

The following story takes place during the month of January 1941. The Nyctalope does not seem to be particularly bothered by the German Occupation. At that time, it was possible to legally cross the demarcation line between Occupied France in the North and Vichy France in the south only by obtaining an Ausweis (identity card) or a Passierschein (pass) from the Nazi occupation authorities after completing a certain number of formalities. This was quite difficult and even the ministers of the Petain regime had no permanent passes—only Pierre Laval, the Head of the Vichy Government, had this privilege. Yet, as indicated at the start of Chapter IV, Leo has all the necessary papers with him, which leaves one to wonder about his position during those dark times...

Jean de La Hire: *Night of the Nyctalope*

Chapter I
Attraction and Foreboding

Madeleine d'Evires dropped the newspaper onto her knees. She had been staring at the same two lines for several minutes while her mind wandered.

She continued to daydream a while longer, giving her gold-speckled, green eyes a soulful expression, one that was much more profound than usual. In fact, more than ever, the young woman showed nothing in her beautiful eyes, except youth, intelligence and a real *joie de vivre*.

"How strange," she said. "I feel like going to the next gala at the Palais de Chaillot!"

"No!" exclaimed Madame d'Evires, pushing her glasses up on her nose and staring directly at her daughter.

When there was no response, she continued: "You? You hate crowds! It's a charity performance, you know. Imagine it, that huge theater, full of endless corridors, staircases and concert halls will be dark and swarming with people. Think what it will be like when..."

"Yes, Mother, yes, I can well imagine it. And that's precisely what's so strange. Despite my hatred of crowds, as you just pointed out, I feel suddenly possessed, attracted and compelled by some mysterious desire to go. It's bizarre, but it's becoming stronger by the minute. Yes, I feel a profound and almost painful desire to go to this gala..."

"Painful?" exclaimed Madame d'Evires, suddenly frightened.

"And also, if you can understand, Mother, also, almost... sensual."

"Sensual? Are you mad, Madeleine?"

"No, Mother, because I see it all very clearly and I'm able to analyze it perfectly well," responded Madeleine in a calm, firm voice. "I'm perfectly logical, as you can't help but proudly brag about to all our friends, Mother. And it's precisely because I am logical that I can clearly see within myself. My whole being, body and soul, is irresistibly pulled and attracted to this gala, even though my reason and tastes have always been diametrically opposed to events of this type. Not only are they crowded, but also the variety of acts is usually disappointing, and even boring, to many of the attendees..."

"Well then?" said Madame d'Evires.

"Well then, Mother... I don't want to go, but I feel and predict and even know that I will! How odd it is... Why do I feel this compulsion?"

"What do you want me to say, my dear? Let me think about it."

Madame d'Evires smiled. In the warm, cozy room, there was once again silence. The mother had gone back to her knitting, and the daughter to her vague reverie, interrupted only by moments of lucid introspection.

The gala at the Palais de Chaillot was scheduled for the following day, Saturday, January 25. It was to begin at 7:30 p.m. Every newspaper and a poster laid out a program that was filled with a variety of stars from music, theater, and nightclubs. But the program's abundance of riches didn't impress Madeleine d'Evires in the least. There was something else that astonished her!

As her stated indifference to the ball grew, so did the mysterious depth and even violent nature of her desire to attend it.

It was indeed a mystery, for Madeleine had the definite feeling that this strange compulsion, so contrary to her nature, had been artificially provoked within her... As soon as she thought about it, that word came from her lips. It was the evening of Friday, January 24. Madeleine was in her bathroom, finishing her nightly routine: a brief, lukewarm bath, five minutes of gymnastics, rubbing cologne on her body, then putting on her silk pajamas...

"Provoked?" she murmured, sitting on the edge of her bed after having turned back the sheets.

She looked at herself in the beautiful, large mirror that stood above her dressing-table and noticed that her otherwise flawless face looked a little more emaciated, and her green eyes speckled with gold were a little more dilated than usual.

"Provoked?" she repeated. "But by what?"

She remained there, motionless, meditative, her arms hanging stiffly by her sides, her hands flat on the edge of the bed. She looked in the mirror and had the impression of seeing another human being who was not herself and who had replaced the Madeleine Evires whom she knew so intimately.

And soon she no longer said: "Provoked by what?" but, in a voice that had lost its firmness, in a voice that betrayed fear, she said instead: "Provoked by whom? Yes, by whom?"

Having experienced the physical sensation that she was sinking into some inescapable abyss, she suddenly straightened up with a burst of energy and free will. She forced herself to do some breathing exercises for several minutes. Then she went to bed, turned off the bedside lamp, lay down on her right side, as she usually did, and, while consciously and willfully closing her eyes, she uttered a loud, firm and decisive:

"I shan't go!"

But, moments later, she knew that she would be going to the wretched gala! She stopped fighting the mysterious compulsion. Then, feeling miserable and yet, at the same time, relaxed and relieved by her acceptance, she wept. She began to examine, in a confused and indistinct fashion, the feeling that had dawned in her mind, and which soon filled her whole being: the feeling that, until that very day, and even the next day, she had lived all her life as a girl, a maiden... Although she had successively reached puberty, and then her real freedom, her legal majority, she still remained a "little girl!" But now she felt that the next day, or rather the next night, she would be entering a new phase of her life, when a young girl becomes a woman. Finally, overwhelmed, exhausted by the opposite emotions of despair and hope, voluptuous attraction and repulsion of pain, desire and fear, Madeleine Evires fell asleep.

For a year, ever since Madeleine had reached her legal majority, Madame d'Evires had always given her daughter her full freedom.

Only three months before, in an intimate ceremony attended only by family and close friends, the young woman had become engaged to Lucien Délévard a virtually penniless medical student, but who was gifted with the kind of genius that would ensure him a brilliant career, either as a researcher or a practitioner.

Was Madeleine truly in love with Lucien? Sometimes, Madame d'Evires wondered about that. But a strong bond of affection united them, being both "cousins" in the fashion of Brittany, and childhood friends. The great estate of the d'Evires in Normandy was adjacent to the farm and stables owned by Lucien's father. Long ago, a Délévard grandmother had married the stepfather of a d'Evires grandfather and that was enough to unite the two families.

This this engagement had been as natural as knotting a piece of string after twisting it into a tangle.

Madame d'Evires had made no objection, although she had thought her daughter's engagement rather hasty. But she followed the rule that she had imposed upon herself, because of the rather rebellious character of her daughter, which was to not interfere with her life in any way after Madeleine had reached her majority. She truly believed that her daughter should now be responsible for all her actions. As a matter of fact, Madeleine was on her own, managing a rather large fortune in real estate and stocks which she had inherited from her father, who had died in an automobile accident in 1937.

So, with respect to the gala at the Palais de Chaillot, on Saturday, January 25, Madame d'Evires asked her daughter, just after lunch:

“Despite the repugnance and fear that you confided in me this morning, are you definitely resolved to go to the performance?”

“Yes, Mother!” Madeleine replied without hesitation.

True to her rule of conduct, which had become an ingrained habit, Madame d’Evires did not say: “Then I will go with you,” but instead, asked: “Do you want me to go with you?”

There, Madeleine hesitated. She looked tenderly at her mother, whom she truly loved with all her heart. And Madame d’Evires thought that only a few words or a maternal gesture would be enough for her daughter to acquiesce, but she was mistaken. Upon hearing Madeleine’s first words, her mother realized that her hesitation had only been about how to best express her rejection, not the decision itself. Madeleine’s statement was frank and honest, as usual, but was accompanied by a sudden flush of confusion and, perhaps, regret.

“I’m sorry, Mother,” she said, “but I called the box office and only made a reservation for one person... And I booked only one seat, which I specified should be far enough from the stage and on an aisle, so I can easily get up and leave at any time without disturbing my neighbors.”

Madame d’Evires raised an eyebrow.

“Why did you do that?” she asked. “Normally, you like to be near the stage and in the middle because of your eyes—I mean, they’re beautiful, but your sight isn’t the best in the world.”

“I know, Mother. And I wonderdd about that myself, but in the same way that, I believe, I have been compelled, even provoked, to attend, when I called the box office, I felt a similar compulsion to book an aisle seat far from the stage...”

She paused, visibly upset and filled with an odd mixture of curiosity, anxiety and anger.

“This is all very strange and not at all like you!” pronounced Madame d’Evires with conviction.

“You’re right, Mother, and I don’t understand it myself.”

Mother and daughter were sitting in a small salon adjoining the dining room, taking coffee after lunch. Madeleine was distractedly smoking a cigarette. After having said “I do not understand it myself,” there was a long, meditative silence between them, during which Madeleine, with the purity of a soul without artifices, looked straight into her mother’s eyes several times.

“What is the number of your seat?” Madame d’Evires finally asked.

“I don’t know off-hand,” replied Madeleine, “but I wrote it down. Wait...”

Her purse was on a small coffee table beside her. She took out a tiny notebook, and offered it to her mother, opened at the right place. Madame d’Evires read a number, a word, and a letter.

“Good!” she said, rising. “I won’t go with you, but I’ll go by myself. I’m going to call the box office and reserve an orchestra seat or a box placed in such a way that I’m able to see you all the time. What do you think?”

Madeleine got up right after her mother. The words she had just heard moved her with such emotion that her beautiful face was pale and her body trembled. Her heart and mind could not blame a mother who only wanted, in such strange circumstances, to watch over her child. So she nodded her approval, with her gaze, her head, and her gestures. But, strangely, she could not express her feelings with words. She uttered the following with great difficulty, as if she was fighting a hidden and invisible will:

“Dearest Mother... Yes... You’re probably right... Perhaps it is better... But we can’t go out together... It’s important that... Yes ... I must be there alone ... Alone...”

“Of course, darling.”

And with the determination of a mother entirely resolved to watch over her daughter, Madame d’Evires picked up the telephone to call the box office.

Chapter II

The Nyctalope

In January 1941, Leo Saint-Clair, a.k.a. the Nyctalope, had the pleasure of enteraining his dear friend Gnô Mitang in his current Parisian mansion on the rue Montbrun.

Leo Saint-Clair, a Frenchman justly famous for his travels, his adventures, his public and secret missions undertaken in honor and in the best interests of his native country, was nicknamed the “Nyctalope” because of his rare ability to see as well in total darkness as in full daylight, whether under natural or artificial light.

Less well known was Gnô Mitang. This high caste Japanese man had been a close friend of the Nyctalope since his battle with Leonid Zattan, and had often accompanied him on his many adventures across the world. But His Excellency Gnô Mitang was also one of the most energetic and subtle of Japan's diplomats, with the rank of ambassador and the often crucial role of Privy Councilor to the Emperor himself.

Physically, Gnô was a small, stocky man, strong but nimble, both vigorous and healthy, with a Buddha-like face. His ever-present smile could be, in turn, good-humored, ironic, mysterious, severe, and even terrifying.

On the evening of Saturday, January 25, 1941, Leo Saint-Clair and Gnô Mitang had decided to attend the gala at the Palais de Chaillot, to which they had been officially invited.

The program itself did not interest them much. They had spent too many years traveling in too many countries, watching and listening to too many singers and dancers, musicians and comedians, magicians and acrobats! But they knew that there would be enough time during the two intermissions to meet and talk with a variety of prominent politicians, military leaders and diplomats, discreetly, freely and without formalities.

On stage, a dozen dancers had just interpreted for the hundredth time a famous ballet that everyone had already seen a hundred times, when Gnô Mitang leaned towards Saint-Clair and said:

"I spy a very pretty woman!"

"Where?"

"To our left, near the aisle, two rows of seats ahead of ours."

And the Nyctalope's eyes, which saw everything in great detail, spotted the woman in question. She had beautiful black hair, whose twists and curls, under a diadem of flowers, shone with blue reflections in the dim lights. Her neck was fine and slender, forming an elegant and noble curve with her pale, bare shoulders. Her head was resting on her open right hand, her fingers delicately spread between her forehead and temple. Saint-Clair saw three quarters of her face which looked pale and a little too thin. Her long eyelashes veiled her eyes. Two rubies that looked like bright red drops of blood hung from almost invisible platinum wires from her ears. Her left hand, lying on the armrest, was perfect in shape and complexion. A strange combination of power and delicacy, modesty and voluptuousness, emanated from her body, obviously the product of the sports and gymnastics in which modern youth indulge frequently.

"She looks very young," said the Nyctalope to his Japanese friend.

Suddenly, without anything happening on the stage that might explain her change of attitude and emotion, the young woman stood up, turned her head, and looked around indecisively, as if she was searching for someone whom she might recognize... Saint-Clair and Gnô were struck by the contrast between her dark hair, eyebrows and long eyelashes and her bright, green eyes speckled with gold, deep and translucent, projecting a feeling of infinity.

Almost immediately, their color darkened. They seemed to focus on some incalculably distant vision, and expressed a kind of surprise that was at once childlike and terrifying... Her lovely face grew pale and contracted...

"Uh-oh!" whispered Saint-Clair. "What did she see?"

"Strange!" remarked Gnô.

They quickly turned their heads to follow the direction of the woman's gaze.

They saw a man sitting stiffly, his body tense, his head leaning slightly forward, looking at the girl. He was sitting in the opposite direction, also two rows ahead of them, thus closer to the young woman. His attitude, and her response, were evocative of the classical picture of a bird being fascinated by a snake.

"Hey! Hey!" said Saint-Clair. "You're right. This is indeed strange, my dear Gnô. "But does she recognize him, or is she seeing him for the first time?"

"The first time," Gnô Mitang said softly. "I have the same thought as you, Leo. I remember the hypnotic powers of the Brahmin of Bombay..."

"Precisely, Gnô!"

At that instant, the young woman, whom he never lost sight of while watching the man, blushed, closed her eyes, bowed her head, turned again to face the stage, leaned on both armrests, and appeared to pay attention only to the ballet.

Mentally and visually, the communication between the “snake” and the “bird” had not lasted more than a minute.

“This time,” said Gnô, “I think that man only wanted to demonstrate his power over his victim. But the strangest thing is that...”

“...he looked nothing like the Brahmin of Bombay,” finished Saint-Clair.

“Indeed. Watch out! He’s looking at us.”

“I see it.”

Saint-Clair and Gnô Mitang instantly played the part of two ordinary spectators entertained by the sprightly ballet that unfolded reasonably well despite the stage that was a little too big for the four small dancers.

But they had seen, and committed to their memories, the face of the man whose gaze had transfixed that of the young woman, so suddenly and violently that he had torn her away from her role as a quiet spectator, indifferent and yet attentive.

He was a man whose only remarkable features were his forehead, eyes, and lips. Otherwise, the general set of his face, his complexion, his size, his very attitude, dressed in a banal tuxedo with a discreet shirt underneath, all seemed beyond ordinary, and showed no signs whatsoever of the exotic. And even if one had been drawn to the face of this man, even his forehead, eyes, and lips were not, in and of themselves, sufficient to provoke curiosity. In short, no one would have paid any special attention to this man!

But the Nyctalope wasn’t just anyone. For him, and Gnô Mitang, both well versed in science and psychology, the forehead, eyes and lips of that man were significant clues. They spoke of his superior intelligence, his base desires, his depraved sensuality—and, further, of his power to focus his will and strike other human beings at a distance. This is a power rarely given to men by Nature, at least in the course of ordinary life. But such powers do exist, even in the modern world, and thousands of cases have been recorded and, sometimes, scientifically studied.

Suddenly, Gnô Mitang, while pretending to be interested in the ballet, said:

“The successful imposition of his will from afar seems obvious,” he murmured. “That woman is suffering under his spell”.

“And for the first time, too,” added the Nyctalope.

“Yes, I agree.”

“It’s very interesting. Of course, we’re going to investigate it.”

“Certainly, my friend.”

And forming the famous smile known and feared in all the chancelleries of the world, Gnô Mitang added:

“In coming to this commonplace variety show tonight, I certainly was not expecting to encounter a rival of the Brahmin of Bombay!”

“Nothing is ever new under the Sun,” said St. Clair, also smiling.

“And wisdom is to never be surprised by what life throws at you!” ended the Japanese.

After that exchange, they remained silent. They knew they had no further need for conversation, and that their observations and thoughts, as a result of their long, intellectual and emotional relationship, would be shared between one another without having to utter a word. This is what allowed them, when they did speak, to omit preliminary or intermediate sentences and to use only the most essential words.

But their silence was not idle. It was only in appearance that they seemed interested in what was occurring on stage, to the tumultuous and unanimous applause of the audience. In reality, Saint-Clair and Gnô Mitang saw only the beautiful young woman and the man who, unquestionably, had “fascinated” her. In this case, the verb “fascinate” was taken in its occult sense, meaning “select by intelligence, possess by thought, control by will, attract by using the eyes and the imperceptible sounds made by a barely moving mouth.”

Saint-Clair had visited the secret temples and colleges of Tibet, learned at the feet of ancient scholars and masters in psychophysiology; he had been the guest of the scholars of Medina and Fez, and of the venerable Egyptian Gypsy of the Albayzin district of Granada, among whom are transmitted by word of mouth, over the centuries, the wonderful and terrible secrets of Ancient Chaldea and of the priests of Isis and Osiris. The Nyctalope and Gnô Mitang were too aware of the

rituals and powers of the occult sciences to doubt, even for a moment, the seriousness and reality of the scene that, by pure chance, they had just witnessed.

Even though this was happened in 1941, in France, in Paris, during the first act of a gala performance, in the concert hall of the very modern Palais de Chaillot, in an audience of several thousand people, they knew that the mysteries of the human soul and the human body remained far beyond the understanding of western science!

“Even if one were to live for a thousand years,” murmured Saint-Clair wistfully, “one would not see everything there is to see on Earth!”

“Indeed,” replied Gnô.

Eventually, the curtain fell on the end of the first part of the show. The management of the Palais had set up a bar and a number of smaller rooms arranged to make up a *foyer* for the night. Many spectators were keen to be seen and to see other celebrities than those performing on stage. So, as soon as the applause ended, there was a great deal of talk and movement as the public left the concert hall and flocked towards the many exits.

“Watch out!” said Gnô.

The young woman had gotten up, taking a fur coat that she had not left at the cloakroom on her arm, and started moving quickly towards the door of the nearest exit.

“She is following that man,” said Saint-Clair.

“That man” was, in fact, already moving in the stream of people passing through a door held open by attendants.

But because of where they had been sitting, the Nyctalope and his Japanese friend had to make a long detour to reach this same exit. They were slowed down by the crowd and the need to stop and murmur constant “Pardon me, Monsieur... Excuse me, Madame” as they worked their way through the throng. When they reached the exit, they found themselves in a small vestibule located between two grand staircases. They eagerly looked around, left and right, but they were unable to find the girl and the man.

The mysterious hypnotist had gotten out first and likely gone up one of the two staircases, and the young woman, irresistibly drawn to him, must have followed him. As she was young and beautiful, she probably had had no difficulty making her way quickly through the gallant crowd...

But unlike Gnô Mitang, Saint-Clair was no longer absorbed by the search for the man and the girl. While walking through the crowd, he had noticed a remarkable-looking woman in her forties, very distinguished, who, like them, was hurrying toward the exit and whose face was showing a great deal of concern, even anguish.

And now, in the same vestibule where their pursuit had reached its logical end, this woman also stopped and paused, just as perplexed and visibly distressed as Saint-Clair.

The Nyctalope looked her straight in the face, and he no longer doubted that the idea that had had taken shape in his mind a minute ago was correct.

“Madame...” he said, in a respectful tone, bowing.

Immediately, he introduced himself, and Gnô Mitang, and before the woman could react in surprise, he continued:

“Madame, are you not, like us, looking for a young and beautiful dark-haired girl with green eyes who left the concert hall as if she was being pulled from afar by an invisible wire?”

“Oh! Monsieur!” exclaimed the woman in a voice trembling with emotion. “Have you seen her?”

“And, if I may be so bold, judging by a certain resemblance, might you not be a close relative of that woman, an older sister perhaps, or maybe her mother?”

“Yes, yes, Monsieur!” exclaimed Madame d’Evires, overwhelmed with emotion. “I am her mother!”

“In that case, Madame, would you do us the honor to allow us to take you home in our car? This will give us an opportunity to talk to you. And I assure you that we will spare nothing, my friend and I, to unravel the mystery that we have just seen and find your daughter.”

Madame d’Evires was a worldly and well educated woman, and knew the names of the famous Leo Saint-Clair, a.k.a. the Nyctalope, and Gnô Mitang, the Japanese diplomat. She saw their faces and their eyes. She had confidence in them.

“I agree, gentlemen—and thank you.”