LINES 2743 to 2961

"How came the village to be deserted?" asked the General.

"It was troubled by revenants, sir; several were tracked to their

graves, there detected by the usual tests, and extinguished in the usual

way, by decapitation, by the stake, and by burning; but not until many

of the villagers were killed.

"But after all these proceedings according to law," he continued--"so

many graves opened, and so many vampires deprived of their horrible

animation--the village was not relieved. But a Moravian nobleman, who

happened to be traveling this way, heard how matters were, and being

skilled--as many people are in his country--in such affairs, he offered

to deliver the village from its tormentor. He did so thus: There being a

bright moon that night, he ascended, shortly after sunset, the towers of

the chapel here, from whence he could distinctly see the churchyard

beneath him; you can see it from that window. From this point he watched

until he saw the vampire come out of his grave, and place near it the

linen clothes in which he had been folded, and then glide away towards

the village to plague its inhabitants.

"The stranger, having seen all this, came down from the steeple, took

the linen wrappings of the vampire, and carried them up to the top of

the tower, which he again mounted. When the vampire returned from his

prowlings and missed his clothes, he cried furiously to the Moravian,

whom he saw at the summit of the tower, and who, in reply, beckoned him

to ascend and take them. Whereupon the vampire, accepting his

invitation, began to climb the steeple, and so soon as he had reached

the battlements, the Moravian, with a stroke of his sword, clove his

skull in twain, hurling him down to the churchyard, whither, descending

by the winding stairs, the stranger followed and cut his head off, and

next day delivered it and the body to the villagers, who duly impaled

and burnt them.

"This Moravian nobleman had authority from the then head of the family

to remove the tomb of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, which he did

effectually, so that in a little while its site was quite forgotten."

"Can you point out where it stood?" asked the General, eagerly.

The forester shook his head, and smiled.

"Not a soul living could tell you that now," he said; "besides, they say

her body was removed; but no one is sure of that either."

Having thus spoken, as time pressed, he dropped his axe and departed,

leaving us to hear the remainder of the General's strange story.

XIV

\_The Meeting\_

"My beloved child," he resumed, "was now growing rapidly worse. The

physician who attended her had failed to produce the slightest

impression on her disease, for such I then supposed it to be. He saw my

alarm, and suggested a consultation. I called in an abler physician,

from Gratz.

"Several days elapsed before he arrived. He was a good and pious, as well

as a learned man. Having seen my poor ward together, they withdrew to my

library to confer and discuss. I, from the adjoining room, where I

awaited their summons, heard these two gentlemen's voices raised in

something sharper than a strictly philosophical discussion. I knocked at

the door and entered. I found the old physician from Gratz maintaining

his theory. His rival was combating it with undisguised ridicule,

accompanied with bursts of laughter. This unseemly manifestation

subsided and the altercation ended on my entrance.

"'Sir,' said my first physician, 'my learned brother seems to think that

you want a conjuror, and not a doctor.'

"'Pardon me,' said the old physician from Gratz, looking displeased, 'I

shall state my own view of the case in my own way another time. I

grieve, Monsieur le General, that by my skill and science I can be of no

use. Before I go I shall do myself the honor to suggest something to

you.'

"He seemed thoughtful, and sat down at a table and began to write.

"Profoundly disappointed, I made my bow, and as I turned to go, the other

doctor pointed over his shoulder to his companion who was writing, and

then, with a shrug, significantly touched his forehead.

"This consultation, then, left me precisely where I was. I walked out

into the grounds, all but distracted. The doctor from Gratz, in ten or

fifteen minutes, overtook me. He apologized for having followed me, but

said that he could not conscientiously take his leave without a few

words more. He told me that he could not be mistaken; no natural disease

exhibited the same symptoms; and that death was already very near. There

remained, however, a day, or possibly two, of life. If the fatal seizure

were at once arrested, with great care and skill her strength might

possibly return. But all hung now upon the confines of the irrevocable.

One more assault might extinguish the last spark of vitality which is,

every moment, ready to die.

"'And what is the nature of the seizure you speak of?' I entreated.

"'I have stated all fully in this note, which I place in your hands upon

the distinct condition that you send for the nearest clergyman, and open

my letter in his presence, and on no account read it till he is with

you; you would despise it else, and it is a matter of life and death.

Should the priest fail you, then, indeed, you may read it.'

"He asked me, before taking his leave finally, whether I would wish to

see a man curiously learned upon the very subject, which, after I had

read his letter, would probably interest me above all others, and he

urged me earnestly to invite him to visit him there; and so took

his leave.

"The ecclesiastic was absent, and I read the letter by myself. At

another time, or in another case, it might have excited my ridicule. But

into what quackeries will not people rush for a last chance, where all

accustomed means have failed, and the life of a beloved object is

at stake?

"Nothing, you will say, could be more absurd than the learned man's

letter.

"It was monstrous enough to have consigned him to a madhouse. He said

that the patient was suffering from the visits of a vampire! The

punctures which she described as having occurred near the throat, were,

he insisted, the insertion of those two long, thin, and sharp teeth

which, it is well known, are peculiar to vampires; and there could be no

doubt, he added, as to the well-defined presence of the small livid mark

which all concurred in describing as that induced by the demon's lips,

and every symptom described by the sufferer was in exact conformity with

those recorded in every case of a similar visitation.

"Being myself wholly skeptical as to the existence of any such portent

as the vampire, the supernatural theory of the good doctor furnished, in

my opinion, but another instance of learning and intelligence oddly

associated with some one hallucination. I was so miserable, however,

that, rather than try nothing, I acted upon the instructions of

the letter.

"I concealed myself in the dark dressing room, that opened upon the poor

patient's room, in which a candle was burning, and watched there till

she was fast asleep. I stood at the door, peeping through the small

crevice, my sword laid on the table beside me, as my directions

prescribed, until, a little after one, I saw a large black object, very

ill-defined, crawl, as it seemed to me, over the foot of the bed, and

swiftly spread itself up to the poor girl's throat, where it swelled, in

a moment, into a great, palpitating mass.

"For a few moments I had stood petrified. I now sprang forward, with my

sword in my hand. The black creature suddenly contracted towards the

foot of the bed, glided over it, and, standing on the floor about a yard

below the foot of the bed, with a glare of skulking ferocity and horror

fixed on me, I saw Millarca. Speculating I know not what, I struck at

her instantly with my sword; but I saw her standing near the door,

unscathed. Horrified, I pursued, and struck again. She was gone; and my

sword flew to shivers against the door.

"I can't describe to you all that passed on that horrible night. The

whole house was up and stirring. The specter Millarca was gone. But her

victim was sinking fast, and before the morning dawned, she died."

The old General was agitated. We did not speak to him. My father walked

to some little distance, and began reading the inscriptions on the

tombstones; and thus occupied, he strolled into the door of a side

chapel to prosecute his researches. The General leaned against the wall,

dried his eyes, and sighed heavily. I was relieved on hearing the voices

of Carmilla and Madame, who were at that moment approaching. The voices

died away.

In this solitude, having just listened to so strange a story, connected,

as it was, with the great and titled dead, whose monuments were

moldering among the dust and ivy round us, and every incident of which

bore so awfully upon my own mysterious case--in this haunted spot,

darkened by the towering foliage that rose on every side, dense and high

above its noiseless walls--a horror began to steal over me, and my heart

sank as I thought that my friends were, after all, not about to enter

and disturb this triste and ominous scene.

The old General's eyes were fixed on the ground, as he leaned with his

hand upon the basement of a shattered monument.

Under a narrow, arched doorway, surmounted by one of those demoniacal

grotesques in which the cynical and ghastly fancy of old Gothic carving

delights, I saw very gladly the beautiful face and figure of Carmilla

enter the shadowy chapel.

I was just about to rise and speak, and nodded smiling, in answer to her

peculiarly engaging smile; when with a cry, the old man by my side

caught up the woodman's hatchet, and started forward. On seeing him a

brutalized change came over her features. It was an instantaneous and

horrible transformation, as she made a crouching step backwards. Before

I could utter a scream, he struck at her with all his force, but she

dived under his blow, and unscathed, caught him in her tiny grasp by the

wrist. He struggled for a moment to release his arm, but his hand

opened, the axe fell to the ground, and the girl was gone.

He staggered against the wall. His grey hair stood upon his head, and a

moisture shone over his face, as if he were at the point of death.

The frightful scene had passed in a moment. The first thing I recollect

after, is Madame standing before me, and impatiently repeating again and

again, the question, "Where is Mademoiselle Carmilla?"

I answered at length, "I don't know--I can't tell--she went there," and

I pointed to the door through which Madame had just entered; "only a

minute or two since."

"But I have been standing there, in the passage, ever since Mademoiselle

Carmilla entered; and she did not return."

She then began to call "Carmilla," through every door and passage and

from the windows, but no answer came.

"She called herself Carmilla?" asked the General, still agitated.

"Carmilla, yes," I answered.

"Aye," he said; "that is Millarca. That is the same person who long ago

was called Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Depart from this accursed

ground, my poor child, as quickly as you can. Drive to the clergyman's

house, and stay there till we come. Begone! May you never behold

Carmilla more; you will not find her here."