LINES: 920 to 1141

What wonderfully different impressions and feelings, with regard to the

same circumstances, come across the mind in the broad, clear, and

beautiful light of day to what haunt the imagination, and often render

the judgment almost incapable of action, when the heavy shadow of night

is upon all things.

There must be a downright physical reason for this effect--it is so

remarkable and so universal. It seems that the sun's rays so completely

alter and modify the constitution of the atmosphere, that it produces,

as we inhale it, a wonderfully different effect upon the nerves of the

human subject.

We can account for this phenomenon in no other way. Perhaps never in his

life had he, Henry Bannerworth, felt so strongly this transition of

feeling as he now felt it, when the beautiful daylight gradually dawned

upon him, as he kept his lonely watch by the bedside of his slumbering

sister.

That watch had been a perfectly undisturbed one. Not the least sight or

sound of any intrusion had reached his senses. All had been as still as

the very grave.

And yet while the night lasted, and he was more indebted to the rays of

the candle, which he had placed upon a shelf, for the power to

distinguish objects than to the light of the morning, a thousand uneasy

and strange sensations had found a home in his agitated bosom.

He looked so many times at the portrait which was in the panel that at

length he felt an undefined sensation of terror creep over him whenever

he took his eyes off it.

He tried to keep himself from looking at it, but he found it vain, so he

adopted what, perhaps, was certainly the wisest, best plan, namely, to

look at it continually.

He shifted his chair so that he could gaze upon it without any effort,

and he placed the candle so that a faint light was thrown upon it, and

there he sat, a prey to many conflicting and uncomfortable feelings,

until the daylight began to make the candle flame look dull and sickly.

Solution for the events of the night he could find none. He racked his

imagination in vain to find some means, however vague, of endeavouring

to account for what occurred, and still he was at fault. All was to him

wrapped in the gloom of the most profound mystery.

And how strangely, too, the eyes of that portrait appeared to look upon

him--as if instinct with life, and as if the head to which they belonged

was busy in endeavouring to find out the secret communings of his soul.

It was wonderfully well executed that portrait; so life-like, that the

very features seemed to move as you gazed upon them.

"It shall be removed," said Henry. "I would remove it now, but that it

seems absolutely painted on the panel, and I should awake Flora in any

attempt to do so."

He arose and ascertained that such was the case, and that it would

require a workman, with proper tools adapted to the job, to remove the

portrait.

"True," he said, "I might now destroy it, but it is a pity to obscure a

work of such rare art as this is; I should blame myself if I were. It

shall be removed to some other room of the house, however."

Then, all of a sudden, it struck Henry how foolish it would be to remove

the portrait from the wall of a room which, in all likelihood, after

that night, would be uninhabited; for it was not probable that Flora

would choose again to inhabit a chamber in which she had gone through so

much terror.

"It can be left where it is," he said, "and we can fasten up, if we

please, even the very door of this room, so that no one need trouble

themselves any further about it."

The morning was now coming fast, and just as Henry thought he would

partially draw a blind across the window, in order to shield from the

direct rays of the sun the eyes of Flora, she awoke.

"Help--help!" she cried, and Henry was by her side in a moment.

"You are safe, Flora--you are safe," he said.

"Where is it now?" she said.

"What--what, dear Flora?"

"The dreadful apparition. Oh, what have I done to be made thus

perpetually miserable?"

"Think no more of it, Flora."

"I must think. My brain is on fire! A million of strange eyes seem

gazing on me."

"Great Heaven! she raves," said Henry.

"Hark--hark--hark! He comes on the wings of the storm. Oh, it is most

horrible--horrible!"

Henry rang the bell, but not sufficiently loudly to create any alarm.

The sound reached the waking ear of the mother, who in a few moments was

in the room.

"She has awakened," said Henry, "and has spoken, but she seems to me to

wander in her discourse. For God's sake, soothe her, and try to bring

her mind round to its usual state."

"I will, Henry--I will."

"And I think, mother, if you were to get her out of this room, and into

some other chamber as far removed from this one as possible, it would

tend to withdraw her mind from what has occurred."

"Yes; it shall be done. Oh, Henry, what was it--what do you think it

was?"

"I am lost in a sea of wild conjecture. I can form no conclusion; where

is Mr. Marchdale?"

"I believe in his chamber."

"Then I will go and consult with him."

Henry proceeded at once to the chamber, which was, as he knew, occupied

by Mr. Marchdale; and as he crossed the corridor, he could not but pause

a moment to glance from a window at the face of nature.

As is often the case, the terrific storm of the preceding evening had

cleared the air, and rendered it deliciously invigorating and life-like.

The weather had been dull, and there had been for some days a certain

heaviness in the atmosphere, which was now entirely removed.

The morning sun was shining with uncommon brilliancy, birds were singing

in every tree and on every bush; so pleasant, so spirit-stirring,

health-giving a morning, seldom had he seen. And the effect upon his

spirits was great, although not altogether what it might have been, had

all gone on as it usually was in the habit of doing at that house. The

ordinary little casualties of evil fortune had certainly from time to

time, in the shape of illness, and one thing or another, attacked the

family of the Bannerworths in common with every other family, but here

suddenly had arisen a something at once terrible and inexplicable.

He found Mr. Marchdale up and dressed, and apparently in deep and

anxious thought. The moment he saw Henry, he said,--

"Flora is awake, I presume."

"Yes, but her mind appears to be much disturbed."

"From bodily weakness, I dare say."

"But why should she be bodily weak? she was strong and well, ay, as well

as she could ever be in all her life. The glow of youth and health was

on her cheeks. Is it possible that, in the course of one night, she

should become bodily weak to such an extent?"

"Henry," said Mr. Marchdale, sadly, "sit down. I am not, as you know, a

superstitious man."

"You certainly are not."

"And yet, I never in all my life was so absolutely staggered as I have

been by the occurrences of to-night."

"Say on."

"There is a frightful, a hideous solution of them; one which every

consideration will tend to add strength to, one which I tremble to name

now, although, yesterday, at this hour, I should have laughed it to

scorn."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, it is so. Tell no one that which I am about to say to you. Let the

dreadful suggestion remain with ourselves alone, Henry Bannerworth."

"I--I am lost in wonder."

"You promise me?"

"What--what?"

"That you will not repeat my opinion to any one."

"I do."

"On your honour."

"On my honour, I promise."

Mr. Marchdale rose, and proceeding to the door, he looked out to see

that there were no listeners near. Having ascertained then that they

were quite alone, he returned, and drawing a chair close to that on

which Henry sat, he said,--

"Henry, have you never heard of a strange and dreadful superstition

which, in some countries, is extremely rife, by which it is supposed

that there are beings who never die."

"Never die!"

"Never. In a word, Henry, have you never heard of--of--I dread to

pronounce the word."

"Speak it. God of Heaven! let me hear it."

"A \_vampyre\_!"

Henry sprung to his feet. His whole frame quivered with emotion; the

drops of perspiration stood upon his brow, as, in, a strange, hoarse

voice, he repeated the words,--

"A vampyre!"

"Even so; one who has to renew a dreadful existence by human blood--one

who lives on for ever, and must keep up such a fearful existence upon

human gore--one who eats not and drinks not as other men--a vampyre."

Henry dropped into his scat, and uttered a deep groan of the most

exquisite anguish.

"I could echo that groan," said Marchdale, "but that I am so thoroughly

bewildered I know not what to think."