

Scene II

Maxwell's office. A door at the back gives on the garden. A door at the right. A large library filled with books, medical instruments, stuffed animals, viols, urns, glassware, skeletons and preserved heads. To the left, a canopied bed on a platform, protected by curtains running on rods. A lamp burns on the table.

AT RISE, Maxwell is alone, looking through the curtains toward the bed which is half open. A ray of light slips through the transept and strikes the face of the Stranger—Lord Ruthven—for it is he—stretched on the bed

MAXWELL

Dick Thorn's is a fine blade. The dressing was only placed on a cadaver. I swore I would bring him back to life, but I admit my impotence. I confess my shame.

(slowly moving away)

Now, here's all that a man can do! Destroy! Dick Thorn is king of the world! His blade is all powerful. It kills who it pleases. As for me, I have science. And I can do nothing against his power.

(returning to the foot of the bed)

Oh, everything's quite over. The wound is deep enough for the soul to be able to escape. He's dead! Quite dead! Heavens! Is that an illusion? Did I see his eye open? His hand move?

(he places his hand on the dead
man's chest)

Oh, no, no, not a heartbeat. He's dead, quite dead. And yet ...

He runs to the library and pulls out an old book which he places on the table and thumbs through it feverishly.

MAXWELL

By all the Powers of Hell. Could it be?...

(reading)

"Don't deny vampires. The wisest minds have attested their existence. When the tomb shuts on them, they can emerge at night in the shape of ghosts."

(interrupting himself)

Ghosts! Visions born of fever or folly. This is naive.

(continues reading)

"The Vampire can be reborn three times. Life can return to the body when it is exposed to the action of lunar rays, before its remains have been confided to the Earth again; like a living man, it is subject to the chances other men run of death, and when for a third time, it has perished by a violent death, all resurrection is impossible. It returns to nothingness."

(rising)

I am confronting one of the most terrifying mysteries of Nature. What of the victims if I give in to the temptations of science? Won't the innocent pay for the guilty? Oh, that would be shocking! Remain dead, remain dead, cursed one. I won't be the one to revive you!

He violently closes the curtains of the canopy, then continues to read the book. Suddenly, there is a gentle knocking at the door.

MAXWELL

Someone's knocking?

The knocking becomes impatient.

MAXWELL

Who could it be?

After making certain the curtains are quite shut, he goes to the door and opens it. It is Reginald.

REGINALD

It's me, Reginald!

MAXWELL

You, Reginald, at this hour?

REGINALD

Yes. Are you alone?

MAXWELL

(after casting a glance at the bed)

Alone, yes, I'm alone!

REGINALD

(turning towards the outside)

In that case, come in!

Anna enters dressed in a long mantle with a capuchin domino.

MAXWELL

What does this mean?

ANNA

(removing the hood)

It's me, Maxwell!

Reginald shuts the door behind her.

MAXWELL

Anna! You here, at my place, at night!

ANNA

Yes. Tomorrow would have been too late.

MAXWELL

Why?

ANNA

I wanted to warn you, to beg you... I've come to tell you that I love you, but my father rules my destiny. He doesn't intend to give me to you. Please don't take arms against him...

MAXWELL

I hear you, and yet, I'm afraid of misunderstanding. The hope he let me glimpse...?

ANNA

You've got to renounce it.

MAXWELL

But just this evening...

ANNA

Earlier this evening, my father was merely Sir William Clifford, Baronet. But the title and fortune of the old Lord Ruthven will now come to him, and...

MAXWELL

He wasn't so confident yesterday.

REGINALD

He'd been told a legitimate heir existed.

MAXWELL

I see.

REGINALD

But now, Sir William is quite certain that this heir no longer lives and, in that case...

MAXWELL

In that case, there is an unbridgeable gap between us. I am poor because I've devoted my life to science, and my science to relieving the suffering of the poor. So it is madness for me to pretend to such an alliance.

REGINALD

My friend!

MAXWELL

Worse still, he will give Anna to someone else.

ANNA

No! Never!

MAXWELL

Oh, yes. He will command and you will have no choice but obey, and marry the one he's chosen for you.

ANNA

Maxwell, it seemed to me that my voice would soften the bitterness of his refusal. I was mistaken. If you lack courage, who will give me some?

MAXWELL

Anna! I am really suffering...

ANNA

Me, too!

MAXWELL

But you won't have either the will or the strength to fight back. And to know that, one day, I may see you in the arms of a rival...

ANNA

Maxwell...

MAXWELL

An odious rival!

REGINALD

Why would you have to see her like that?

MAXWELL

What do you mean?

REGINALD

What's forcing you to dwell in this country where life is so painful and sad for you?

MAXWELL

I...

REGINALD

No question Anna will marry someday. But you could choose to be unaware of it, if by a voluntary exile—

MAXWELL

Voluntary exile! Tell me that idea doesn't come from you. You're in love with my sister. You know she'd follow me anywhere.

REGINALD

Maxwell!

MAXWELL

I tell you, this idea didn't come from you. I smell the hand of proud Sir William... Insolent plebeian, I dared pretend to the hand of his daughter. So much audacity merits punishment. A refusal is not enough. He must drive me out!

REGINALD

Maxwell, you're becoming obsessed!

MAXWELL

Swear to me. Swear to me, both of you, that I'm wrong... Ah! You keep silent! So, I guessed right, didn't I?

ANNA

Yes, Maxwell, it is true. My father is cruel. He very much wishes you ill. He insists on your departure. I curse fate, but I cannot curse him, for he's my father, Maxwell—my father.

REGINALD

What's your decision, Maxwell?

MAXWELL

I don't know. Can I make a decision like this so fast? Can I tear my love from my heart? Is that what you came to ask of me, Anna?

ANNA

No!

MAXWELL

Good, for I would be unable to obey you.

ANNA

And yet, perhaps you should.

MAXWELL

To forget you? Oh, that's beyond your power. Don't ask the impossible of me.

ANNA

Whatever may happen, I have the right to tell you that I love you. I say it without blushing. Goodbye, Maxwell. I'm not telling you to leave, but the sight of you deprives me of the courage that I need. Spare me the spectacle of your suffering.

MAXWELL

I will obey you.

ANNA

Thank you. Goodbye. I love you. I will love you forever.

Maxwell kisses her hands. Anna gently disengages herself.

REGINALD

Courage, Maxwell.

MAXWELL

Don't worry, I'll be brave.

Anna puts on her cloak, and offers her hand to Maxwell who kisses it. Maxwell shakes hands with Reginald. Then, they leave. Maxwell throws himself in an armchair.

MAXWELL

Why should I hesitate?

He pulls back the curtain and lets the moonlight bathe the body of Lord Ruthven.

MAXWELL

Ah, I am poor and obscure. Well, Sir William, I am going to prove to you that, from the depth of my poverty and obscurity, my vengeance can dazzle even someone as powerful as you. Come to life, mysterious creature, who can repay me with the blood of men. Fear not! I will be near you. And I won't allow you to revert to nothingness, even after you've made the ones who've done so much ill to me expiate their crimes.

At this moment, the corpse moves its head and raises it.

MAXWELL

So the legends didn't lie...

MAXWELL (cont'd)

The soul seeks to resume its place. Life is flowing again in those icy veins. I am the equal of God, for I have created a new man. Bad luck—bad luck to the one who first falls beneath your glance.

Lord Ruthven rises on the bed and looks around confusedly. Suddenly, Fanny appears in the doorway.

FANNY

You're still awake?

Maxwell turns and sees his sister.

MAXWELL

Ah!

He rushes toward her to prevent her from entering.

MAXWELL

Get out of here!

FANNY

(surprised)

What's the matter with you?

MAXWELL

(fearful)

Get out of here! For God's sake, get out of here!

FANNY

(noticing Ruthven)

My God!

RUTHVEN

(noticing Fanny)

Ah, that young girl... How beautiful she is.

FANNY

That young man! You've saved him! Ah, your science is powerful, Maxwell.

MAXWELL

His glance on her. The Devil's work has begun. God is avenging himself already!

CURTAIN