

# CASTLE DRACULA



It was the dead of night. Jonathan Harker sat bolt upright in bed and screamed "No-oooo!" His brow was covered in sweat, his heart beat furiously, and he was so scared that he didn't know where he was. Then, slowly, it all came back to him – he was at an inn in Transylvania, one of the wildest, least-known parts of Europe. "What a creepy dream," he thought. "Those horrible wolves. And that huge bat which wrapped its wings around me. . ." He shuddered.

Next morning he received a letter.

*My dear friend,*

*Welcome to Transylvania. I am particularly looking forward to meeting you in the flesh.*

*I have arranged for you to travel by the afternoon stagecoach to the Borgo Pass, where my carriage will bring you to my castle.*

*Count Dracula*

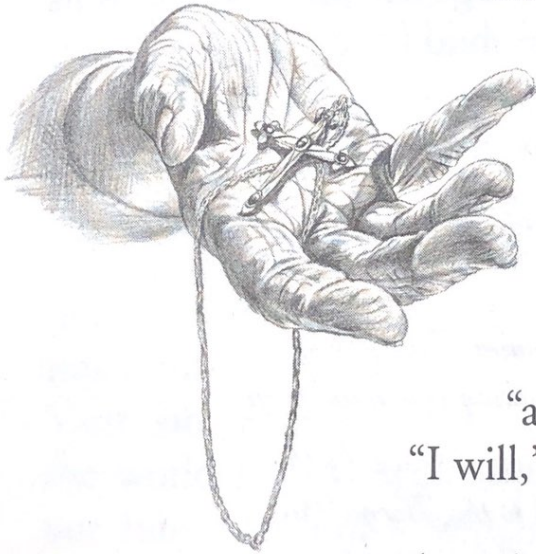
As Jonathan was getting ready to leave, the landlady surprised him by coming to his room, and pleading desperately with him not to go.

"But it's my job as a lawyer," he explained, feeling slightly embarrassed. "I've organized all the legal details of the Count's new house in London, and I need to explain to him how. . . Oh! Please don't be upset."

"Tonight," whispered the old lady, "all the evil in the world will be let loose. You will be at the mercy of forces you never dreamed existed. You must not go!"

"Did you have nightmares as well?" Jonathan joked, trying to make light of the situation. "I did. First this gigantic bat wrapped its slimy wings around me, then as I screamed in terror it sank its teeth into my. . . Are you alright?"

The old lady was moaning and gasping in horror, making him regret being so flippant. So when she held out in her hand a chain with a cross on it, he looked at her solemnly.



"For the sake of your soul," she begged, "always wear this crucifix."  
"I will," he said in a quiet voice.

When the other passengers on the stagecoach found out where Jonathan was going, they stared at him in astonishment. Then they started whispering in Transylvanian and Jonathan heard some words that he knew: *pokol* and *vrolok*. The first word meant hell, and the second. . . Jonathan

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shivered. It meant vampire. But he told himself that such fears were merely absurd superstitions. When he met the Count, it would be interesting to discuss them.

Even though the roads were rough, winding and dangerous, the driver seemed to be in a frantic hurry. Jonathan watched the countryside flash past, a landscape of steep hills, green forests and sudden spectacular views of craggy mountains. When it started to get dark, the driver urged his horses to go even faster, and the stagecoach swayed and rocked like a boat on a stormy sea. They entered the Borgo Pass at a full gallop, then the driver pulled hard on the reins and the carriage lurched to a halt. Jonathan was glad they had arrived – the other passengers were starting to get on his nerves. Half the time they were whispering that his soul was in eternal peril, and the rest of the time they kept trying to press cloves of garlic into his hand. Why? thought Jonathan, as he secretly dropped yet another clove out of the window.

“This is the Borgo Pass, but there’s no carriage waiting for you,” said the driver with a great sigh of relief. “You’re not expected after all.” It was a cold night, but there were beads of sweat on his face. “We’ll drive on, as fast as we can, and you can return tomorrow – and with a different driver, too,” he added in a low voice.

But before he had finished speaking, his horses began to snort and stamp wildly, and out of the surrounding darkness a four-horse carriage thundered up to them. When they saw the tall, dark driver, the

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other passengers screamed and cowered. His face was obscured by a long, brown beard, and a large, black hat. But nothing could obscure the fact that his eyes flashed red in the blackness of the night.

"The stagecoach has never been so early," he observed, smiling from a cruel-looking mouth, his voice harsh and malevolent. "Now," he commanded, "the English gentleman will come with me."

Jonathan's fellow passengers suddenly seemed like the most cheerful, friendly and fascinating bunch of people he had ever met. There was nothing he wanted less than to leave them and go with the tall, dark man. But he felt that he had no choice, so he got out of the stagecoach and collected his luggage from the roof. His anxiety was not eased when the door of the carriage flew open of its own accord, trembling on its hinges. And when he got in, the door slammed shut behind him so hard that the noise echoed across the mountains, like nails being banged into a coffin. Then, before he could even sit down, the carriage surged forward and swept him away into the night.

The journey took hours. They rose ever higher up the perilous paths of the thickly forested mountains, the driver savagely cracking his whip as the horses struggled to climb the steep slopes. Bats flitted above them in great numbers, and by the edge of the road there were hundreds of wooden crosses which, Jonathan suddenly realized with horror, were graves. Everything was so creepy that he wished he had stayed in England. He thought about his fiancée, Mina. She

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would be at home now, marking her pupils' homework, or perhaps sitting snugly in front of a log fire, eating hot, buttered toast.

Then, finally, the trip drew to a close. They journeyed along a track to a vast, forbidding castle, as wolves bayed malevolently into the darkness of the night. When they arrived, and Jonathan was left alone in the courtyard, he could see the castle's broken battlements etched against a moonlit sky. Not a ray of light came from the high, black windows. Directly in front of him was a huge, wooden door, and beyond it he heard heavy steps approaching: clump, clump, clump. There was a rattling of chains and a clanking of bolts. Then very slowly, the old door creaked open.

A tall, old man was standing in the doorway, dressed from head to foot in black. He had a sneering mouth with two sharp white teeth protruding over his lips.

"Welcome to my house!" he said, and then, almost eagerly, "Won't you come inside?"

Jonathan winced when he shook hands with him. The old man's grip was like a steel trap, and his hand was as cold as ice, like the hand of a dead man. And there was something else very curious about it: the palm was covered in hair.

"Count Dracula?" Jonathan asked nervously.

"I am Dracula," the old man replied in a chilling voice, "and I welcome you, Mr. Harker."

The Count bowed to Jonathan, who felt a sudden shudder. Perhaps it was just that the Count's breath was revolting, but there was something about the man that was making him feel sick.

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The freezing stone corridors they walked along did nothing to raise Jonathan's spirits. Nor did the narrow staircases, the damp walls, or the heavy bolted doors. But at last the Count led him to a comfortable study. A fire was burning in the hearth, and an open door revealed an adjoining bedroom. Suddenly Jonathan felt much better. To see a warm fire was comforting, and his welcome to Castle Dracula had at least been, well, polite. After all, it wasn't the Count's fault if he had hair on the palms of his hands, or breath so bad that it could fell an ox.

"You must be hungry after your journey," the Count said, pointing to a table where a substantial meal was laid out. "You will excuse me if I do not join you. My eating habits are rather. . . er, unconventional."

Neither of them spoke much as Jonathan was eating, but when he had finished, the Count said, "And now, my friend, tell me all about my new house in London." So Jonathan got the property deeds out from his luggage. Clause by clause, he explained the numerous legal arrangements. Then he asked the Count to sign various papers and documents.

"But is the house exactly as I requested?" the Count asked.

"Oh yes," said Jonathan, who had seen the place with his own eyes. He wondered why anyone would want to buy such a crumbling old dump. Carfax was dark and damp and gloomy. It was falling to pieces. It was next door to a lunatic asylum. "The property is a most desirable residence," said Jonathan.

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Count Dracula kept Jonathan talking about England, and London in particular, for so long that it was nearly dawn when he left.

“Lie in as long as you like tomorrow,” he said gravely, pausing in the doorway. “I have important affairs to attend to until evening. Sleep well, Mr. Harker. . .”

Before finally going to bed, Jonathan sat down at a desk and described the day’s events in his journal. It was a diary of all his Transylvanian experiences which he was keeping for Mina. He smiled as he wrote, imagining her reading it. She would laugh her head off at how nervous he had been earlier.

He woke up so late the next day that it was already dark. He couldn’t find a mirror in his bedroom, so he hung up his own shaving-mirror by the window. As he slowly dragged the razor across his chin by the light of a lamp, he idly wondered why there was no mirror.

“Good day,” said the Count’s voice, from nowhere. Jonathan jumped in surprise, cutting himself with the blade. He blurted out a gabbled greeting, then turned back to the mirror. A cold feeling suddenly swept over him. He could see his own reflection, a glistening trickle of blood running down his chin. And behind his face he could see the rest of the room. But he couldn’t see the Count.

He turned around again, very, very slowly. It was inexplicable – there was the Count, as large as life, standing right behind him. . . and he was staring at the blood on Jonathan’s chin. The Count’s nose began to

twitch, and he licked his lips. Then, as quick as lightning, his hand shot out and made a grab for Jonathan's throat. Jonathan stepped back in alarm, and the Count's hand touched the chain of the crucifix. In an instant the old man regained control over himself.

"Take care," he warned in a strange voice, breathing heavily. "Take care not to cut yourself in this place. It could be dangerous." Then he seized the mirror. "This wretched object has caused all the trouble – away with it!" And he crushed it to smithereens in his bare hands, and furiously flung it out of the window.

There was a meal waiting for Jonathan in the study. He picked at it listlessly, alone and very afraid. After throwing the mirror away, the Count had left, without a word of explanation. Jonathan wrote about the incident in his journal. Then, as the Count didn't seem to be around, he decided to explore the castle. Taking a lamp with him, he set off.

It was cold in the echoing stone corridors. He hurried along them, trying out doors on each side. He noticed that there was thick dust on the handles, as though no one had used them for years. Each one he tried seemed to be locked. But it was a big place, so he made his way to another floor. There were hundreds more doors to try. One of them was bound to be open. He grabbed another handle. Locked. Jonathan tried to ignore the sinking feeling in his stomach.

After another hour, he knew the dreadful truth: he was a prisoner. He sat down on the top step of a stone staircase, and closed his eyes. For some minutes he sat motionless, listening to his own heartbeat.