

Ruthven enters.

ALL

Who are you?

GILBERT

What do you want?

RUTHVEN

Oh, pardon, a thousand pardons, ladies! Excuse me, gentlemen. You ask me who I am—I am a traveler like you, sent away by the innkeeper, Señor Rozo, who is marrying his daughter. They told me that a joyous company had bravely gone up to the Castle Tormenar—and in fact, from down there, I saw the windows which seemed to throw out flames. What do I want—why, since you've found a fine lodging here, I quite simply want you to admit me to your company. I bring my provisions and my arms. I am Lord Ruthven, peer of England, your devoted servant. Put your swords back in their scabbards, gentlemen and you, ladies, pardon me for not having myself announced, but I found no one in the antechamber.

GILBERT

It's for us to ask you pardon, Milord—but your arrival here in the midst of these ruins was so unexpected. Relax, Juana.

RUTHVEN

Oh! But I'm acting frightfully. What, Madam, does my appearance make you so pale and trembling?

JUANA

In truth, Milord, your arrival coincided so strangely with a story they were telling.

RUTHVEN

And what story were they telling?

GILBERT

Why they spoke of—

RUTHVEN

Of what?

THIRD TRAVELER

Of a vampire, Milord.

RUTHVEN

Ah! Ah! Of a—?

SECOND TRAVELER

I was saying that, in Hungary, it's not unusual to hear even more terrible stories told—

RUTHVEN

Yes, surely, but it's much rarer thing to meet the hero of these stories. Me, too, ladies, I've traveled in Hungary and have never seen one.

SECOND TRAVELER

But still, were you never told—?

RUTHVEN

If you please, gentlemen, can't we talk of things more pleasant?

JUANA

Oh! As for me, I beg you.

GILBERT

Milord, permit me to introduce you to those you find yourselves with, the Marquis d'Hecquerey with his wife and two daughters, the Chevalier Marini and as for me, Milord, I am Count Gilbert de Tiffauges. Now, Milord—be welcome. You said you had some weapons?

RUTHVEN

Here.

GILBERT

Provisions?

RUTHVEN

My valet's bringing it here on a mule.

GILBERT

But I don't see him?

RUTHVEN

Oh, I left him behind arguing with the mule. He's really very bull-headed a mule and this one doubtless knows the legend of Castle Tormenar so well that he resists coming with all his strength.

GILBERT

But perhaps your servant will get lost?

RUTHVEN

Oh—there's no danger. He's a lad from these parts that I took from the inn of Master Rozos. He was looking for a master and I engaged him. Eh! I hear him! Arrive, lad! Arrive!

Lazare enters.

LAZARE

All the same, here I am! Well, my word of honor, I didn't know a man could be brave enough to have such fear of dying.

GILBERT

Why, it's that poltroon of Lazare.

LAZARE

Poltroon! Do you say that to me, here?

GILBERT

What the devil decided you to climb up to Tormenar?

LAZARE

Listen! I already missed two chances, Madam and you. Who risks nothing gets nothing. I swore not to let a third escape. It was this gentleman who came—he's not the one who pleased me the most, no, I must say it, but he was the one who came last.
(looking around him)

You are all still in good condition.

JUANA

My friend.

LAZARE

Ah! It's you, Señora?

JUANA

Yes—you didn't see Don Luis at the inn?

LAZARE

I didn't see Don Luis at the inn, Señora. If another had come, I assure you, I would have chosen him.

THIRD TRAVELER

But you aren't eating or drinking, Milord?

RUTHVEN

The cold has taken my appetite.

LAZARE

Why, how funny that is—the cold has such an effect on him. It has the contrary effect on me. Good! So I don't have the same character as my master—Oh—whoever would have told me that I would be dining at Castle Tormenar!

THIRD TRAVELER

Still, what's wrong with this famous Castle Tormenar?

FIRST TRAVELER

To me, it seems it's a castle like any other.

LAZARE

Yes, like all the others! He's sweet, this tourist.

SECOND TRAVELER

Absolutely like, a little less dilapidated, perhaps—that's all.

LAZARE

That's all! Why you don't know what happened in Castle Tormenar?

GILBERT

Here?

LAZARE

Yes, here, right in this room where we are.

FIRST TRAVELER

Ah! Gentlemen, each of you told us a story—now this brave lad must tell us his—I bet whatever you want that it won't be as lugubrious as ours.

LAZARE

Me, tell the story of Castle Tormenar here in Castle Tormenar even? Come on—never!

FIRST TRAVELER

Why's that?

LAZARE

Why because I already felt myself almost dying of fear when I told it two leagues from here. And as for telling it in this castle, I would be afraid of dying for real!

FIRST TRAVELER

Come on, come here and drink this glass of wine.

LAZARE

Oh! As to that, I ask nothing better—for the story, no, no. I don't take a turn like that for myself. Oh! I don't say if I had two or three glasses of wine like that in my head.

SECOND TRAVELER

A second, my friend—and to your health!

LAZARE

You do me honor! Ah! No doubt about it, new wine. Not like Master Rozo's.

FIRST TRAVELER

It is.

LAZARE

It's from Master Rozo's?

THIRD TRAVELER

Be sure of it.

LAZARE

Then I must be mistaken about the bottle.

SECOND TRAVELER

Well—because you've had three glasses of wine.

LAZARE

You think so?

GILBERT

You said there was a Count of Tormenar?

LAZARE

No—Not just one—three.

FIRST TRAVELER

Three!

LAZARE

Yes—there were three Counts of Tormenar. You see—there was one who was said to have passed away fifty years ago. Others who say it was a thousand years ago, and then others who say he never died at all.

SECOND TRAVELER

But still, at the present time, there exists no Count of Tormenar?

LAZARE

Why—what does it matter to you—I ask you?

FIRST TRAVELER

Why—Hell!—When one has been received in people's home, it's nice to know if you might meet them someday to thank them.

LAZARE

Ha! You won't meet him—rest assured or if you meet him, it's some cousin, a collateral who doesn't bear the family name.

SECOND TRAVELER

Still, to get back to these Counts.

LAZARE

Well, I said each of them had a castle in Catalonia—one of them, the youngest and most despicable, invited his two brothers to dine with him. He's the one who lived in this castle.

THIRD TRAVELER

Ah! The devil!

LAZARE

You really are determined to know the end of this story?

ALL

Why certainly. By God!

LAZARE

It's that I'd prefer not to tell it.

ALL

The end of the story. The end of the story.

LAZARE

The youngest and most despicable of the three invited his two brothers to dine—he lit up the castle as for a feast day, he prepared everything as if they were going to come.

GILBERT

As if they were going to come?

LAZARE

Yes, but he knew they wouldn't come, the dog, since he had them murdered on the way.

RUTHVEN

Ah! Ah! Why—do you know your story is charming, my friend? I'm really pleased to have taken you into my service; when you have nothing to do, you'll tell me these stories.

LAZARE

Milord is good. He had them murdered in the mountains and, as he was naturally their heir, and since he killed them and their children with them—he inherited.

THIRD TRAVELER

You forgot the circumstances of the children which was very important.

LAZARE

I had forgotten, that's right. But that doesn't matter since I remembered it. He inherited all three castles.

FIRST TRAVELER

Only two, my friend, since the third was his.

LAZARE

That's right—but then something happened to him—

THIRD TRAVELER

Which was?

LAZARE

Oh! A bad business completely.

GILBERT

Let's see.

LAZARE

Which was that whenever he sat down to eat, he found one of his brothers was already seated before him—which was—whenever he wanted to go to bed, he found one of his brothers sleeping in the space between the bed and the wall.

RUTHVEN

My dear Lazare, I'm doubling your wages.

LAZARE

I thank Milord much. I know many more stories like that and, if he likes, I can learn others.

RUTHVEN

Ah! This suffices, since you've finished it.

FIRST TRAVELER

But, it is finished, doubtless?

LAZARE

Ah, indeed, yes! The rogue had three children, three boys—handsome and strong—one a student at the University of Salamanca, the second at the University of Valladolid and the third at Coimbra. He made all three come and resolved to go with them to visit his brothers' castles which he did not dare visit alone.

THIRD TRAVELER

That's understandable.

LAZARE

During the first voyage made to one of the castles, his oldest son died. After the first, he went to the second and he lost his younger son. He was obstinate and returned to the first where he lost his third son.

FIRST TRAVELER

But since he was warned, what the Devil was he going to do in such a place?

LAZARE

Yes—really—what was he going to do in this castle? It appears that he also said that. So that not daring to return to the others or his own, he went to a monastery where he confessed his crime, did penance and died with the odor of sanctity. Since that time, the three chateaux have been deserted and when, by chance, travelers stop to pass the night, the next morning, one or two are found dead. That's infallible, that is!

RUTHVEN

In that case, gentlemen, the bad luck will be mine.

GILBERT

Why's that?

RUTHVEN

Because I was the last to arrive and customarily, it's on the last that these things fall.