

Looking at the first page of the journal, John struggled to read the text's cramped script. "My name is Alexander Dawney McGill and I am cursed. I was born in 1828, the oldest son of the daughter of the 4th Viscount Dawney. For my first twenty-one years, I led a normal, if privileged life, growing up on the grand estate of Beningborough. My mother had not married well, and it was generally counted as a blessing when my father, Captain Chancy McGill, was mortally wounded during the Battle of Cape St. Vincent in 1833. In the immediate aftermath of his death, our existence went from tenuous to perilous, as without my father's income, my mother could not support the modest home she was renting in Portsmouth. However, her brother, my uncle, the 6th Viscount, had by this time inherited the title, and he was kind enough to invite my mother to take up residence at his estate, Beningborough. Although I was not in line to inherit the estate or any wealth, my cousins treated me with respect and my uncle provided me with a generous allowance that covered my education and other needs even after my mother succumbed to influenza. Perhaps their generosity was based on the knowledge that our grandfather had inherited the estate by an act of fate, and their immense wealth was more a factor of untimely deaths and fortuitous marriage than a great family history. Knowing that I was not going to inherit wealth, I had resolved to take up medicine and had gone down to King's College at Cambridge to complete my studies. After four years of study in the modern medical program they provided, I was ready to take up a training program at the Royal Cambridge Hospital with the aim of becoming a licensed physician. Prior to taking up my position, I returned to Beningborough for a month to celebrate my graduation and spend time with my fiancé.

I spent my first week at home enjoying the fresh Yorkshire air, reacquainting myself with the estate, and walking the moors, both alone and in the company of my friends and relatives. My fiancée, the Lady Felicity Stephenson, lived with her parents in a pleasant house not more than two miles from Beningborough. I initially met Felicity at one of the many soirees my uncle hosted. Although I thought her a foolish child, I was always struck by her beauty. I soon found that she, like me, despised these formal affairs, with their vapid conversations and idle gossip, so we gravitated to spending time together away from the crowds. Soon I was totally smitten with her intelligence and wit as well as her beauty. I fear that Felicity's parents, especially her father, never fully approved of me and believe that it was only my tenuous connection to royalty that garnered his approval when I had asked for Felicity's hand the previous spring. I greatly enjoyed the gentle walk between our respective homes, and given the long stretch of warm, dry weather we were experiencing, I undertook to walk the path as often as I rode my horse. One evening, having been invited to dine with the family, dark had fully fallen before I set out for home. Ignoring my hosts' entreaties to have their coachman drive me home, I cited the nearly full moon and fine weather as reasons for wanting to travel by foot.

I set out for Beningborough in fine fettle, having dined well and even discussed a date for marriage with my dear Felicity to coincide with my planned date for being granted a physician's license. The bright moon shone down on the moorland path, making for a very pleasant walk. Soon, however, I began to hear a rustling in the heather beyond the course, which I initially attributed to a stag or doe enjoying an evening meal. My good mood faded as I noticed that all other sounds of nature that I was long used to hearing on my walks, the croaks of the frogs and chirps of the crickets and other creatures' symphonies communicating with each other, had

disappeared. I had not pondered this unnatural stillness long when a strange cloaked creature appeared in front of me. Without speaking a word, he – and here I am assuming it was a he, for in truth, I saw nothing – lunged upon me. I immediately felt a searing pain upon my neck and then all was dark.

How long I lay in the moor or how I came to be home, I do not know. Later I was told that one of my cousins came upon me while riding home and found me lying in the heather. He probably would not have seen my nearly dead form except for seeing the cloaked figure running off at great speed as he rode up and then noticed my boots gleaming in the moonlight. My savior threw me up in the saddle and raced back to Beningborough. For weeks I lay in my sickbed, which all, including the army of physicians and surgeons summoned by my family, assumed would become my death bed. By some miracle of God, however, I did not die, and gradually, I began to recover my strength. I had scarcely moved a muscle for the entire period of my confinement in bed when I turned to my dear cousin, who was keeping a death vigil for me and said in a voice barely more than a whisper, “I am horribly parched. Could I trouble you for a glass of water?” With those words, my recovery began in earnest, and the next day I felt sufficiently strong to sample a fortified broth.

I was still as weak as a newborn kitten, and the effort to sit up in bed left me fatigued. The collected physicians still counseled my cousins that my recovery was probably illusory and that I was still more likely to succumb to my injuries than to continue my recovery. It was at this time that I saw for the first time the extent of my injuries. I had a massive wound on my neck, showing distinct bite marks that would not have been out of place had it been an animal that attacked me. Yet I knew, and thankfully my cousin confirmed that a person had attacked me. My cousins reported that while I had lingered near death, a massive search had been organized, but no trace of this vile attacker had been discovered. I could not help but wonder what sort of demon would attack an innocent in this manner, but I was so thankful for my recovery that I shoved these thoughts aside and focused on regaining my strength. I learned much to my dismay that my beloved Felicity had become so distraught upon learning of my attack that she was forced to retire to her bed for a week. Even now, she was so concerned that I might expire that she could not face venturing to Beningborough to see me in person.

I doubled my resolve to recover on hearing of her distress and in a couple of days, I had gathered the strength to write her a note urging her not to fret on my behalf, but to focus on her recovery and promising a visit within a fortnight. Much to my joy, I received a return note that same afternoon. “Alexander my love”, she wrote, “words cannot express my ecstasy knowing that God has spared you and you are on the road to recovery. You are my true love, and the thought of your death nearly ripped my soul asunder. I await your visit with fervent anticipation.”

Reading this expression of love from the gentle Felicity was a tonic better than any medicine and restored my soul as much as the broth I was consuming restored my body. Much to the astonishment of the physicians, emboldened by my true love, I was out of bed and walking the halls of Beningborough in a couple of days. Every day brought a new level of strength and recovery. I also began to notice the scar on my neck fading at an unusual rate, with the angry redness of a newly formed scar fading into something much less repulsive at the same time as

my body recovered. I knew from my limited medical training and exposure to patients that this was not a natural healing process. However, I was too pleased with my growing strength to dwell long on such events.

As my self-imposed fortnight deadline for visiting Felicity approached, my life had seemingly reverted to normal. I attended dinners with my family in the great hall, although I frequently found I had no appetite, I enjoyed the company and conversation. I convinced my cousins to let me go out riding, although for several days, they insisted on escorting me everywhere, as if convinced my recovery was an illusion, and I would fall from my horse at the slightest exertion. Felicity and I exchanged daily notes, and I was as pleased with her recovery as I was with my own and was full of anticipation for renewing our acquaintance in person.

Try as I might, however, I could not convince my cousins or my uncle that I was strong enough for the ride to Felicity's parents' estate. After several unsuccessful attempts to get them to agree to a date that they thought would be suitable, I resolved to take matters in my own hands. I used my daily missive to Felicity to inform her that I would be attending her that evening, but given my relatives' concerns, I would be doing so in secret. Accordingly, after our evening supper, I silently slipped out of the house and made my way to the stables, where I quietly saddled my gentle mare and road across the moors to my Felicity.

As I road that evening, I felt more alive than ever, a fact that I attributed to the prospect of seeing Felicity again. The moon shone in the sky as it had on the night I had been attacked, but seemed all the brighter as I gazed at the countryside. I again heard the cacophony on animals singing in the night, but on this evening, I swore I could identify each individual creature as it sounded off, to the point that I felt like I could point to the exact location of each one in turn. The ride across the moors was over in a matter of minutes, and soon, I spied my love's home in the distance. My heart sang as I saw Felicity sitting in a gazebo awaiting my arrival. Even in the distance, I could see the perfection of her skin, the radiance of her smile, and feel the warmth of her heart. As I approached the gazebo, I practically leaped from my horse into her arms, into her warm embrace.

Leading Felicity out across the lawn, I was suddenly possessed by a lust that I can barely describe, not a carnal lust for her body, but an intense craving for her blood. I was overwhelmed by the scents that were assaulting my senses, chief among these being the smell of vitality that exuded from her pores. We walked but a few paces while these strange, unnatural urges assailed my brain. Felicity had no inclination of my anguish and spoke in glowing terms of her love and joy at seeing me again. However, I could no longer control the demon seizing my soul, and I pounced upon her. Just like the mad demon that had attacked me, I found myself biting into her neck. In an instant, I was coated in her blood, a condition that should have sickened me, but that just seemed to increase my insane desire. I drank in her blood with a hunger that I had not felt in weeks, and as I drank, I could feel an increased vitality course through my veins. While her blood continued to flow, my thirst could not be slacked, and I drank until all the life force had been drained from her body.

The instant I had drained her last drop of blood, my blood lust disappeared, as if a switch had been turned, and I was overwhelmed by a horrible revulsion at that I had just done. It was as if I was a stranger who had just appeared on the scene. My mind raced as I surveyed the horror,

blood thick on my coat, face, and hands, and covering the lawn around my feet. Worst of all was my poor innocent Felicity lying lifeless, a look of shock on her face, and the devastating wound that I had inflicted on her neck. In that moment, when I should have been thinking about remorse and atonement for this horrid sin, all I could think about was escape and survival. My brain was acting with a clarity that astounded me, for I was seized with the idea of loading Felicity on to my horse and taking her to the same location on the moors where I had been attacked. Felicity's body seemed feather-light as I draped it over my horse as gently as I could. I used my already ruined coat to mop up much of the blood staining the grass. I then led my horse back to the accursed spot of my own attack and left my poor Felicity to be discovered by the next passerby. After completing this morbid task, I rode back to Beningborough as swiftly as possible. I returned my mount to the stables, taking the time even in my panic to brush her down and give her fresh hay. Pausing only to throw my blood-soaked garments in the kitchen fire, which though banked for the night, was sufficiently hot to destroy all evidence of my sin, I returned to my rooms via the back stairs to eliminate the chance encounter with any of my cousins. In my room, I scrubbed my skin until it shone, washing away all remaining traces of my crime. I then climbed into bed to await my fate.

I didn't have long to wait, for the morning sun had barely appeared on the horizon when one of my cousins burst into my chamber, shouting the terrible news of the attack on my Felicity. Knowing myself to be a complete fraud, I feigned shock and dismay. Weeping profusely, I demanded to be taken to her body, refusing to believe what I knew to be true until I had seen her corpse with my own eyes. When we arrived at the now overly familiar stretch of trampled heather where I had lain her body, I was overtaken by real horror and remorse as I saw in the light of day the sad results of my frenzied attack. Fortunately, my deception worked better than I could have expected, and everyone accepted the implication that the same madman that had savaged me had attacked Felicity. Although no one could fully explain what she was doing out on the moors, a couple of theories were floated, that either the villain had captured her closer to home and brought her here to his favored spot to despoil her or that she was overcome by remorse for not visiting me during my recuperation and had ventured into the night to find me.

As for me, the acceptance of my cover-up did nothing to alleviate my guilt and shame. I was tormented with the reoccurring visions of my crime. What if this blood lust overtook me again? What sort of vile creature had I become? Surely I did not deserve to live. With the deepening concern that I might attack again filling my thoughts, I resolved to depart from Beningborough never to return. Concocting a story of needing time away to recover from my grief, I packed my cases and allowed my uncle to force a traveling allowance on me and departed for the Continent. I did not have a plan for where I would go, only to leave before my crimes were discovered and I brought shame to my family.

Setting out from Dover, I traveled to Calais and from there to Paris in the winter of 1849. Having spent some time in London while a student at Cambridge, I expected to find some level of familiarity in Paris, but it was unlike any city I have ever experienced. On the surface, the city had mostly recovered from the demonstrations and destruction of the brief 2nd Republic the previous year. Louis Phillip had been reinstalled on the throne, and crowds no longer rioted in the streets. However, the same social divides that led to two revolutions in less than 50 years still simmered below the veneer of stability. In other words, I could not have found a better city

for someone looking to disappear. If you had silver, landlords didn't ask questions, and they might even give a discount to clients who didn't ask any questions about what had happened to the previous tenants.

I secured lodging on the top floor of what had previously been a grand home not far from the Champs-Elysees but was now sub-divided into a rabbit warren of small apartments. Subsisting on a meager diet of bread and wine, I rarely ventured out of my rooms. Lying on my shabby mattress, however, I could listen to the passing traffic in the street below, gaging the time of day by the noise even more than the position of the shadows crossing my room. At some point, I realized that if I concentrated, I could make out the distinct voices of individual speakers amidst the din coming through my windows. And I began to detect the different scents of the passersby and my fellow tenants. Much to my horror, I also felt my blood lust begin to return. Every day this lust grew, gnawing at my stomach with a hunger that I no longer felt for ordinary meals.

After some weeks of torment, I could fight my desires no more, and so late one evening, I ventured into the streets looking to quench my lust. I despised myself for this act of base immorality, but every hour I repressed these desires, the stronger they grew, and the more I know that my psyche would explode if I did not act soon. I found myself walking down toward the Seine, where I knew the poor and infirm would congregate in the evening. Staying in the shadows, I watched these small clusters of sad and broken people, trying to rationalize my need to slake my thirst against the sin of taking another life. So intent was I in this internal moral dilemma that I failed to notice another person, a distinguished-looking older gentleman, had taken up a position next to me.

"This first feed is the hardest", were his first words to me. "What do you mean first feed", I stammered, feigning ignorance while wondering how this gentleman could have any inkling of my struggle. "Do not worry, my son", said my new companion, seeing the confusion on my face, "I am not here to judge, but merely to offer my assistance to a fellow afflicted".

"How would you know anything of my affliction", I cried. "You cannot begin to understand what a cursed soul I am." I was on the verge of weeping, but his next words brought me to a halt. "Of course, I understand your affliction. I can see it in your eyes and smell the reek of it all over you. You, like me, are a vampyre."