

**GEORGINA TALBOT -  
STEAMPUNK PRINCESS**



**THE SECRET LIFE OF AN  
EXTRAORDINARY  
GENTLEWOMAN**

**BY MR GARY MITCHELL**

**EPISODE ONE - NEW WORLDS  
FOR OLD**

**WEBSITE: [WWW.SPACEVIXENSFROMMARS.COM](http://WWW.SPACEVIXENSFROMMARS.COM)**

## I

1849, and the new town of Bournemouth was one of *the* places to be; it's clear air and fresh sea a welcome contrast to the smoky, fetid, disease, crime and squalor ridden stench of London, capital of the mighty British Empire. Fashionable people young and old came to frequent the new seaside 'spa', to bathe and socialize, to make connections and attachments and – perchance – find romance with suitables of a like fortune and social standing.

One such young man was Lord James Winton. Only technically Lord James was no longer young, and no longer a *man*. For Lord Winton was a vampire. Had been for years. Ever since meeting Count Dracula in 1805, during the Emperor Napoleon's campaign at Austerlitz...

"My Lord", recognizing him approach the doorman opened the portal and doffed his cap. "Welcome back to the Royal Bath Hotel".

Barely acknowledging the man's presence his lordship gestured one of his accompanying minions give the man a penny for his trouble.

Winton could afford it, and besides, being pleasant helped maintain his cover whilst he searched for new blood...

Life was not easy for Sir Percy Florence Shelley. It was bad enough having two scandalous celebrity parents; a deceased poet father and a mother who was an infamous still living novelist. What made it worse was having the same first name as his father – and a second name that of the town of his birth. Hence his much preferred moniker, 'Arthur'.

"I'm empty", his aging mother Mary whispered.

"Of course", Arthur gestured at the waiter – who brought a tray for her to take her fill. It wasn't that she had a drink problem; it was that when she imbibed her tongue loosened. Loosened off too many dark secrets. Was her coming to live with him in Boscombe a bad idea? Perhaps – but his wife Jane was the caring sort, and Mary could at least assist with his technical perambulations.

Maybe she'd die of old age before it came to pass?

"Arthur, Mama", it was Jane who interrupted his reverie to approach with newcomers. "Allow me introduce two local ladies of note, Miss Georgina and Miss Marianne Talbot".

"Ladies", the comely visage of the women immediately gained Arthur's full attention. Both sisters were tall, handsome brunettes – useful contacts to make, perchance, for a family like the Shelleys, new to the area. "Please, join us", he insisted.

"Sir Percy", both politely curtsied as they took their seats, although the younger Miss Georgina improperly taking the lead.

"You know Bournemouth well?" he engaged.

“We do Sir”, mindful of her responsibilities Georgina was polite. “For many years, as children, we were brought here for holidays, by our late Father, Sir George Talbot”.

“For the clean air”, Marianne hastily added.

“Talbot, Talbot”, Mary Shelley searched her memory. So many parties in her life, so much debauchery with her late husband and his friend, the ‘mad, bad and dangerous to know’ Lord Byron...

“Berkeley Square Talbot?” she launched a further interrogative.

“Indeed”, Georgina readily agreed – though they’d resided in Grosvenor Square the designation was location enough.

“I recall” (she remembered him as dutiful and dull).

“Our father much encouraged us to read”, Marianne detected slight approbation. “Arts and sciences. And we were much taken with your novel ‘*Frankenstein*’”.

“Ah!” at that the old woman brightened. “I fear I will never live it down, my inventing the genre of ‘gothic science fiction’, as the literary experts call it – and who”, she grinned, “am I to refute such acclaim?”

“Quite”, Lady Jane wished her mama-in-law not again monopolise the conversation with endless reminiscences of her scandalous youth. “The Mesdames Talbot are settled in the town”.

“Ah!” Arthur revelled. “As now too are we. I rejoice we shall have good society”, he flattered.

“Thank you Sir”, if Marianne was blushing the steady Georgina retained her cool. “We sold out later father’s land in Surrey and farm in Notting Hill to move here...”

“For the air...” Marianne interrupted to repeat herself. “Hinton Wood House. On the East Cliff”.

“I understand you are to live in Boscombe?” a glance from Georgina bid her more skittish sibling still.

“Indeed”, Arthur agreed. “Keep out the riff-raff. God forbid they ever move in there”.

“I trust I am not intruding?” spake a voice.

“My Lord!” Arthur rose in familiar deference to a superior – but a gesture from Winton bid him remain.



“We’re old friends”, the vampire smiled at the private secrets he and they kept.

“May I present, my Lord, Miss Georgina and Miss Marianne Talbot, new members to our widening circle”.

“A pleasure”, Winton smiled – for truly it *was*. Two attractive vivacious maidens – of independent means? What more could any vampire ask for..?

“Waiter!” he called. “Champagne all round!”

As the evening progressed Winton found himself in a bind. If it was the younger Miss Georgina who was the dominant personality, with her hands upon the Talbot fortune, it was the elder Miss Marianne who was proving more susceptible to flattery. No matter...

“...and it was whilst living in Bournemouth we discovered the many poor suffering in the region. Of course we saw poverty all the time in London”, Georgina waxed lyric of her proposed philanthropy, “but as girls we were most upset to see the poor, begging, here, at the seaside”.

“Distressing indeed”, novelist Mary exchanged a glance at Winton - for compared to what they’d seen and experienced *that* was but a mere bagatelle.

“Now moved here we are moved” (and here Marianne giggled at her own pun), “to help the poor of the area. We so do not wish them to end up in the local workhouse, in Christchurch”.

“A worthy aim”, Arthur was wearying of Miss Georgina’s radically-aware social diatribe.

Yet so evangelical was her zeal the younger Talbot would not be deflected. “Yet if – as they say – ‘the poor are always with us’ – the solution is not simply to give them *money*”.

“That they would but drink it away”, Marianne endorsed.

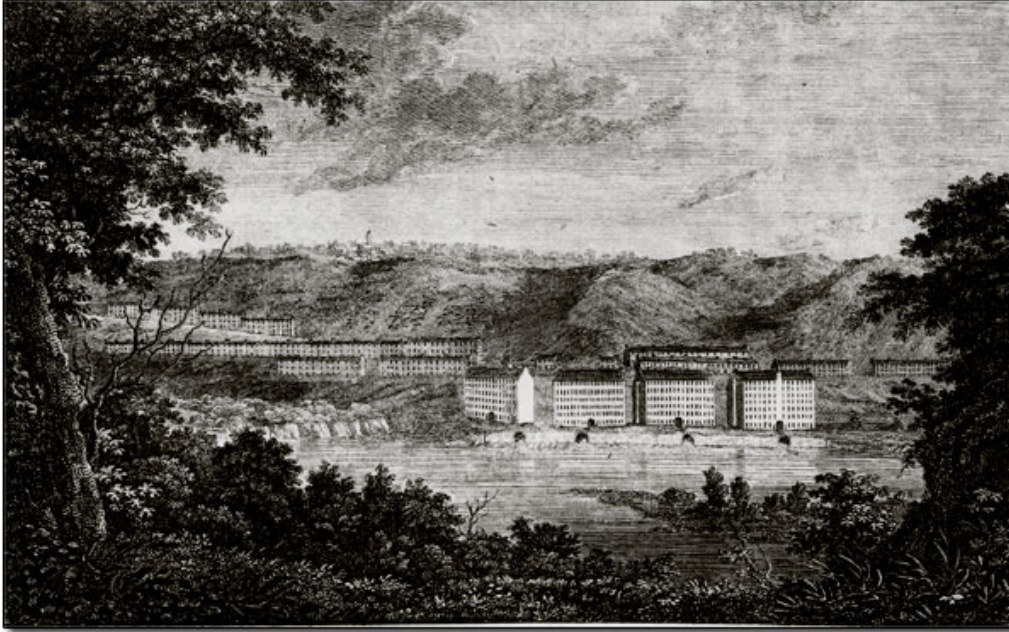
“Work is the curse of the drinking classes””, having herself that evening imprudently imbibed Mary recollected.

“No”, Georgina continued with barely a pause for comment, “the local poor need to improve themselves so as not to become but the next generation of smugglers and poachers. We, the privileged, we must provide them employment, moral guidance and decent housing. For a rental, of course”.

“And how, dear lady, do you propose to accomplish this?” his Lordship sensed an opening for his own nefarious scheme.

“We have a fortune – more than for our needs”, Marianne smiled.

“We intend on this very morrow to purchase land hereabouts and endow a model village community - as an example to all of our class how to assist”, Georgina proudly declared.



New Lanark

“Such as the celebrated Mr Robert Owen does”, Marianne extrapolated.

“New Lanark in Scotland”, Winton knew well of the insufferable dogooder.

“You are familiar with his work?” Marianne was most impressed.

“Know the chap well”, the vampire freely lied. “I would be happy to expound my association to you sometime?”

“Your Lordship is most gracious”, if she habitually suspected the way he regarded them, Georgina was yet polite.

“When are you then free, my Lord?” Marianne, however, was imprudently forward - in the extreme.

“Tomorrow?” the vampire restrained himself to casually suggest.

“I don’t think...” Georgina interceded.

“Mrs Shelley?” his lordship instantly countered. “Could I, peradventure, impose upon you to chaperone?”

“Of course”, Mary knew she owed his patronage favour.

“It should not conflict with our affairs, Sister?” Marianne enthused a plea.

“They must remain our first priority”, Georgina reluctantly conceded...

As the evening progressed it became apparent to Georgina a spark was igniting between her senior sister and the seemingly eligible lord. Could it be a *match*? No – such a thing was unthinkable – their work unfinished,

his station infinitely superior to theirs. Yet Lady Jane assured he was a bachelor and, as the saying goes, ‘it is a truth universally acknowledged a gentleman in possession of a fortune will be in want of a wife’. And now? His Lordship was dancing with Marianne – that shameful new Austrian creation, the waltz. No, intolerable...

Presently the couple returned. “We must return home, Sister”, Georgina gravely chided. “There is much to do tomorrow. Our plans”.

“Sister?” Marianne resented being pulled away from her first fun in years.

“Frivolity can be a vice”, the younger asserted. “We must be an example to poor working-class country people. An example of how to conduct moral and upright lives”.

“My sister is much taken by the story of St. Glenmoor”, Marianne explained.

“The local Celtic saint”, Lady Jane knew the tale of the mythic Arthurian proto-martyr.

“You must relate me the legend”, his lordship ingratiated. “When we next meet?”

“Indeed”, Marianne now openly flirted.

“Another time”, Georgina rose as if ready to leave, her sister obliged by decorum to follow.

Yet his lordship’s plan was about to rapidly accelerate.

The private message he’d conveyed to the delectable Marianne at dance should see to that...



St. Glenmoor (artist unknown)

## II

The next morning Georgina was most vexed to discover from the servants that Marianne had left early, after having been called for by the elder lady Shelley and her carriage. Why *had* her elder sister not informed her – order the staff not to wake her?

Because she would have forbidden her departure, that is why. And were she to marry Winton - why? - *he* would have their fortune! Georgina was also much disgruntled as their mentor, the Reverend Wanklyn, was due to call, to assist in deliberations over purchase of land for the proposed village.

As always the dear clergyman was punctual, and Georgina received him in the drawing room.

“Is Miss Marianne unwell?” he inquired.

“She is indisposed”, Georgina said nothing yet all. “The gentlemen should be here soon...”

Upon arrival at the Shelley Manor estate in Boscombe, Marianne found herself shown through to the drawing room and cordially offered refreshment by both Lady Shelley and her mother-in-law. Of Sir Percy and Lord Winton there was as yet no sign, despite the latter’s most uxorious entreaty of the previous evening.

“Is his Lordship unwell?” anxious to meet the man she hoped might become a suitor she questioned.

“As is their habit the gentlemen are currently at work in the basement, in their laboratory”, Mary explained. “And I must join them. Please, excuse me”.

“And I must attend to the servants”, Lady Jane likewise exited.

Suddenly, deflated, alone, Marianne Talbot instantly regretted absconding an important estate meeting for *this* wild impulse.

Had she *really* been so naïve as to believe his Lordship would take her away from her dour life as second fiddle to her dominant sister?

Perhaps it was as well Georgina did not task the Reverend with Marianne’s precise location. Soon after the servants showed in her other precisely arrived guests, Sir George Gervis and Mr William Driver.

“Miss Talbot”, Sir George was brisk. “I understand you wish to purchase wasteland from Driver here and myself?”

‘Wasteland’? The definition stuck in Georgina’s craw. “Indeed Sir George”, she asserted with as much force as a lady of her station could



Lord Winton

inevitably deem decent. “I, in particular, am shocked by the poverty of the local people, many of whom are begging, suffering real hardship, the Enclosure Act of 1822 having abolished their traditional right to free grazing, hunting game and gathering fuel from the surrounding ‘common’ heathland”.

“My land now”, Sir George snorted his disapproval of her stance. “However, Miss Talbot, if the price is right Driver and I will sell and you can... give it *back* to them”.

“That is not Miss Talbot’s charitable intention”, the Reverend explained. “She intends an institution for the industrious working man – not a free asylum for all to wantonly cavort upon the Dorset heathlands”.

Ladies of independent means spending their time, fortune and thoughts in relieving the plight of the labouring classes? What could induce them to make this noble fiscal sacrifice? If the avaricious Driver knew not he kept silent, his mind but on the cash upon offer.

“And you are certain of this?” Sir George’s conscience yet viewed the transaction as taking sweetmeats from an infant.

“We – my sister and I – we have the support and advice of many very wise persons; among whom are Mr Glyn<sup>1</sup>, Lord Portman, Sir Eardly Wilmot and that great preacher Mr Leybourne Popham. I assure you we have quite thought this matter through”.

“You are a lady sure of your mind, Miss Talbot”, Sir George was relieved she was not *his* responsibility...

---

<sup>1</sup> Later to be Lord Wolverton (*Ed.*)

\*\*

Minutes passed and Marianne was still alone. In need of a pot to discharge the refreshment the ladies had so thoughtfully presented, Marianne rose to find a servant – only to find the door to the drawing room had been discreetly yet securely fastened.

Yet for a lady from London such a lock was easy to pick. A pin sufficed. Finding no one around Marianne next made her way through a quiet and apparently dormant *villa*; through the grandly staircased entrance hall and into a study she'd so fortuitously spied, by chance, upon entry, thence to what appeared to be Sir Percy's desk.

It too was locked, but silently she opened the *bureau*, a hairpin again sufficing. Diagrams? Formulae? Such interesting papers! Now her education paid-off. Carefully she examined bills of sale, records of wages, maps. Treasure maps? Maybe - but no history – no mythology to explain the other-worldly scientific contraptions she saw before her, upon Sir Percy's drafts and drawings. A man of science and learning? Aye, an inventor true...

"Am I disturbing you?" a tart voice disrupted Marianne's private investigation.

"The contracts", Sir George presented – and Georgina suddenly hesitated. Marianne wasn't here to endorse – yet it was *she* who was the sensible one, the *e facto* head of the Talbot household, a position she'd lose were she to ever marry. So, marry she would not. And her sister? Well, by her absence this morn Marianne had clearly abdicated all input.

"Are you sure Miss Talbot?" sensing her demure the Reverend Wanklyn assisted.

"Yes", she affirmed. "Indeed I am sure", resolved, she hastily signed. Where oh where was Marianne when you needed her?

"Am I disturbing you?" a tart voice disrupted Marianne's private investigation.

She turned – and a lantern flared in the gloom of a north-facing room. "I... I... I was *lost*", she pretended to fluster.

"No, you were *spying*", Lord James Winton retorted. "For what, may I enquire?"

"I, er, I don't know what you mean, my Lord".

"Oh, I think you *do*, Marianne", his familiar, powerful, mesmeric eyes bore into her soul, the eyes of a being at home in the night, a creature that though *undead* yet retained hope of *life*.

Marianne saw the game was up. "I was left alone... I was intrigued by everyone's absence".

“Ah – indeed”, Winton grinned something like understanding as a brace of armed minions entered.

“My Lord?” a protective underling raised his musket.

“You won’t be needed”, Winton dismissed with a reassuring click of his fingers. “Marianne is but a curious *cat*”, he explained. “Wants to know all our secrets”.

“I warned you about her”, arriving from below in a laboratory coat Sir Percy now sniffed contempt for the way the vampire frequently disregarded him. “No good will come of this I tell you”.

Noting the contrary tone of their conversation Marianne considered running – but the minions had the only exit covered.

“There are things here even you don’t know, old friend”, the vampire determined to Sir Percy. “Leave us!” he ordered his henchmen.

As the underlings reluctantly departed Marianne suddenly, and uncharacteristically, feared for her *soul* far more than her *life*. “So I was curious as to your activities”, she defiantly declared. “What of it?”

“Are you *sure* you want to know?” Winton challenged. “Understand I can sense whatever you do here – that escape is now impossible”.

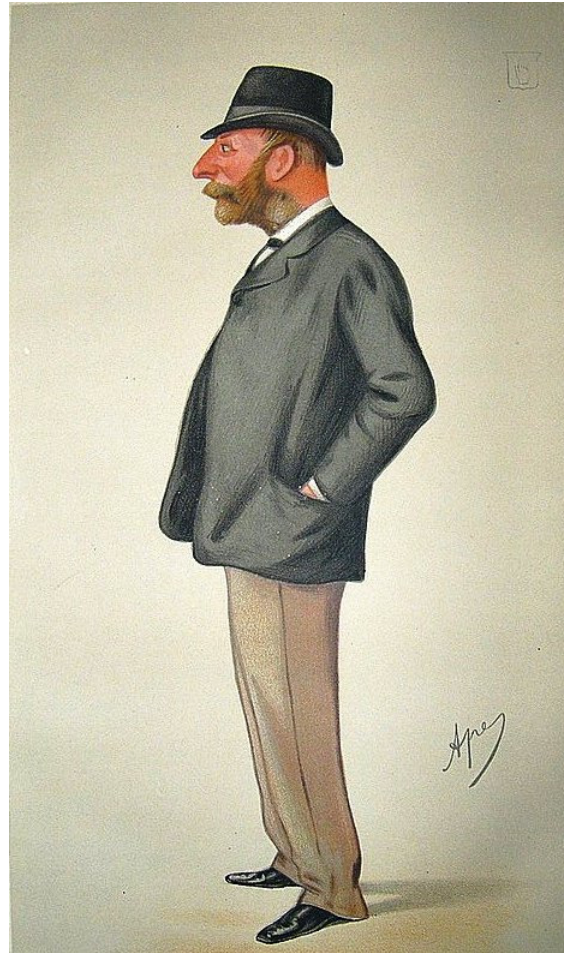
That was either a clear threat or an unpleasant promise. “My sister knows I’m here”, the elder Talbot proudly riposted.

“Then soon, I trust, she will join us. Follow me”, carrying the light the vampire moved into the hallway and down the staircase to the basement.

But Marianne Talbot hesitated to follow.

“Oh – we keep nothing really revolutionary upstairs”, it was as if he could almost read her mind.

“Miss Talbot”, ever the gentleman Sir Percy insisted. “After you, if you please...”



Sir Percy Florence ‘Arthur’ Shelley

\*

Proceedings concluded Georgina bid farewell to the Reverend and her business guests – and discerning a feeling something was not quite *correct* resolved to quit Hinton Wood as a matter of urgency.

“Parker!” she called for her chief servant. “Parker!”

“Miss Georgina?” the aged but faithful retainer from her father’s day appeared from polishing the silverware.

“Prepare the carriage, please. I must to Boscombe”.

“Miss Georgina?”

“I have a terrible premonition”, she confided, “that Miss Marianne may be in grave danger...”

“My private chamber”, the vampire admitted with all his powers of persuasion.

Yet Marianne hesitated to cross the threshold. Then, ill met by lamplight, she saw a portrait hanging on the wall. “Who *is* he?” she found herself irresistibly drawn inside. “He looks exactly like... like your *father*?”

“That is I”, Lord Winton quietly gestured Sir Percy close the door behind her. “The picture ages. I do not”.

“But... but how?”

“Perhaps I could best answer that question”, Mary Shelley now appeared from behind some apparatus at the rear of the basement area. “You recall my famous novel?”

“Indeed I do”, Marianne affirmed – she’d read it many times. “Along with Austen, the Brontes, Mrs Gaskell and other ‘chick lit’ I am most familiar with cutting edge fiction”.

“Mrs Shelley’s work is not *all* fiction”, his Lordship now affirmed. “You recall, Marianne, Galvani’s experiments back in ’92?”

“At the Royal Society?” she struggled to recall her late father’s science lectures. “Electricity to make the muscles of dead frogs move – the inspiration for Mrs Shelley’s tale”.

“Only not fiction”, the aged novelist now proudly affirmed. “And soon our work will be complete”.

“So *this* is why you lured me here? To become part of your experiments?” Marianne fearfully turned to leave – but found the vampire again blocked her egress.

“Earlier you asked me a question”, he was powerfully laconic. “So, Miss Talbot, here is the answer. Soon we men of science will have the very power of life itself. The laws of physics, as we currently understand them, do not fully apply. There is, for example, the aether”.

“Conductive space?” Marianne knew something of the theory.

“Indeed”, Sir Percy enjoined. “It enfolds and pervades everything, within you and without you. And now we have the power to harness it



Sci-fi pioneer Mary Shelley

here!” he proudly pointed to a secondary door – whereupon his wife arrived with a casket of glowing mineral. “We shall call it Victorium, after Her Majesty”.

“See?” Lady Jane exclaimed. “It radiates the strength to traverse the aether – to power a thousand machines once turned by coal, and by steam”.

“But what has this to do with me?” Marianne feared.

“Why, nothing at all”, Lord Winton next smiled deadly fangs. “For *you*, Miss Talbot, I have another use”.

And before she could run Marianne found

herself grasped and restrained by the other women, for though apparently inordinately evil the gentlemen behaved as such...

Unsure whether she’d been wise *not* to inform the Constabulary of her fears, Georgina urged her horse and gig on the two miles to Boscombe Manor. Once there, would easily find the Shelley’s villa? It was allegedly near the sea, past Boscombe Chine, and in that wasteland afore Christchurch it would hopefully not be too difficult to locate...

“You’re a *vampire*!” the scales falling from her eyes Marianne alarmed.

“Of course”, Lord Winton smiled. “You could call it a ‘devil’s bargain’, I suppose. Only I don’t subscribe to the same values of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as your revered Reverend Wanklyn”.

“No!” bosom heaving in fear Marianne exclaimed.

“Anyway”, his lordship moved to rest against the door frame, “I intend to persuade our rulers – Her Majesty included – to accept as I. To embrace the gift of eternal life”.

“You mean *vampirisation*?”

“If you prefer”.

“I prefer”, she denied him. “I prefer to keep my *soul*”.

“So do not a few”, he accepted. “At first they tried to kill us, you know? Harker and the others. They couldn’t of course, which is rather what convinced some of them to join. Once I’d been, well, ‘impressed’ on the road to Austerlitz there was really no going back”.

“I prefer my soul”, Marianne asserted.

“And I simply prefer earthly immortality to spiritual”.

“You’re blasted evil!” she swore at his declaration.

“No Marianne”, Winton almost apologised. “Life is simply unfair and you die at the end of it. Or rather, in my case, *don’t* die”.

His mention of his death made Marianne again stare at the portrait.

“No”, she defiantly shook her head. “Whatever it is you’re thinking, ‘no’. I intend to live a free woman!”

“You were first a dutiful daughter. Now you are beholden to your elder sister”, the vampire moved towards her. “How can you intend to *do* what you’ve never previously *enjoyed*?”

“No!” despite the restraint of Mary Shelley and Lady Jane Marianne backed away. “My soul is born free!”

“But it’s trapped in a body *we* hold prisoner!” Mary cackled like a witch.

“Let me go!” Marianne now feared for her life more than that she feared for her soul. “My sister will be missing me!”

“I think she is too late”, using all his unnatural skills the vampire held her head to look directly into the liquid pools of her eyes.

“No! Never!” resisting as best she could Marianne Talbot experienced the alleged power of a vampire’s gaze as a cold, hard, truth. To deny him further she shut her eyes – but somehow it wasn’t enough. Or was it? Could she instead escape by *stealth*? “Please?” she forced herself go limp. “Don’t hurt me, my Lord!”

“I’ll not hurt you”, Winton assured – and released his grip – emotions torn by the all-surveying portrait of his own rendered soul.

Believing their sacrifice to the dark side tamed, Mary and Jane too relaxed their hold. Seizing her chance Marianne raced for the exit – but was unable to work the heavy door-catch before the vampire was again upon her, a hand over her mouth muffling her screams. Bodily he flung her away from the only exit – and this time gestured acolyte Percy Shelley hard bolt it. Trapped, Marianne ran to the lamp – toward the light – but again was unable to escape both his mesmerising gaze and the staring painting of his now dead soul.

“No! No!” she insisted. “I’ll not render my soul!”

“It’s not your soul I *want*”, the vampire explained. “Would it be so bad to become mistress of a large estate, to become the *de facto* Lady Winton?”

“Uh huh!” Marianne gasped negative – his gaze piercing - petrifying her with fear – fear of the exotic excitement of possible betterment – of the temptation to climb the social ladder to which she could otherwise never hope to aspire.

But at what price?

“So warm!” the vampire raised her trembling hands in his. “So alive!” he forced himself resist the urge to vamp her there and then.

And at that declaration of indecent intent upon her honour Marianne Talbot screamed...

“Yes?” the servant at the door superiorly questioned, one of Mr Samuel Colt’s new-fangled revolvers stuffed into his belt.

“I am Miss Georgina Talbot. I have come to retrieve my sister”.

“I’m afraid you are mistaken”, the underling physically blocked her egress. “This is Sir Percy Shelley’s residence. There is no Marianne Talbot here”.

“So how do you know her name?”

That was a point. “I...”

Then Georgina heard a muffled scream from deep underground. “Let me in!” she demanded.

“Please leave. The matter is decided”.



Marianne Talbot’s *Twilight*...

“No!” recalling her childhood *Llan-Bach*<sup>2</sup> training Georgina lunged a kick to the butler’s groin – and charged inside...

And at that declaration of indecent intent upon her honour Marianne Talbot screamed. “I’m really not your type!” she tried to pull away in protest. “I’m really very lowly birth. In trade, almost...”

“You are already my *servant*!” Winton asserted his right to her indenture. “You cannot resist me indefinitely”.

“Y...yours?” Marianne knew she was forever undone – the real reason for her being enticed here now starkly plain.

“I suggest you reconcile yourself to your fate that you might willingly... *embrace*”, Lord Winton wanted not a resentful trophy.

“I am a free woman!” she denied.

“You are already damned”, Sir Percy resigned. “As are we all”.

“You won’t break me!” Marianne insisted.

“My point precisely!” the vampire calmly locked eyes. “I don’t wish to *break* you...”

“Not so fast – my Lord!” just then the door suddenly flung back – the bolt sheered off by brute force - to reveal a roused and angry Georgina Talbot.

“Stop her!” he ordered his accomplices.

“I can’t hit a woman?” ‘Arthur’ Shelley protested the indelicacy.

But such rules did not apply to his wife and mother. “At her!” they moved to restrain the fiery Georgina Talbot.

“Unhand my sister!” she fought back against the demonic duo as his Lordship moved with superhuman strength to rip Marianne’s gown away from her neck.

“No!” the transfixed and powerless elder Talbot protested – as before her eyes the melee continued.

‘Wham!’ a kick from Georgina sent Lady Jane spinning backwards to bang her head onto - and to activate - a wall switch. One down? As the woman fell unconscious her mother-in-law’s electrical life-giving device began to pulse with new-fangled energy.

“Yes!” fearing his moment might pass - enflamed by desire for his innocent victim’s chastity – the vampire dug his fangs deep into the maiden’s neck to suck her blood – to steal her life and soul – to sate his need for *conquest*.

“No!” Georgina made a desperate lunge to help – but a kick from the still sprightly novelist sent her sprawling – toppling – to fall – fall into the fell machine.

---

<sup>2</sup> An ancient Welsh art of self-defence (*Ed.*)

“It’s set too high for her, Mama!” Sir Percy realised as sparks surged.  
“Eleven on a scale of ten!”

Indeed it was. “Aggh!” the elder Talbot sister convulsed in blue sparks and orange volts before – mercifully – oblivion embraced.

“Yes!” at last *understanding* the transformed Marianne Talbot felt dark power pulse and surge within her veins...



### III

A rude awakening? Alone in the cool dawn of a new day Marianne regained consciousness, wrapped in a blanket against the night. Quickly recalling her late *trauma* she ran her tongue over her teeth, but they *seemed* the same, still fang-free. Rising she went to the mirror and checked for her reflection – but as she'd anticipated it was no longer there.

“Many times I do that too”, his lordship stirred from where they'd lain, moving rapidly to an oaken wardrobe to quickly pull on riding boots.

“Uh!” Marianne startled at his fearful ability to creep up on her.

“Look upon my reflection”, he qualified. “Many times I do that too. But of course it's gone now”, he again sensed her thoughts.

And it was then Marianne Talbot recalled. Recalled she was now damned – the bride – the *consort* – of a vampire lord – her poor sister laid out on a table downstairs, in a coma, perchance never again to awaken.

Yet was it *all* bad?

“I am not of your social class?” she wondered the reason for her *de facto* spouse's selection.

“You are now”, his cold but gentle touch assured. “Until *later*, my bride”, he gently kissed her hand, for although a vampire he remained a gentleman, so discreetly moderated his words. “I regret for now I must bid you good day to ride to Poole, to attend to business”.

Marianne recoiled at his mentioning that wretched hive of scum and villainy. His fangs showing clear when he smiled - were he not so handsome she'd have been repulsed. She realised – to her shame – it *was true* what they said about the attraction of a vampire, of the seductive power of their wealth, and influence, and leisure...

“What is to become of me?” she wondered.

“You are my bride, not my possession”, preoccupied her new master quickly found his coat. “As my *consort* you are free to go about your duties”.

“And what would *they* be?”

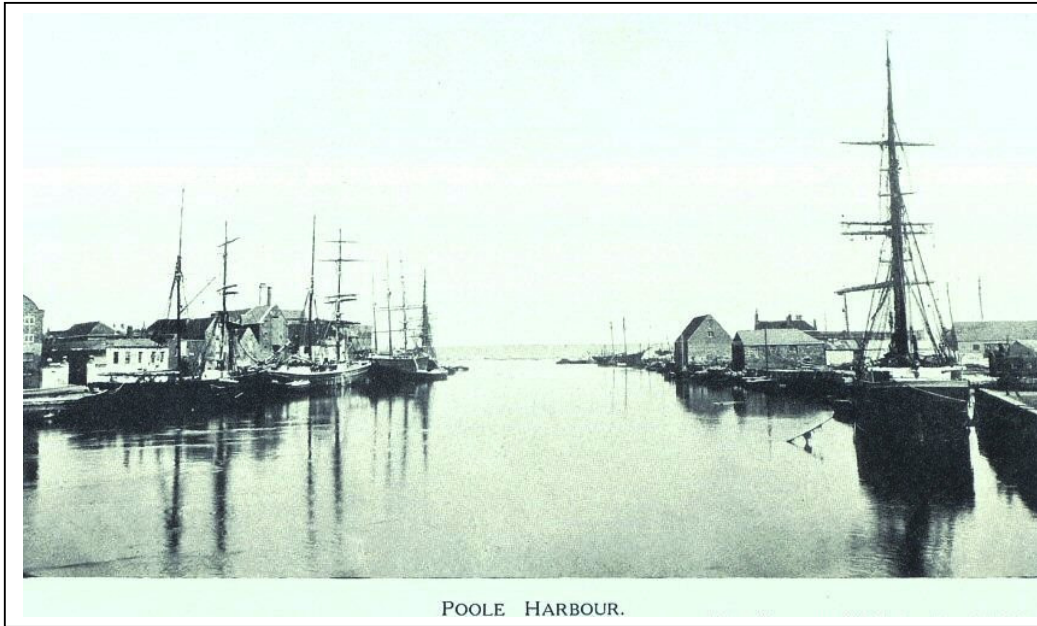
“The same as yesterday”, his lordship shrugged. “Your model village – do that. See to your sister's recovery”.

“Yes”, guilt surged in Marianne. “My poor dear baby sister Georgina!”

“Indeed. Until tonight, my love”, he left – this time without looking at her.

‘The same as yesterday’, Marianne pondered. Atonement for her defilement? It was indeed *tempting*.

Then she again recalled poor Georgina's failed attempt at rescue and salvation, *knew* she must at least save *her* soul. In all the hubris of conjoining she'd quite neglected from her thoughts her sister's potential



recovery. Decided – galvanised - determined to seize her possibly one-and-only chance of recompense - she raced to spy out of the bedroom window. She saw her new *husband* gallop away with a posse of minions – so rushed downstairs to find...

“Sister?” she found Georgina at a table with the Shelley’s, calmly sipping tea.

“Sister”, Georgina wearily acknowledged.

“I will atone for my dishonour with good works”, Marianne blurted. “Devote my life to our model village”.

“You have nothing to atone for”, Sir Percy explained. “It was not done willingly. By ancient lore your soul is *safe*”.

Yet Georgina said nothing – appeared broken by her trauma. “You forgive me, Sister?” Marianne entreated.

“You’re wedded now to a peer of the realm”, Georgina sighed resignedly.

“Secretly”, Mary Shelley reminded.

Had she still been human Marianne would have blushed at this suggestion of feigned propriety. “Not by the Church”, she felt shamed.

“That is a weight you must carry a long time”, Georgina sighed.

“Yet you are not the only one changed”, Lady Jane explained. “In the kerfuffle your sister too was much transformed”.

“Transformed like the creature in my novel”, Mary explained.

“How so?” suddenly weak Marianne sought the comfort of a chair – (‘hungry – yes – she now had an almost uncontrollable urge for red meat’).

“Too much electricity”, Georgina sighed resignation to her fate.

“Yet we are all again reconciled as friends”, Sir Percy endorsed.

“I wouldn’t quite go that far”, Georgina asserted.

“Sister?” Marianne fearfully questioned. “In what way, ‘transformed’?” (‘was she now a vampire too?’)

“Behold!” Georgina rose to her feet and extended her arm. Instantly an arc of aetheric plasma – pure energy - burst forth to shatter and dissolve both an occasional table and the aspidistra sat atop it; to charge with electricity the atmosphere around them, as before a thunderstorm.

“You’ve... you’ve *superpowers*!” her – quite literally shocked – sister exclaimed.

“Which she can turn off and on at will”, Mary Shelley smiled her fictional creation had at last unwittingly become flesh.

“And which”, Georgina affirmed, “I intend to use for good. Use for good as guardian of this land, in the service of our God and our Queen”.

Because – for the Talbot sisters of Bournemouth – life would never be the same again.

TO BE CONTINUED...



