F. J. Bergmann - Half-Mourning

A white peacock perched on the edge of a fountain, from which wine sprayed and scattered in the wind like threads of red floss. The woman in lavender-grey silk approached cautiously, offering soft, fallen fruit from the trees that overhung the sepulcher’s basalt angels. As soon as she touched the bird’s observant tail, her hands twisted away and became wings that tore open the sleeves of her light gown. Her new plumage was moonlight-colored, like her hair.

She opened her wings, and the shrinking sun lit the translucent pinions, turning their edges to milky flame. The wings were crooked, too small to bear her aloft. Beyond the topiary hedges she could hear stragglers hurrying toward the gates as the closing bell tolled, laughing softly and exchanging a few last kisses, invisible to her as she to them. As night fell like a black hood, she lifted her wings to mask her face as she moved between the massifs of flowers heaped at the base of each crypt, peering intently through her opalescent feathers.

When she found the hidden staircase, she hesitated for only a moment before descending. Her dull dress trailed in the dead leaves. At the foot of the stairs, she inspected the mechanism of the lock and looked for a long time through the keyhole at the innumerable stars far below. That kind of magic had always been a mystery to her.

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