

## THE YOUNG VAMPIRE

### I.

“There is some truth in all persistent beliefs,” said Jacques Le Marquand. “I mean beliefs that relate to precise and oft-repeated facts.”

“Such as witchcraft...”

“As a whole, I deny that, because it includes too many imprecise facts, and also because it varies immoderately—but modern science uses many practices similar to those of sorcerers and witches; consequently, it’s ridiculous to deny that witchcraft rests, at least partially, on an experimental basis. I don’t insist on that, because I’ve only studied the matter superficially—but what would you say if I were to affirm the existence of a phenomenon akin to vampirism?”

“Science doesn’t deny it!” exclaimed Charmel, mischievously. “It merely transposes it from human beings to a species of bat...”

Jacques Le Marquand shrugged his shoulders and continued: “I knew a vampire once...in the district of Islington, in London, between 1902 and 1905—and I learned recently that she is still alive. What’s more, she’s married; she even has four children.”

“Who will be little vampires!” Charmel interjected, gravely.

“Vampirism doesn’t seem to be hereditary,” Le Marquand riposted, with even more gravity.

The young person of whom I speak was the third daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Grovedale, and she was distinguished from her sisters because she was much prettier. At the time that I knew her, she was even fantastically pretty. What I mean by that is that she combined her beauty with something extraordinary—I should say supernatural. To begin with, her face was exactly as white as that sheet of paper—which ought to have rendered her a trifle alarming, but, for one reason or another, didn’t make her alarming at all. On the contrary, she was, as our neighbors say, *fascinating*. Evidently, her eyes, hair and mouth compensated for the excessive pallor of her skin. I don’t know which was most tempting: the bush of flames that grew from her skull; her pathetic eyes, immense and avid; or her lips, as red as a *Canna* flower.

She hadn’t been as pale as that for long—a little more than five years. Her mother explained that she had died—*literally* died. Two doctors had certified her death. In accordance with English custom, the cadaver was preserved for some time. On the third day, it began to decompose—which didn’t prevent the fact that on the morning of the fourth day, Evelyn Grovedale revived. She presented particularities that were interesting to scientists and disquieting for those around her. Her memory was greatly disordered; she only spoke at infrequent intervals and in an incoherent manner; she showed no affection for her family. Although her intelligence was co-ordinated, one might have thought that Evelyn was two people. With respect to the present and events that followed her death she spoke in the first person; with respect to earlier events, she made reference to an indecisive personality. Furthermore, her memory only seemed to serve to guide her through life, not for any return to her past self. When she decided to grant caresses to her relatives, she did so ardently, but in a bizarre fashion.

With time, she reverted almost to normality. After some hesitation, rebellion and fear, she seemed to *accept* the story of her past, as one accepts rules of conduct or as one adopts a belief.

This is the moment to mention an abnormal phenomenon that occurred shortly after her resurrection. Father and Mother Grovedale, the two daughters and the little boy, who all had florid complexions, became paler, and languished to various degrees. Her father was the worst afflicted. Her mother simply seemed tired, as did her older sister, Harriet. As for the younger daughter, Aurora, she seemed to be afflicted with chlorosis, and little Jack seemed incapable of following his lessons at school or doing his chores in the house; he was always drowsy and slept 19 hours out of 24.

The Grovedales, being unimaginative folk, made few conjectures; the family doctor manifested some surprise, but limited himself to giving various names to the epidemic of pallor and administering an assortment of pills and potions.

In the spring, all the symptoms eased. The mother and Harriet became almost vigorous again; Aurora recovered her strength; and young Jack, without succeeding in studying, slept no more than 15 hours out of 24. This coincided with the persistent presence of one James Bluewinkle, a young man built like a wrestler, who conceived an inordinate passion for Evelyn. The Bluewinkles and the Grovedales yielded promptly to the solicitations of the lovers; they were married before the end of April. They took a “trip” to the continent and came back to take up residence in London.

Following Evelyn’s departure, the amelioration observed among the Grovedales was rapidly augmented. Everyone, in fact, recovered—even the child, whose ration of sleep declined to ten hours. On the other hand, James Bluewinkle acquired a “pale complexion.” Endowed with the stomach of a lion, he consumed pounds of rump steak, leg of lamb, chicken or goose every day, but his vitality weakened. A succession of physicians failed to discover any cause. In the end, a homeopath had a vague intuition and prescribed a rest cure in isolation in a sanitarium in Ipswich.

The effects of this cure proved prodigious. James Bluewinkle recovered his strength. By way of compensation, Evelyn sickened and became anemic. After a few days, she sought refuge with her family—with her grandmother, since Harriet and her mother felt “uncomfortable.” Aurora and the boy began to go pale again.

In their innocence, they continued not to understand it at all. They scarcely felt the slight astonishment that one feels when confronted with insignificant coincidences when, on James Bluewinkle’s return, their illness vanished as if by enchantment.

You might expect that the husband would now fall back into languor, and you would not be mistaken. A month after his return from the sanitarium, he had become weak and pale again. Less candid than the Grovedales, he conceived anxieties—almost suspicions—and began to study his wife.

She led a methodical life. Her tastes were simple. She spent little; she dressed elegantly but without ostentation; she ate sparingly. On the other hand, James fulfilled his various conjugal duties fervently, but without any of those exaggerations that can sap a man’s energy—especially a strong man. Nevertheless, it seemed that after Evelyn’s kisses—and I mean simple kisses—he was gripped by a kind of torpor. Then, without his quite knowing how, an idea occurred to him that might well have been an *instinctive memory*.

One evening, without his wife’s knowledge, he drank two cups of exceedingly strong coffee, in order to resist the lethargic somnolence that overtook him every night, and pretended to go to sleep, as usual. For a long time, nothing abnormal occurred. 11 p.m., midnight and 1 a.m. chimed successively.

Finally, Evelyn’s respiration, regular until then, accelerated. At first, the young woman remained motionless; then she sat up very slowly. Bluewinkle sensed that she leaned over

him. Two warm and silky lips made contact with his neck. It was a strange sensation, voluptuous and disturbing at the same time. The lips aspired something, with infinite gentleness. Gradually, he felt himself growing weaker. An irresistible numbness overwhelmed his consciousness. He knew that if he waited another minute, he would fall into a leaden sleep, in spite of the stimulus of the coffee. With a limp gesture, he pushed Evelyn's head away, and his throat taut with anguish, exclaimed: "Vile creature!"

A sob burst forth in the darkness, and when he switched on the electric lamp he saw Evelyn, prostrate on the bed, trembling in every limb.

"Vile creature!" he repeated. "What have I done to you, that you should kill me?"

Their eyes met. The young woman's pupils were quivering; her entire face expressed a mysterious terror. As if in a dream, she replied: "I can't do otherwise...I'd *die!*"

Suddenly, Bluewinkle had an inspiration—one of those inspirations that come from the utmost depths of being and are born of extraordinary contacts. He became certain that Evelyn Grovedale was a vampire.

We sat in silence for a minute, under the spell of a mystical *aura*. Then Charmel slowly shrugged his shoulders.

"What does that certainty prove?" he asked.

"I'll tell you tomorrow," Jacques Le Marquand replied, after consulting his watch.

## II.

The next day, Jacques Le Marquand continued his story in these terms.

The sentiment that initially overcame Bluewinkle was one of horror and dread. Soon, though, Evelyn's tears moved him, for he had a tender heart and she seemed charming in the luminous disorder of her hair.

"It's an aberration!" he said. "You wouldn't die at all!"

"I'd die," she repeated, in a profound tone.

He sensed that she was perfectly sincere, and became thoughtful again. His conviction remained firm: Evelyn really was a vampire, but in a manner somewhat different from that related by tradition. James, who was something of a philosopher, knew that traditions embody elements of symbolism and legend. In this instance, it was not necessary to believe in vampires emerging from their tombs; that was the contribution of the spirit of the macabre and popular puerility. One could believe, on the other hand, in some organic oddity, followed by apparent death—which was strictly applicable to Evelyn's case. Not only had she been taken for dead, but her metamorphosis revealed itself by an excessive pallor and by the disturbance of her mind.

"The proof that you wouldn't die," he resumed, "is that you've spent the greater part of your existence quite innocently."

"My existence!" she murmured, in a grim tone. "Was it really *my* existence?"

That question did not entirely surprise Bluewinkle; he knew that the young woman's memory exhibited singular features. Nevertheless, his attention was more excited than usual: Evelyn had never been as precise.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you suppose that the Evelyn Grovedale of old and the present one are not the same person?"

She did not answer immediately. Her lips were trembling. She looked up at James with a gaze full of supplication and suspicion. Finally, as if carried away by an irresistible impulse, she whispered: "They are two different people!"

Her tone frightened the young man. He paused momentarily, as if bewildered, then said, hoarsely: "Then what? The old Evelyn Grovedale would be *really dead*...and the one that I have before me...where did she come from? It's the same body, though!"

"Yes, the same body...but *only* the same body."

"Try to explain yourself clearly!" he exclaimed, with a convulsive agitation. "The same body...and another soul?"

"Another *being*."

"The terminology isn't important. There would be a stranger living in the body of Evelyn Grovedale...a stranger incarnate therein."

"I don't know."

"How can you not know? Since you're sure of not being Evelyn, you must be the being incarnate in her body."

She shook her head, meditative and melancholy. "I can't answer you. I don't have the words to say what I'd need to say. I only know that the memories I find in this body—the memories of *before my arrival*—aren't mine. Yes, I know that..."

"How? Do you have other memories that contradict Evelyn's?"

"I have other memories."

"Of what?"

"I tell you that I don't have the words to explain them...and this brain has no images to enable me to recall my own past. They're memories of another world! They're there, apart...oh, how I sense them!—but I can't reach them."

"At any rate," said Bluewinkle, in despair, "you have a memory of the moment when you *invaded* Evelyn's body."

"I don't have any!"

James got up, and, having regained some strength with the aid of a cordial, sat down by the young woman's beside, successively enfevered by certainty and reassured by doubt. As is only natural, he sometimes wondered whether Evelyn might be mad—but if madness could explain her words and actions, it could not begin to explain the very real effect manifest upon himself.

"Explain to me," he said, fervently, "how you lived, after your death, until the moment when you met me."

"I lived on them!" she confessed. "And during your absence, as well."

With a long shudder, he remembered little Jack's pallor, and that of young Aurora.

"Then, if I hadn't come along, you would have killed those poor children!"

"No," she said, swiftly. "When one of them became too exhausted, I switched to the other. I'm not wicked...I'm unfortunate...I struggle against myself...I know that I'm doing wrong...but I also know that I'm in constant danger of death, and the temptation becomes irresistible..."

She spoke with a humble and coaxing grace, which touched Bluewinkle profoundly. He studied those eyes in which such a passionate flame burned, and said to himself: *That's not a wicked creature!* Then, seized by an ardent and somber curiosity, he said: "But what is it that you take from us?"

She looked away, hiding her face in the pillow; nevertheless, he heard her sway: "Your blood!"

He had half-expected that reply. In consequence, he was only slightly shocked, and he went to examine the place where Evelyn had set her lips in a mirror; he saw nothing but a

faint—very faint—pink patch. “That’s impossible!” he declared. “Blood doesn’t filter through the skin like that...”

“Do you think so?” she said.

He postponed the problem until later and retorted: “Then again, you hardly eat anything. If you ate, you could give up this horrible thing.”

“I can’t eat much. Beyond a certain quantity, *your* nourishment poisons me.”

“How did you come by the idea of absorbing blood?”

“It seems that I’ve always had it. I only have to place my lips on the skin. Straight away...”

She concluded with a gesture, and sighed. He no longer knew what to believe. Ideas were whirling in his head like dead leaves in a forest. As he had interrogated Evelyn, he had become accustomed to the fantastic, and no longer had a precise view of the limits that separated it from quotidian reality. There was also the darkness, the cordial, that strange and dazzling creature...he was living in a dream.

“You know that you’re doing wrong. Are you repentant?”

“I have great regrets.”

“So you love Evelyn’s parents, sisters and brother?”

“I didn’t love them at first...affection came afterwards.”

“And me?”

“Oh! You...very much!”

He felt moved. Evelyn’s seductiveness reappeared in its entirety.

“Do you consider me to be a member of your species?”

“Yes,” she said, passionately. “*Wherever I come from*, I belong to *humankind*. I know that I’m a stranger in this world, but I also know that I’m a woman—and I love my new life...especially because I live with you...”

In the state of excitement in which Bluewinkle now found himself, which was comparable both to the intoxication of alcohol and that of opium, there was almost no room for astonishment. The Beyond seemed to him to be very simple, the supernatural intricately confused with the natural.

“You don’t miss your other life?” he asked.

She shivered from head to toe; then, in a striking tone, she said: “I’m afraid of my other life! I sense that I underwent an adventure so terrifying *there*...that my soul was *obliged to depart*. It’s inexpressible, and frightful. And what does it matter, since I love you?”

She had pronounced the last words in a voice so pure, tender and human, she was so beautiful, and her beauty so intoxicating, that James could no longer see anything but an adored wife. He seized Evelyn’s head; their lips sought one another in an avid kiss.

At first it was delirious; everything was erased by an immense love...then, the strange weakness that Bluewinkle knew only too well took possession of his flesh and his mind; he felt faint. He only just had time to extract himself from the embrace.

Then he saw, distinctly, a moist redness overflowing the gap between Evelyn’s lips, and red trickles on her silvery teeth.

“Blood!” he cried. “*My blood!*”

Evelyn uttered a long moan.