?" he asked again as though he could think of only one thing, and as if he were alone, talking to himself. He was hardly aware of her presence.

She gave an impatient shrug of her shoulders and walked over to the fire-place where she stood gazing down into the blazing fire. "My dear boy," she said a little too smoothly, considering the seriousness of the situation, "You must be more explicit."

"Why did you do this?" he expostulated angrily; aware at last that she was either serenely unconscious of the knowledge of the crumpled paper or a very good actress. He held the bottle and paper in front of him and walked over to her side.

The door opened again noiselessly, a low voice said, "My friends, what is the trouble?" It was Dr. Ralph Durant, best friend and physician of the Bedford family. He was a tall, grey-eyed man of thirty. Though he addressed both his eyes rested on Mrs. Bedford, and from her eyes to his silent message was conveyed. He understood.

"You!" cried Bedford. "You cur! You, who have been masquerading as my friend and confidant, you whom I have loved. You have betrayed my confidence!"

"What do you mean, George?" cried poor Cecilia.

"I mean, and you know it, that you deliberately tried to poison me so you could marry Ralph Durant. If I hadn't quite by accident found this tiny piece of paper, I probably would have complied with your wishes and have drunk it, but fate, it seems, decreed that I stay on this old earth a little longer," he concluded sarcastically.

Cecilia put up her trembling hands to her face and wept silently. Ralph Durant walked to the window. Bedford stood looking into space. Ruined! All hope gone. And all in this nightmare room! He had always hated it, but Cecilia wanted "a retreat," as she called it and, of course, she had her way.

The bottle and paper fell unnoticed to the floor and Bedford sat down, plunging his face in his hands. Minutes passed. Not a sound was heard. Durant turned. Cecilia wiped her eyes with a bit of lawn and lace and went over to Bedford.

"Dear," she began. He thrust her away, rose and walked swiftly to the door, turning quickly he faced them—white faced but determined. In his hand he grasped a revolver. Cecilia screamed and ran to him, but he did not waver or take his eyes from Durant who also held an automatic.

Suddenly they all became aware of the presence of another person. He had been walking quietly around, creeping in and out, but now faced them. "Eyes blazing," he cried, "the act is a failure! Do it over again. A little more emotion at the last, Gloria. Camera!"—High Life (Greensboro High School.)

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