

## **Mandy French**

### **The Black Lily – Chapter 1**

The room was small, made smaller by all of the people that occupied it. Cigar smoke mixed with the smells of liquor, perfume, and sex in the air. Each wall had a couch, and every couch was occupied by lovers coupling, sometimes in groups as large as three and four. Dark, heavy drapes covered the windows, so as not to give a free show to any passersby outside, and low burning candles reflected off of the soft, exposed breasts and thighs of the women. Laughter and music could be heard from inside, so all who passed the building knew what kind of place it was.

Outside a lone figure crouched on the roof of a house across the street from the building. The figure did not move, and none who passed by on the nearly deserted street noticed it, clad as it was from head to toe in dark blue to blend in with the night. It waited for some signal known only to it, and when it saw it, it sprang forward, moving across the slanted the roof like water. Candlelight from a lamppost stretched out its fingers, barely brushing the figure's exposed face, and briefly revealing it to be that of a young woman's before she evaded the light once more and faded into darkness. The buildings here were closely packed and the streets narrow, making it easy for her to leap from one to another, until finally she came to a shop, a few buildings down from the brothel, that reached its eaves far enough over the street for her to leap from it and land on the rooftop on the opposite side of the street. She began to traverse her way back to the brothel, and when she was on top of it, she slid down the steep slant of the roof, stopping just as her feet hit the thick round drainpipe that ran across it. Staying crouched, she grabbed onto the drainpipe and dropped her body lightly to the window below it, her softly slipped feet coming to rest on its ledge.

This window, too, was covered in a thick curtain, and peeking through the sliver where the drawn curtains met, she gazed into the room unnoticed. Her eyes took in the large bed, the centerpiece of the room. There was little furniture otherwise: a small loveseat scattered with pillows and a makeup table for the women to prepare themselves at. At the far end of the room there

was a door that led to the watercloset, where the men and women could refresh themselves afterward.

The bed was covered in tapestries that hung from its four posts as well as a stained comforter that seemed to be of no use besides decoration and soaking up the spilled seed of the men who visited. This man was a regular. From the golden trim of his jacket hung across the couch to the neat lines of the pants which were now becoming quite wrinkled in his furious activity, he was clearly a nobleman of some standing. And as with most noblemen, he had a taste for the more devious, as the whore who lay under him could be no more than fifteen years to the day. She moaned softly for him, fakely, and looked off into the distance, pretending she wasn't there as he pounded into her again and again. He didn't last long before he was spent and collapsed his full weight on top of her, sweating and breathing heavily, before getting up out of the bed.

"Leaving already, m'lord?" she asked, not bothering to move herself. She had been trained to keep the men as long as she could, they charged by the minute, whether she wanted him to copulate again with her or not. She reached out a hand to him, but he shoved it away and walked over to the lavatory. There was the sound of him cleaning himself off and pulling up his pants, then, silence.

He came running back into the room seconds later, fury in his eyes. He held a flower in his tightly-clenched hand, a lily dyed black. "What is the meaning of this?" he roared at the girl, who now looked quite frightened.

"I don't know! I don't know, it was just sent to me today, I thought it was pretty so I put it in the vase!"

"Foolish whore!" he yelled, striking her across the face. The girl began to cry and gathered up her clothes around her naked body, running out of the room with a slam of the door.

He crushed the flower in his hand before throwing it to the ground, stomping on it. It was not the first he had received in the past few days, and it clearly frightened him. He quickly began to gather up his clothes and redress before heading for the same door. But as he reached for the doorknob he heard a whistling, and then a knife slammed into it just above his hand.

The nobleman stared at it in shock, unmoving. The woman hopped down from the window ledge, the curtains fluttering around her small body.

“Leaving already, m’lord?” she mimicked in a high pitched voice, and he turned, staring at her through slanted eyes.

“I’ll scream,” he warned her quickly.

Her light-hearted laughter filled the room. “You’re in a brothel. No one will notice you scream. I’m guessing from your expression and your wild attempt to escape, that you already know who I am and why I’m here.”

He looked her up and down slowly, his mouth forming a grim line and his back straightening, and replied, “I know who you are, though you’re certainly not what I expected. As to why you’re here...I have many enemies, it is only a matter of whom I upset this time to have them send an assassin after me.”

She smiled. “I thank you for the compliment, my lord, and as for the whom, you should look no further than your only surviving descendent.”

“Rebeckah?” he muttered in disbelief.

“Yes, your one and only daughter. Though I can understand her desire for patricide. Any girl would want vengeance on the man who burned her brother and his wife alive in his home.”

“It was my home, actually, and he should have known better than to offend me by running off and marrying a commoner.”

“Yes, terrible thing that, him marrying. Perfectly good reason to kill someone.” She eyed him predatorily. “I tire of our banter. Shall we get on with it then?”

He did not offer a reply, but instead turned towards the door and grabbed the hilt of the knife. After a few tugs he managed to free it and turn towards her, wielding his only weapon. “If they would let my guards in here, you would be dead by now.”

She pouted. “Oh my lord, it saddens me that you think so little of me.” The woman smiled. “You came here to play, so, let us play.”

And without further warning she leapt at him like a cat at its prey. He responded, slashing the knife at her midsection, but she dodged it easily before taking hold of his wrist and disarming him. With his arm bent behind his back and his wrist burning with pain, he found himself nose to the floor, the woman on top of him. “How shall we do it, my lord? If you are nice to me, I’ll make it quick and clean, and you’re wife and child will only have to gaze upon you in your coffin with a broken neck.”

“Damn you to every level of hell! I should see you hanging from the gallows like your friend Robert.”

She glared at him, her lips curling back. Rage filled her eyes, but she reigned it in. “Just for that, I’ll make you suffer.” The woman leaned in to him, her lips at his ear. “Tell me, *my lord*, have you ever heard the old adage, ‘Don’t cut off your nose to spite your face’?”

The cheerful music and laughter of the whores and their customers was interrupted by an ear-piercing shriek. The door to the room burst open and a man stumbled inside, his face and shirt covered in dark red blood that gushed out onto the floor, splattering a few of those who were unfortunate enough to be near him. Through the blood they could see a gaping hole in the center of his face where his nose should be. He seemed to be trying to speak as he grabbed at his face, screaming in pain, but none could make out his words. Moments later, he collapsed to the floor, dead.

They found a curious flower clenched in one of his hands. By the morning, rumors had spread throughout the city. The Black Lily had struck again.