

VAMPYRES  
Lord Byron to Count Dracula

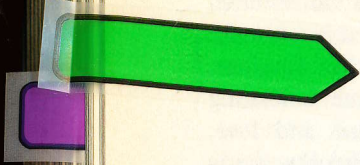
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*faber and faber*

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## Aurelia

E. T. A. HOFFMANN

This story, written in 1819–20 as one of the twenty-nine tales in his collection *Die Erzählungen der Serapionsbrüder* (*The Serapion Brethren*), is an uncharacteristic example of Hoffmann's work. It is not directly concerned with the themes we normally associate with Hoffmann – the darker side of the human psyche, symbolized by hypnotic states, automata controlled by a demonic power, and the psychological phenomenon of the *Doppelgänger* – and the cynical Lothair (in a critical discussion which introduces the story) associates vampire tales of this type with writers who simply 'blind the eye for a moment with borrowed light'. Serapion was supposed to have been a mad nobleman who cut himself off from society and lived as a hermit, writing tales of fantasy remarkable for their psychological realism. The Serapion Brethren, according to Hoffmann, would meet periodically to judge each other's efforts by this criterion. The principle of 'Serapionism' (to which all the Brethren were supposed to adhere) involved presenting paranormal phenomena *convincingly*, and the discussion which links all the various tales in Hoffmann's most famous collection normally concerns the strategies by which this can best be achieved: melodramatic vampire tales (unlike the best tales by Kleist and Tieck) are thought by Lothair to belong to the more 'obvious' kind of horror story, where the various Gothick trappings (by *showing* everything) tend to obscure 'the *idea* of the thing' (which Hoffmann thought was much more frightening).

*Aurelia* dates from the most creative part of Hoffmann's life (two years before he died of total paralysis) and, in *The Serapion Brethren*, is sandwiched between his best and most famous works. The story may be among those which, according to E. F. Bleiler, were 'written hastily, under time pressures, to pay for expensive wines, or to settle tavern bills', but in the context of the challenging discussion which precedes it, *Aurelia* manages to combine stock Gothick trappings with 'Serapionism' (despite Lothair's cynicism), and thus deserves a place here. It has long been unavailable in English. This translation comes from a Victorian collection of Hoffmann's *Tales*.

'It is remarkable,' said Sylvester, 'that – unless I mistake – another great writer appeared on the other side of the channel, about the same time as Walter Scott, and has produced works of equal greatness and splendour, but in a different direction. I mean Lord Byron. But his predominant tendency seems to be towards the gloomy, the mysterious and the terrible; and his "Vampire" I have avoided reading, for the bare idea of a vampire makes my blood run cold. So far as I understand the matter, a vampire is an animated corpse which sucks the blood of the living.'

'Ho! ho!' cried Lothair, laughing, 'a writer such as you, my dear friend, Sylvester, must of course have found it necessary to dip more or less deeply into all kinds of accounts concerning magic, witches, sorcery, enchantment, and other such works of the devil, because they are necessary for your work, and part of your stock in trade. And I should suppose you have gone into those subjects yourself with the view of getting some personal experience of them as well. As regards vampirism – that you may see how well read I am in these matters – I will tell you the name of a delightful treatise in which you may study this dark subject. The complete title of this little book is "M. Michael Ranft (Deacon of Nebra), Treatise on the Chewing and Sucking of the Dead in their Graves; wherein the true nature and description of the Hungarian vampires and bloodsuckers is clearly set forth, and all previous writings on this subject are passed in review and subjected to criticism". This title in itself will convince you of the thoroughness of this treatise, and you will learn from it that a vampire is nothing other than an accursed creature who lets himself be buried as being dead, and then rises out of the grave and sucks people's blood in their sleep. And those people become vampires in their turn. So that, according to the accounts received from Hungary and quoted by this magister, the inhabitants of whole villages become vampires of the most abominable description. To render those vampires harmless they must be dug out of their graves, a stake driven through their hearts, and their bodies burnt to ashes. Those horrible beings very often do not appear in their own proper forms, but *en masque*. A certain officer, I happen to remember, writing from Belgrade to a celebrated doctor in Leipzig for information as to the true nature of vampires, expresses himself thus: "In a village called Kinklina it chanced that two brothers were troubled by a vampire, so that one of them used to sit up by the other at night whilst he slept. The one who was watching used to see something like a dog



opening the door, but this dog used to make off when he cried out at it. At last one night they both were asleep at the same time, and the vampire bit and sucked a place under the right ear of one of them, leaving a red mark. The man died of this in three days time. In conclusion," said the officer, "as the people of this place make all this out to be miraculous, I venture to take the liberty of requesting you to tell me your private opinion as to whether it is caused by the intervention of sympathetic, diabolic, or astral spirits. And I remain, with much respect, &c." Take example by this officer of enquiring mind. As it happens his name occurs to me at this moment. He was an ensign in the Prince Alexander regiment, Sigismund Alexander Friedrich von Kottwitz. The military mind seems to have been considerably exercised on the subject of vampirism about that time. Magister Ranft quotes in his book an official declaration made by an army surgeon before two of his brother officers concerning the detection and destruction of a vampire. This declaration contains, *inter alia*, the following passage: "Inasmuch as they perceived, from the aforesaid circumstances, that this was unmistakably a vampire, they drove a stake through its heart, upon which it gave vent to a distinct gasp, emitting a considerable quantity of blood." Is that not both interesting and instructive?"

'All this of Magister Ranft's,' said Sylvester, 'may, no doubt, be sufficiently absurd and even rather crack-brained; but, at the same time, if we keep to the subject of vampirism itself, never minding in what particular fashion it may be treated, it certainly is one of the most horrible and terrible notions imaginable. I can conceive nothing more ghastly repulsive to the mind.'

'Still,' said Cyprian, 'it is capable of providing a material, when dealt with by a writer of imagination possessed of some poetical tact, which has the power of stirring within us that profound sense of awe which is innate in our hearts, and when touched by the electric impulse from an unseen spirit world causes our soul to thrill, not altogether unpleasantly after a fashion. A due amount of poetic tact on the author's part will prevent the horror of the subject from going so far as to be loathsome; for it generally has such an element of the absurd about it that does not impress us so deeply as if that were not the case. Why should not a writer be permitted to make use of the levers of fear, terror, and horror because some feeble soul here and there finds it more than it can bear?

Shall there be no strong meat at table because there happen to be some guests there whose stomachs are weak, or who have spoiled their own digestions?"

'My dear, fanciful Cyprian,' Theodore said, 'there was no occasion for your vindication of the horrible. We all know how wonderfully great writers have moved men's hearts to their very depths by means of that lever. We have only to think of Shakespeare. Moreover, who knew better how to use it than our own glorious Tieck in many of his tales? And how finely that author says: "In those imaginary legends the misery cannot reach the world with its rays until they have been broken up into prismatic colours," and I should have supposed that in that condition they would have been endurable by eyes, even not very strong.'

'We have often spoken already,' said Lothair, 'of this most genial writer; the full recognition of whom, in all his grand super-excellence and variety, is reserved for posterity, whilst Wills o' the Wisp rapidly scintillating into our ken and blinding the eye for a moment with borrowed light, go out into darkness just as speedily. On the whole, I believe that the imagination can be moved by very simple means, and that it is often more the *idea* of the thing than the thing itself which causes our fear. Not only could Kleist, for example, "dip" into the aforesaid colour-box, but he could lay the colours *on*, with the power and the genius of the most finished master. He did not need to raise a vampire out of the grave.'

'This discussion about vampirism,' said Cyprian, 'reminds me of a ghastly story which I either heard or read a very long time ago. But I think I heard it, because I seem to remember that the person who told it said that the circumstances had actually happened, and mentioned the name of the family and of their country seat where it took place. But if this story is known to you as being in print, please stop me and prevent my going on with it, because there's nothing more wearisome than to tell people things which they have known for ever so long.'

'I foresee,' said Ottmar, 'that you are going to give us something unusually awful and terrible. But remember Saint Serapion and be as concise as you can, so that Vincenz may have his turn; for I see that he is waiting impatiently to read us that long-promised story of his.'

'Hush! hush!' said Vincenz. 'I could not wish anything better than that Cyprian should hang up a fine dark canvas by way of a background so as to throw out the figures of my tale, which I think are brightly and variedly coloured, and certainly excessively active. So begin, my



Cyprianus, and be as gloomy, as frightful, as terrible as the vampirish Lord Byron himself, though I know nothing about him, as I have never read a word of his writings.'

Count Hyppolitus (began Cyprian) had just returned from a long time spent in travelling to take possession of the rich inheritance which his father, recently dead, had left to him. The ancestral home was situated in the most beautiful and charming country imaginable, and the income from the property was amply sufficient to defray the cost of the most extensive improvements. Whatever in the way of architecture and landscape gardening had struck the Count during his travels – particularly in England – as specially delightful and apposite, he was going to reproduce in his own demesne. Architects, landscape gardeners, and labourers of all sorts arrived on the scene as they were wanted, and there commenced at once a complete reconstruction of the place, whilst an extensive park was laid out on the grandest scale, which involved the including within its boundaries of the church, the parsonage, and the burial ground. All those improvements the Count, who possessed the necessary knowledge, superintended himself, devoting himself to this occupation body and soul; so that a year slipped away without its ever having occurred to him to take an old uncle's advice and let the light of his countenance shine in the Residenz before the eyes of the young ladies, so that the most beautiful, the best, and the most nobly born amongst them might fall to his share as wife. One morning, as he was sitting at his drawing table sketching the ground-plan of a new building, a certain elderly Baroness – distantly related to his father – was announced as having come to call. When Hyppolitus heard her name he remembered that his father had always spoken of her with the greatest indignation – nay, with absolute abhorrence, and had often warned people who were going to approach her to keep aloof, without explaining what the danger connected with her was. If he was questioned more closely, he said there were certain matters as to which it was better to keep silence. Thus much was certain, that there were rumours current in the Residenz of some most remarkable and unprecedented criminal trial in which the Baroness had been involved, which had led to her separation from her husband, driven her from her home – which was at some considerable distance – and for the suppression of the consequences of which she was indebted to the prince's forbearance. Hyppolitus felt a very painful and disagreeable

impression at the coming of a person whom his father had so detested, although the reasons for this detestation were not known to him. But the laws of hospitality, more binding in the country than in town, obliged him to receive this visit.

Never had any one, without being at all ill-favoured in the usual acceptation of that term, made by her exterior such a disagreeable impression upon the Count as did this Baroness. When she came in she looked him through and through with a glance of fire, and then she cast her eyes down and apologized for her coming in terms which were almost over-humble. She expressed her sorrow that his father, influenced by prejudices against her with which her enemies had impregnated his mind, had formed a mortal hatred to her, and though she was almost starving, in the depths of her poverty he had never given her the smallest help or support. As she had now, unexpectedly as she said, come into possession of a small sum of money she had found it possible to leave the Residenz and go to a small country town a short distance off. However, as she was engaged in this journey she had not found it possible to resist the desire to see the son of the man whom, notwithstanding his irreconcilable hatred, she had never ceased to regard with feelings of the highest esteem. The tone in which all this was spoken had the moving accents of sincerity, and the Count was all the more affected by it that, having turned his eyes away from her repulsive face, he had fixed them upon a marvellously charming and beautiful creature who was with her. The Baroness finished her speech. The Count did not seem to be aware that she had done so. He remained silent. She begged him to pardon – attributed it to her embarrassment at being where she was – her having neglected to explain that her companion was her daughter Aurelia. On this the Count found words, and blushing up to the eyes implored the Baroness, with the agitation of a young man overpowered by love, to let him atone in some degree for his father's shortcomings – the result of misunderstandings – and to favour him by paying him a long visit. In warmly enforcing this request he took her hand. But the words and the breath died away on his lips and his blood ran cold. For he felt his hand grasped as if in a vice by fingers cold and stiff as death, and the tall bony form of the Baroness, who was staring at him with eyes evidently deprived of the faculty of sight, seemed to him in its gay many-tinted attire like some bedizened corpse.

'Oh, good heavens! how unfortunate just at this moment,' Aurelia



cried out, and went on to lament in a gentle heart-penetrating voice that her mother was now and then suddenly seized by a tetanic spasm, but that it generally passed off very quickly without its being necessary to take any measures with regard to it.

Hyppolitus disengaged himself with some difficulty from the Baroness, and all the glowing life of sweetest love delight came back to him as he took Aurelia's hand and pressed it warmly to his lips. Although he had almost come to man's estate it was the first time that he felt the full force of passion, so that it was impossible for him to hide what he felt, and the manner in which Aurelia received his avowal in a noble, simple, child-like delight, kindled the fairest of hopes within him. The Baroness recovered in a few minutes, and, seemingly quite unaware of what had been happening, expressed her gratitude to the Count for his invitation to pay a visit of some duration at the Castle, saying she would be but too happy to forget the injustice with which his father had treated her.

Thus the Count's household arrangements and domestic position were completely changed, and he could not but believe that some special favour of fortune had brought to him the only woman in all the world who, as a warmly beloved and deeply adored wife, was capable of bestowing upon him the highest conceivable happiness.

The Baroness's manner of conduct underwent little alteration. She continued to be silent, grave, much wrapped up in herself, and when opportunity offered, evinced a gentle disposition, and a heart disposed towards any innocent enjoyment. The Count had become accustomed to the death-like whiteness of her face, to the very remarkable network of wrinkles which covered it, and to the generally spectral appearance which she displayed; but all this he set down to the invalid condition of her health, and also, in some measure, to a disposition which she evinced to gloomy romanticism. The servants told him that she often went out for walks in the night-time, through the park to the churchyard. He was much annoyed that his father's prejudices had influenced him to the extent that they had; and the most earnest recommendations of his uncle that he should conquer the feeling which had taken possession of him, and give up a relationship which must sooner or later drive him to his ruin, had no effect upon him.

In complete certainty of Aurelia's sincere affection, he asked for her hand; and it may be imagined with what joy the Baroness received this proposal, which transferred her into the lap of luxury from a position of

the deepest poverty. The pallor and the strange expression, which spoke of some invincible inward pain or trouble, had disappeared from Aurelia's face. The blissfulness of love beamed in her eyes, and shimmered in roses on her cheeks.

On the morning of the wedding-day a terrible event shattered the Count's hopes. The Baroness was found lying on her face dead, not far from the churchyard: and when the Count was looking out of his window on getting up, full of the bliss of the happiness which he had attained, her body was being brought back to the Castle. He supposed she was only in one of her usual attacks; but all efforts to bring her back to life were ineffectual. She was dead. Aurelia, instead of giving way to violent grief, seemed rather to be struck dumb and tearless by this blow, which appeared to have a paralyzing effect on her.

The Count was much distressed for her, and only ventured – most cautiously and most gently – to remind her that her orphaned condition rendered it necessary that conventionalities should be disregarded, and that the most essential matter in the circumstances was to hasten on the marriage as much as possible, notwithstanding the loss of her mother. At this Aurelia fell into the Count's arms, and, whilst a flood of tears ran down her cheeks, cried in a most eager manner, and in a voice which was shrill with urgency:

'Yes, yes! For the love of all the saints. For the sake of my soul's salvation – yes!'

The Count ascribed this burst of emotion to the bitter sense that, in her orphaned condition, she did not know whither to betake herself, seeing that she could not go on staying at the Castle. He took pains to procure a worthy matron as a companion for her, till in a few weeks, the wedding-day again came round. And this time no mischance interfered with it, and it crowned the bliss of Aurelia and Hyppolitus. But Aurelia had all this while been in a curiously strained and excited condition. It was not grief for her mother, but she seemed to be unceasingly, and without cessation, tortured by some inward anxiety. In the midst of the most delicious love-passage she would suddenly clasp the Count in her arms, pale as death, and like a person suddenly seized by some terror – just as if she were trying her very utmost to resist some extraneous power which was threatening to force her to destruction – would cry, 'Oh no – no! Never, never!' Now that she was married, however, it seemed that this strange, overstrained, excited condition in which she had been, abated and left her, and the terrible inward anxiety



and disturbance under which she had been labouring seemed to disappear.

The Count could not but suspect the existence of some secret evil mystery by which Aurelia's inner being was tormented, but he very properly thought it would be unkind and unfeeling to ask her about it whilst her excitement lasted, and she herself avoided any explanation on the subject. However, a time came when he thought he might venture to hint gently, that perhaps it would be well if she indicated to him the cause of the strange condition of her mind. She herself at once said it would be a satisfaction to her to open her mind to him, her beloved husband. And great was his amazement to learn that what was at the bottom of the mystery, was the atrociously wicked life which her mother had led, that was so perturbing her mind.

'Can there be anything more terrible,' she said, 'than to have to hate, detest, and abhor one's own mother?'

Thus the prejudices (as they were called) of his father and uncle had not been unfounded, and the Baroness had deceived him in the most deliberate manner. He was obliged to confess to himself – and he made no secret of it – that it was a fortunate circumstance that the Baroness had died on the morning of his wedding-day. But Aurelia declared that as soon as her mother was dead she had been seized by dark and horrible terrors, and could not help thinking that her mother would rise from her grave, and drag her from her husband's arms into perdition.

She said she dimly remembered, one morning when she was a mere child, being awakened by a frightful commotion in the house. Doors opened and shut; strangers' voices cried out in confusion. At last, things becoming quieter, her nurse took her in her arms, and carried her into a large room where there were many people, and the man who had often played with her, and given her sweetmeats, lying stretched on a long table. This man she had always called 'Papa,' and she stretched her hands out to him, and wanted to kiss him. But his lips, always warm before, were cold as ice, and Aurelia broke into violent weeping, without knowing why. The nurse took her to a strange house, where she remained a long while, till at last a lady came and took her away in a carriage. This was her mother, who soon after took her to the Residenz.

When Aurelia got to be about sixteen, a man came to the house whom her mother welcomed joyfully, and treated with much confidentiality, receiving him with much intimacy of friendship, as being a dear old friend. He came more and more frequently, and the Baroness's style of

existence was soon greatly altered for the better. Instead of living in an attic, and subsisting on the poorest of fare, and wearing the most wretched old clothes, she took a fine lodging in the most fashionable quarter, wore fine dresses, ate and drank with this stranger of the best and most expensive food and drink daily (he was her daily guest), and took her part in all the public pleasurable which the Residenz had to offer.

Aurelia was the person upon whom this bettering of her mother's circumstances (evidently attributable solely to the stranger) exercised no influence whatever. She remained shut up in her room when her mother went out to enjoy herself in the stranger's company, and was obliged to live just as miserably as before. This man, though about forty, had a very fresh and youthful appearance, a tall, handsome person, and a face by no means devoid of a certain amount of manly good looks. Notwithstanding this, he was repugnant to Aurelia on account of his style of behaviour. He seemed to try to constrain himself, to conduct himself like a gentleman and person of some cultivation, but there was constantly, and most evidently, piercing through this exterior veneer the unmistakable evidence of his really being a totally uncultured person, whose manners and habits were those of the very lowest ranks of the people. And the way in which he began to look at Aurelia filled her with terror – nay, with an abhorrence of which she could not explain the reason to herself.

Up to this point the Baroness had never taken the trouble to say a single word to Aurelia about this stranger. But now she told her his name, adding that this Baron was a man of great wealth, and a distant relation. She lauded his good looks, and his various delightful qualities, and ended by asking Aurelia if she thought she could bring herself to take a liking to him. Aurelia made no secret of the inward detestation which she felt for him. The Baroness darted a glance of lightning at her, which terrified her excessively, and told her she was a foolish, ignorant creature. After this she was kinder to her than she had ever been before. She was provided with grand dresses in the height of the fashion, and taken to share in all the public pleasures. The man now strove to gain her favour in a manner which rendered him more and more abhorrent to her. But her delicate, maidenly instincts were wounded in the most mortal manner, when an unfortunate accident rendered her an unwilling, secret witness of an abominable atrocity between her abandoned and depraved mother and him. When, a few days after this, this man,



after having taken a good deal of wine, clasped Aurelia in his arms in a way which left no doubt as to his intention, her desperation gave her strength, and she pushed him from her so that he fell down on his back. She rushed away and bolted herself in her own room. The Baroness told her, very calmly and deliberately, that, inasmuch as the Baron paid all the household expenses, and she had not the slightest intention of going back to the old poverty of their previous life, this was a case in which any absurd coyness would be both ludicrous and inconvenient, and that she would really have to make up her mind to comply with the Baron's wishes, because, if not, he had threatened to part company at once. Instead of being affected by Aurelia's bitter tears and agonized entreaties, the old woman, breaking into the most brazen and shameless laughter, talked in the most depraved manner of a state of matters which would cause Aurelia to bid, for ever, farewell to every feeling of enjoyment of life in such unrestrained and detestable depravity, defying and insulting all sense of ordinary propriety, so that her shame and terror were undecipherable at what she was obliged to hear. In fact she gave herself up for lost, and her only means of salvation appeared to her to be immediate flight.

She had managed to possess herself of the key of the hall door, had got together the few little necessities which she absolutely required, and, just after midnight, was moving softly through the dimly-lighted front hall, at a time when she thought her mother was sure to be fast asleep. She was on the point of stepping quietly out into the street, when the door opened with a clang, and heavy footsteps came noisily up the steps. The Baroness came staggering and stumbling into the hall, right up to Aurelia's feet, nothing upon her but a kind of miserable wrapper all covered with dirt, her breast and her arms naked, her grey hair all hanging down and dishevelled. And close after her came the stranger, who seized her by the hair, and dragged her into the middle of the hall crying out in a yelling voice –

'Wait, you old devil, you witch of hell! I'll serve you up a wedding breakfast.' And with a good thick cudgel which he had in his hand he set to and belaboured and maltreated her in the most shameful manner. She made a terrible screaming and outcry, whilst Aurelia, scarcely knowing what she was about, screamed aloud out of the window for help.

It chanced that there was a patrol of armed police just passing. The men came at once into the house.

'Seize him!' cried the Baroness, writhing in convulsions of rage and pain. 'Seize him – hold him fast! Look at his bare back. He's –'

When the police sergeant heard the Baroness speak the name he shouted out in the greatest delight –

'Hoho! We've got you at last, Devil Alias, have we?' And in spite of his violent resistance, they marched him off.

But notwithstanding all this which had been happening, the Baroness had understood well enough what Aurelia's idea had been. She contented herself with taking her somewhat roughly by the arm, pushing her into her room, and locking her up in it, without saying a word. She went out early the next morning, and did not come back till late in the evening. And during this time Aurelia remained a prisoner in her room, never seeing nor hearing a creature, and having nothing to eat or drink. This went on for several days. The Baroness often glared at her with eyes flashing anger, and seemed to be wrestling with some decision, until, one evening, letters came which seemed to cause her satisfaction.

'Silly creature! all this is your fault. However, it seems to be all coming right now, and all I hope is that the terrible punishment which the Evil Spirit was threatening you with may not come upon you.' This was what the Baroness said to Aurelia, and then she became more kind and friendly, and Aurelia, no longer distressed by the presence of the horrible man, and having given up the idea of escaping, was allowed a little more freedom.

Some time had elapsed, when one day, as Aurelia was sitting alone in her room, she heard a great clamour approaching in the street. The maid came running in, and said that they were taking the hangman's son of — to prison, that he had been branded on the back there for robbery and murder, and had escaped, and was now retaken.

Aurelia, full of anxious presentiment, tottered to the window. Her presentiment was not fallacious. It *was* the stranger (as we have styled him), and he was being brought along, firmly bound upon a tumbril, surrounded by a strong guard. He was being taken back to undergo his sentence. Aurelia, nearly fainting, sank back into her chair, as his frightfully wild look fell upon her, while he shook his clenched fist up at the window with the most threatening gestures.

After this the Baroness was still a great deal away from the house; but she never took Aurelia with her, so that the latter led a sorrowful,



miserable existence – occupied in thinking many thoughts as to destiny, and the threatening future which might unexpectedly come upon her.

From the maidservant (who had only come into the house subsequently to the nocturnal adventure which has been described, and who had probably only quite recently heard about the intimacy of the terms in which the Baroness had been living with this criminal), Aurelia learned that the folks in the Residenz were very much grieved at the Baroness's having been so deceived and imposed upon by a scoundrel of this description. But Aurelia knew only too well how differently the matter had really stood; and it seemed to her impossible that, at all events, the men of the police, who had apprehended the fellow in the Baroness's very house, should not have known all about the intimacy of the relations between them, inasmuch as she herself had told them his name, and directed their attention to the brand-marks on his back, as proofs of his identity. Moreover, this loquacious maid sometimes talked in a very ambiguous way about that which people were, here and there, thinking and saying; and, for that matter, would like very much to know better about – as to the courts having been making careful investigations, and having gone so far as to threaten the Baroness with arrest, on account of strange disclosures which the hangman's son had made concerning her.

Aurelia was obliged to admit, in her own mind, that it was another proof of her mother's depraved way of looking at things that, even after this terrible affair, she should have found it possible to go on living in the Residenz. But at last she felt herself constrained to leave the place where she knew she was the object of but too well-founded, shameful suspicion, and fly to a more distant spot. On this journey she came to the Count's Castle, and there ensued what has been related.

Aurelia could not but consider herself marvellously fortunate to have got clear of all these troubles. But how profound was her horror when, speaking to her mother in this blessed sense of the merciful intervention of Heaven in her regard, the latter, with fires of hell in her eyes, cried out in a yelling voice:

'You are my misfortune, horrible creature that you are! But in the midst of your imagined happiness vengeance will overtake you, if I should be carried away by a sudden death. In those tetanic spasms, which your birth cost me, the subtle craft of the devil –'

Here Aurelia suddenly stopped. She threw herself upon her husband's breast, and implored him to spare her the complete recital of

what the Baroness had said to her in the delirium of her insanity. She said she felt her inmost heart and soul crushed to pieces at the bare idea of the frightful threatnings – far beyond the wildest imagination's concept of the terrible – uttered to her by her mother, possessed, as she was at the time, by the most diabolical powers.

The Count comforted his bride to the best of his ability, although, he felt himself permeated by the coldest and most deathly shuddering horror. Even when he had regained some calmness, he could not but confess to himself that the profound horribleness of the Baroness, even now that she was dead, cast a deep shadow over his life, sunbright as it otherwise seemed to be.

In a very short time Aurelia began to alter very perceptibly. Whilst the deathly paleness of her face, and the fatigued appearance of her eyes, seemed to point to some bodily ailment, her mental state – confused, variable, restless, as if she were constantly frightened at something – led to the conclusion that there was some fresh mystery perturbing her system. She shunned her husband. She shut herself up in her rooms, sought the most solitary walks in the park. And when she then allowed herself to be seen, her eyes, red with weeping, her contorted features, gave unmistakable evidence of some terrible suffering which she had been undergoing. It was in vain that the Count took every possible pains to discover the cause of this condition of hers, and the only thing which had any effect in bringing him out of the hopeless state into which those remarkable symptoms of his wife's had plunged him, was the deliberate opinion of a celebrated doctor, that this strangely excited condition of the Countess was nothing other than the natural result of a bodily state which indicated the happy result of a fortunate marriage. This doctor, on one occasion when he was at table with the Count and Countess, permitted himself sundry allusions to this presumed state of what the German nation calls 'good hope.' The Countess seemed to listen to all this with indifference for some time. But suddenly her attention became vividly awakened when the doctor spoke of the wonderful longings which women in that condition become possessed by, and which they cannot resist without the most injurious effects supervening upon their own health, and even upon that of the child. The Countess overwhelmed the doctor with questions, and the latter did not weary of quoting the strangest and most entertaining cases of this description from his own practice and experience.

'Moreover,' he said, 'there are cases on record in which women have



been led, by these strange, abnormal longings, to commit most terrible crimes. There was a certain blacksmith's wife, who had such an irresistible longing for her husband's flesh that, one night, when he came home the worse for liquor, she set upon him with a large knife, and cut him about so frightfully that he died in a few hours' time.'

Scarcely had the doctor said these words, when the Countess fell back in her chair fainting, and was with much difficulty recovered from the succession of hysterical attacks which supervened. The doctor then saw that he had acted very thoughtlessly in alluding to such a frightful occurrence in the presence of a lady whose nervous system was in such a delicate condition.

However, this crisis seemed to have a beneficial effect upon her, for she became calmer; although, soon afterwards there came upon her a very remarkable condition of rigidity, as of benumbedness. There was a darksome fire in her eyes, and her deathlike pallor increased to such an extent, that the Count was driven into new and most tormenting doubts as to her condition. The most inexplicable thing was that she never took the smallest morsel of anything to eat, evincing the utmost repugnance at the sight of all food, particularly meat. This repugnance was so invincible that she was constantly obliged to get up and leave the table, with the most marked indications of loathing. The doctor's skill was in vain, and the Count's most urgent and affectionate entreaties were powerless to induce her to take even a single drop of medicine of any kind. And, inasmuch as weeks, nay, months, had passed without her having taken so much as a morsel of food, and it had become an unfathomable mystery how she managed to keep alive, the doctor came to the conclusion that there was something in the case which lay beyond the domain of ordinary human science. He made some pretext for leaving the Castle, but the Count saw clearly enough that this doctor, whose skilfulness was well approved, and who had a high reputation to maintain, felt that the Countess's condition was too unintelligible, and in fact, too strangely mysterious, for him to stay on there, witness of an illness impossible to be understood – as to which he felt he had no power to render assistance.

It may be readily imagined into what a state of mind all this put the Count. But there was more to come. Just at this juncture an old, privileged servant took an opportunity, when he found the Count alone, of telling him that the Countess went out every night, and did not come home till daybreak.

The Count's blood ran cold. It struck him, as a matter which he had not quite realized before, that, for a short time back, there had fallen upon him, regularly about midnight, a curiously unnatural sleepiness, which he now believed to be caused by some narcotic administered to him by the Countess, to enable her to get away unobserved. The darkest suspicions and forebodings came into his mind. He thought of the diabolical mother, and that, perhaps, *her* instincts had begun to awake in her daughter. He thought of some possibility of a conjugal infidelity. He remembered the terrible hangman's son.

It was so ordained that the very next night was to explain this terrible mystery to him – that which alone could be the key to the Countess's strange condition.

She herself used, every evening, to make the tea which the Count always took before going to bed. This evening he did not take a drop of it, and when he went to bed he had not the slightest symptom of the sleepiness which generally came upon him as it got towards midnight. However, he lay back on his pillows, and had all the appearance of being fast asleep as usual.

And then the Countess rose up very quietly, with the utmost precautions, came up to his bedside, held a lamp to his eyes, and then, convinced that he was sound asleep, went softly out of the room.

His heart throbbed fast. He got up, put on a cloak, and went after the Countess. It was a fine moonlight night, so that, though Aurelia had got a considerable start of him, he could see her distinctly going along in the distance in her white dress. She went through the park, right on to the burying-ground, and there she disappeared at the wall. The Count ran quickly after her in through the gate of the burying-ground, which he found open. There, in the bright moonlight, he saw a circle of frightful, spectral-looking creatures. Old women, half naked, were cowering down upon the ground, and in the midst of them lay the corpse of a man, which they were tearing at with wolfish appetite.

Aurelia was amongst them.

The Count took flight in the wildest horror, and ran, without any idea where he was going or what he was doing, impelled by the deadliest terror, all about the walks in the park, till he found himself at the door of his own Castle as the day was breaking, bathed in cold perspiration. Involuntarily, without the capability of taking hold of a thought, he dashed up the steps, and went bursting through the passages and into his own bedroom. There lay the Countess, to all appearance in the



deepest and sweetest of sleeps. And the Count would fain have persuaded himself that some deceptive dream-image, or (inasmuch as his cloak, wet with dew, was a proof, if any had been needed, that he had really been to the burying-ground in the night) some soul-deceiving phantom had been the cause of his deathly horror. He did not wait for Aurelia's waking, but left the room, dressed, and got on to a horse. His ride, in the exquisite morning, amid sweet-scented trees and shrubs, whence the happy songs of the newly-awakened birds greeted him, drove from his memory for a time the terrible images of the night. He went back to the Castle comforted and gladdened in heart.

But when he and the Countess sat down alone together at table, and, the dishes being brought and handed, she rose to hurry away, with loathing, at the sight of the food as usual, the terrible conviction that what he had seen was true, was reality, impressed itself irresistibly on his mind. In the wildest fury he rose from his seat, crying:

'Accursed misbirth of hell! I understand your hatred of the food of mankind. You get your sustenance out of the burying-ground, damnable creature that you are!'

As soon as those words had passed his lips, the Countess flew at him, uttering a sound between a snarl and a howl, and bit him on the breast with the fury of a hyena. He dashed her from him on to the ground, raving fiercely as she was, and she gave up the ghost in the most terrible convulsions.

The Count became a maniac.

'Well,' said Lothair, after there had been a few minutes of silence amongst the friends, 'you have certainly kept your word, my incomparable Cyprianus, most thoroughly and magnificently. In comparison with this story of yours, vampirism is the merest children's tale – a funny Christmas story, to be laughed at. Oh, truly, everything in it is fearfully interesting, and so highly seasoned with asafoetida that an unnaturally excited palate, which has lost its relish for healthy, natural food, might immensely enjoy it.'

'And yet,' said Theodore, 'our friend has discreetly thrown a veil over a great many things, and has passed so rapidly over others, that his story has merely caused us a passing feeling of the eerie and shuddery – for which we are duly grateful to him. I remember very well having read this story in an old book, where everything was told with the most prolix enumeration of all the details; and the old woman's atrocities in

particular were set forth in all their minutiae, truly *con amore*, so that the whole affair produced, and left behind it, a most repulsive impression, which it took a long while to get over. I was delighted when I had forgotten the horrible thing, and Cyprian ought not to have recalled it to my memory; although I must admit that he has acted in accordance with the principles of our patron saint Serapion, and caused us a sufficient thrill of horror, particularly towards the end. It made us all turn pale, particularly the narrator himself!'