

Strike Up the Dead (A vampire tale)

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Faites jouer les morts (Une histoire de vampire)

S'agit-il ici vraiment d'une histoire de vampire ? Est-ce le chant d'une douloureuse agonie ou celui d'une extrême jouissance ? Ou peut-être les deux à la fois ? Une voix syncopée et haletante, venue d'un autre temps, chuchote: «Brûler en enfer pour l'éternité, se retirer, avancer rapidement Déployer. Abandonner. C'était un autre siècle, ses obscures et lourds sentiers.... La possibilité du danger. Oui. Ceci veut dire quelque chose.» S'agit-il de soumission ou de résistance ? De peur ou de désir ? De violence ou d'amour ?

I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear.... – Bram Stoker, *Dracula*

I was all but assassinated in my bed, wounded here, ...and never was the same since. – J. Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla*

She did appear that sleep as it comes, loaded and waiting, rich by abduction. By time the way it furls. That we can be led on; eyes closed. Eyes snuffed. Dimness that doesn't quite. Comes baled with those images, raising one hand, deposit of gesture, slipping, drifting, knowing what comes next. Going under. One finger raised, but who's counting.

Am I cold? Have I given out. What more could I obliterate for? To burn in hell forever, drawing off, or drawing on apace, an antique manner to say. Unfurling. Giving up. That was a different century, her dark heavy paths. That was her stride I heard last night whispering "inside inside inside." The dire fabric. And I in something red with a low neckline; with her ever on this one.

The possibility of danger. Yes. That does mean something. A pose, a notation, a space for reckoning.

This is a grave suspicion: there is everything to say for it. Not said in one century and must not in another. I am becalmed with a peculiar

ardour, to find myself at these devices. Having thought of it, I must not dishonour it. On those paths is my tongue stopped. Given the task how can I, peculiar, aspire? Paths of flame. And there do her feet walk. A grave suspicion, one cannot proceed too quickly; one must, of necessity, go cautiously. With faith, and savour.

As it moves, now and ever. In sleep and recall: a face pressed to mine. Coldly pressed. A face much at once beheld and beloved. Diligent, always, and put to memory in procuring the details; but hair, her flaxen hair, silver in the moonlight: that colour that men not known for anything else have been known to die for. Her mouth with its stolen good and a forehead for the ages. Placed all together and still no telling, baled with those images. So throat, so skin. Such apprehension, achieved in diverse passages. There is myself, in sickness or other, in parcel of flesh, state of mind. Temporarily stateless. Sleeping the way I did come upon this ground.

Of why. This particular ground. The most innocent reason; I know mine worse than anybody. None can ever get enough of raising the stakes.

Loaded and waiting, what opening to the nineteenth century terms. I wouldn't remember if I didn't want it. Given over, indolently. To long for, and cede. To come again, coldly pressed beneath her dark and heavy skirts. She is a woman with a mouth, her mouth, the way I've been used.

It's no use. My splintered thinking. I cannot account for myself.

What might she promise, of so few words and profuse suggestion? Striking such an acquaintance, what should I say, well-met and full of surprises. What hasn't she heard before, all in all as if it mattered. What lips would one find such a time talking, to think of what could hear. How low a voice must be kept? At such a time. For such could it be, seemly and right, were it not for a most questionable spirit.

As it moves, so do I.

Thinking: replete. Satiety. Glutted. Or any of the thousand names of satisfaction. That graceful list. Stolen goods. Worth having; worth fearing. Something enters this way, a dream of fear. A double embrace, participant and vessel, the dream of her face. Floating near the surface of memory not quite anchored. Swift and unsettled.

May I say that peculiar ardour of mine, so draining, so extraordinarily

grieved and satisfying, the scantest veneer through which bevels everything. I should not to anyone, not in one century or must not another. What an egress am I, drawing off and taking myself with me; this is not unpleasant. I would not have it thought that this is unpleasant.

You never love. I have heard those words before. *You yourself never loved.* So I stand, with these words telling. Her voice, so near my own throat. Surely I have heard this before. How I stand, eyes snuffed, that voice vibrating the skin of my throat. From beyond rejoinder and past sense. Something to be taken up when I come for it. Moving off, down to a range of deeper sleep.

The warmest drifts. The quiet tide. To sink like that: wounded here, so slowly, and with such great pleasure. Ambition, diversion, strongly and wholly replete with coma. This being the ingress: and so am I taken.

It is true that I have kept for myself. Coming in the night like that: how can she be trusted? Why this here looks soft what fine a resting place. Such admissions as I have. Her hair. I have yes known. Such face and skin for dusty memory. Her circled waist her looks soft the coldly pressed and dark and heavy skirts. Gathered from whirling dust and moonlight, the method of those who would. Drawn on so they are discrete elements but flooding together; I cannot say. Have I done this before? I am known for anything else, such admissions as I have. Such a spurned and trifled offering, what would she take. Admissions, or whatever bows the head. Or sends it falling back, the throat swelling above the dire fabric.

I am cold. I have never loved. I am in these situations and confound my history. Examining my conscience I have found, tripped thick through catechisms praying, crying, for more. And what have I looked over my shoulder. Dainty vices and full blooded coming; worth loving, worth fearing. Listen to this, and sorcery. With an ear full, an eye snuffed, a conscience at fault. A most questionable spirit. I should give it up if given the chance.

Symbols and trappings beside the dust and memory. These are found things. I think on them, their hardness of prayer. Less and less it matters, I am suspected. Maybe come the great soft tides once I that held to heart. What do they seem that I had? At such a loss, I would give all too much.

That does mean something. A space for reckoning; exactly; this one; and so. I cannot atone for myself.

Curious ardour: its latent demands, how familiar it seems. The discipline. The schooling of my earliest days to this, or something like this. I have perhaps got it wrong. Shattered thought. For what feels right, may it be right, but was I never told. I have a grave what to go on. My ardour, exhausted, lies upon a strange bed from which it cannot rise. Nor will it rise. Stricken, it moves a most peculiar rest.

Borne on this, the quality of sleep. A secret, personal thing, an uncurled limb or racking back to the past; which past that plumbed her kind. Over now, and out of this she comes: the only way to stop her is through the heart. But this, is too familiar.

Wherefore an offering, and say what kind. That ritual, I believe, could make important. Which one, could say, really needs? What kind ways her obliging; her teeth. The obligations of her teeth.

Say what I am now in the grip of. Have I been dreaming, whirring and throbbing that sleep as it comes. Thus loaded and waiting; my conscience desperately at fault. I have yes known. This is the dream where I hold my head a little strangely, making offer of my own throat. I could not accomplish awake. Loving as she can love, as I myself have never loved. On nineteenth century terms. Scared to death and mad for it, in her arms the dead of night. Rendering account disallowed in my own time, full blooded, heavy scented, most willfully, stubbornly given. So few things worth tossing back my head for, and yet this is one.

Knowing her face in dreamy fear, not given up nor set aside on any account. I would have spoken just so had I lived at the time, had I lived and kept account. I would state for the record: just so. Those who come after will be left to make of this.

But what, then, of the low neckline? So much will be made of that.

Too familiar that I should weaken, that I am troubled through my heart. In this alone my ardour stands me company, stricken though we are, each to its custom. Faith and savour, yet another list. Perhaps paths of flame, I am troubled, by my schooling perhaps. That we can be led on. And what should I return to apart from dust and memory? I had desires yes for somewhat beyond; for that have I given up my stake. For a mouth which vibrates the skin of my throat.

Say now once for me again what I am in the grip of. Admissions of existence. A swelling throat. A foundered conscience, or merely something red. I come for it, and would own or mad for it. Quarter and mercy am I taken, the trappings within the dust and memory. For what conscience have they their knowledge forged. Such profuse unspoken promise from one century to another, and that suggestion ever at her lips. The dream of her face, most grave and familiar.