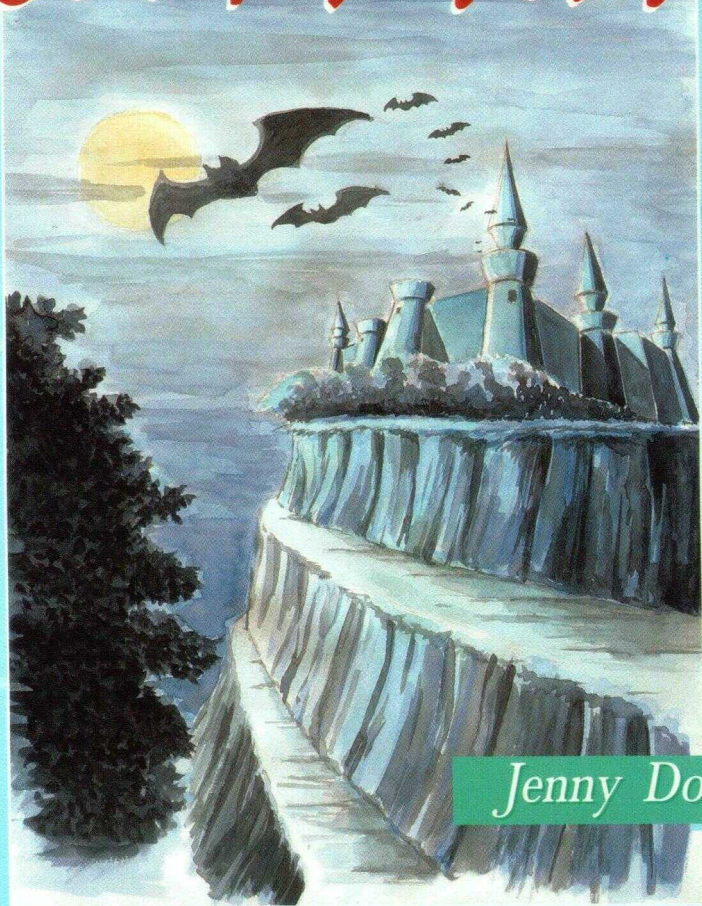


Count Vlad



Jenny Dooley



Express Publishing

A telegram from Count Dracula

It was early autumn in the year 1895. Alfred Sackville-Jones and Lord Ernest Deboy were sitting in front of an open fire in Alfred's apartment. On the table lay a heap of bones, all that remained of the meal they had just eaten. Licking a finger, Alfred got to his feet.

"Now after such a satisfying and filling meal, Ernest, my dear fellow, I suggest that we finish off with one of my very special wines."

Alfred pulled the cork from a dusty bottle and filled a glass with dark red wine. His eyes lit up as he passed the glass under his nose.

"Perfect. Absolutely perfect! Maison D' Armignac 1880. I've been saving it for a special occasion."

"Special occasion? What are we celebrating, old boy?"

"First of all, my birthday, which, of course, you completely forgot. And secondly, the end of another successful adventure."

Alfred passed the glass to Ernest, who raised it in the air with a smile.

"Sorry for forgetting your birthday, dear boy. I've got a hopeless memory. I'm not sure I even know my own birthday. What age am I, anyway? Twenty-eight or twenty-nine?"

"You're thirty-three. And a liar. You have a brilliant memory. You know by heart everything about every bat that has ever existed."

"Ah, now that's different."

Alfred, who worked for a newspaper called *The Globe*, and

Lord Ernest had just returned from Norway, where they had solved an unusual case. A Count and his family had gone to live in an old castle that the Count's uncle had left him in his will. However, after a week, a strange figure without a head and dressed like a Viking began appearing at midnight. The Viking roared as loudly as he could, and scared everybody. Naturally, everybody in the castle was very upset, which was why they asked Alfred and Lord Ernest for help.

As he drank his wine, Ernest looked out through the window into the streets of London, but all he could see was smoke and fog.

"You know, Alfred, old chap I have to admit that this is jolly good wine. You don't happen to have any more, do you, by any chance?"

Alfred poured more wine and Ernest made himself comfortable again.

"You know, I rather like this ghost-hunting business."

Ernest began to laugh as he lit his pipe.

"What a hopeless actor that Viking was!"

"Quite terrible! I've seen better acting done by Great Aunt Agatha's church drama group. He sounded more like a mouse than a monster!"

"What a devil! Imagine trying to frighten the family out of the castle so that he could claim it as his."

"Well, we solved that case, which makes three so far this year. I think we're becoming quite famous."

Alfred went to his desk and picked up the newspaper and looked admiringly at the headline:

‘BRITONS FIND VIKING'S MISSING HEAD.’

Suddenly he looked very serious.

"Do you believe in ghosts, Ernest?"

"I'd like to, but I'm very much afraid they don't exist. A pity really."

"Well, I'm not so sure."

Just then the doorbell rang, which made both men jump a little.

"Who on earth can it be at this time of night?"

A minute or so later, Alfred's servant entered, holding a telegram.

Alfred tore it open. He disliked telegrams. His eyes moved quickly down the paper. A look of relief appeared on his face.

"You know, I think we're in business again, my dear Ernest. It's from ... guess who ...?"

"Oh, come on! Don't keep me in suspense!"

"Count Dracula of Transylvania."

"Count Dracula ... Dracula ... the name rings a bell."

"I believe you have got a bad memory, after all. Those pointed teeth, I'll never forget them as long as I live. Enough to make your blood run cold."

"Teeth. Yes, of course, a handsome pair, all right. Perfect for sucking blood, eh? And those bloodshot eyes. What a funny looking man he was! And what a frightful accent! He sounded like an old frog. Well, come on!"

Alfred held the telegram under the lamp and started reading:

"Dracula village

10th November 1895

Will always remember my visit to England and particularly meeting you and your remarkable friend who knows so much about bats. I have bad news. I am dying and badly in need of your help. I wish to clear the Dracula name before I leave this world. Please come quickly.

Yours,

Count Vlad Dracula."

Alfred noticed the excitement on Lord Ernest's face.

"How about it then, old chap? Can you pack your bags by tomorrow and be at the station by ... em ... ? let me see..."

Alfred took the train timetable from the shelf and looked up the departure times from Charing Cross to Dover.

"7.32?"

"a.m. or p.m., old boy?"

"Why, a.m., of course!"

"Thought so. You know how I hate getting up early in the morning."

"I can always go without you."

Ernest jumped up out of his chair.

"No, you will not! I wouldn't miss this for the world!"

"All right then. Meet you at the station at 7.15. And don't be late."

Alfred took his friend to the front door and waited until a cab appeared out of the thick fog.



The next day, on the train to Dover, Alfred was reading an early morning newspaper. The headline on page three caught his eye.

"Ernest, look at this! 'VAMPIRE COUNT DEAD.'"

Ernest half-opened his eyes and looked sleepily at his friend.

"What's that?"

"*'Count Dracula of Transylvania died this morning in his castle near Vilcea, Transylvania, after a short illness.' Oh, and look at this. It says, 'A report from a reliable source says that before his death the Count had asked two British experts to clear his name.'* Good heavens, news travels fast."

"Well, now that he's dead, I suppose there's no point in going on."

The newspaper nearly fell out of Alfred's hands.

"What are you saying? I'm certainly not going back. Ernest, think of what you'll be missing. You might even get the chance to see the Transylvanian vampire bat, in person."

Ernest's eyes suddenly came alive.

"All right. You've persuaded me."

"Wonderful, wonderful!"

Alfred lay back happily in his seat and allowed the rhythm of the train to send him to sleep. Suddenly he woke up with a start.

"Ernest! Do you think we've got everything we need?"

"You mean, passports and so on?"

"Well, no. I was thinking more of ... em ... protection."

"Let me see. I've got my Derringer, my buffalo knife and some rope. That should do. And, of course, I was twice boxing champion at school."

"Well, yes, but I was wondering whether we should have brought a cross with us, and em ... maybe some garlic."

"I had no idea you were religious, old boy. And, as for garlic, I didn't know you had French tastes."

Ernest burst into laughter, which made Alfred feel rather silly. So, he picked up his paper noisily and pretended to read.

Ernest just fell back to sleep, dreaming he was in a coffin and meeting the vampire bat.

A Visit to Count Vlad

The journey across Europe was long and tiring. Ernest slept most of the day, waking at night to study the night life through the carriage window or read his favourite writer, Edgar Allan Poe, while Alfred read endless books about famous people in Transylvanian history. By the time they reached Vienna he knew all there was to know about every Dracula back to the 16th century.

As the train made its way deeper into Dracula's country, Alfred was just finishing the fifth and last volume of *A Complete History of Transylvania*.

"Fascinating! It was partly thanks to him that the Turks didn't conquer the rest of Europe. They say he was a fearless officer, loved by his men."

"Who on earth are you talking about, dear fellow? I wish you wouldn't always expect me to read your mind."

"The first Dracula. Prince Vlad Dracula. A great chap. He had one little weakness, though. He enjoyed torturing his prisoners by pushing sharp pieces of wood through their stomach or tearing their body apart."

"Charming fellow! It doesn't say anything about him drinking their blood too, does it?"

"It seems that only the present Count enjoys, or should I say, enjoyed, human blood. Hard to believe really. Seemed pretty harmless to me."

"It was those teeth of his. Not exactly what one would like

one's dear old granny to have!"

"Ernest, for goodness' sake, how can humans suck blood?"

"Just like vampire bats do, dear boy. Through holes in their teeth."

"There's no such thing as a vampire human... is there?"

"That's what we're here to find out, dear boy, isn't it?"

"Sometimes you can be quite absurd. Now, let me ask this kind old gentleman when we are expected to arrive in Vilcea."

An old one-eyed man looked out of the window and pointed to the sky. He looked at him out of the corner of his good eye and asked him,

"Where are you going, stranger?"

"Castle Dracula. To help the Count with a spot of trouble. It's a bit hush-hush, you know."

At the name Dracula the old man turned away from Alfred in horror.

"Funny chap. He doesn't seem to like foreigners."



Four hours later, just as the moon was appearing above the top of the mountain, the train pulled into Vilcea station. Alfred and Ernest, along with one other passenger, got off and walked to the entrance to find Dracula's servant, who was supposed to meet them there.

"I hope he got our message. I don't fancy staying here the night."

Hardly had Alfred spoken than a crooked old man appeared from the shadows. His name was Gregory and he wore a black overcoat, black gloves and a black top hat. He spoke so quietly that Alfred had to bend over to hear him.

"Aleferd Shackwill Gons and Lourd Ernest, I suppose."

"Just call me Alfred. I think it would be easier. It was very good of ..."

"Follow."

Alfred and Ernest followed the old man to where a black carriage and two black horses were waiting outside. As soon as they had got in, the driver set off on the last part of their journey to Dracula Castle.



Alfred was woken up by the sound of horses' hooves on wood. The carriage had stopped on the bridge over the water surrounding Dracula Castle. Then, they passed under the thick stone walls. By the dim light of the carriage, Ernest caught a glimpse of the enormous old door.

"Did you see that, Alfred? A bat."

"You've got bats on the brain, dear boy."

"No, really, carved on the door. I'm sure it was a vampire bat!"

When they entered the main building of the castle, the two servants were standing in deadly silence, ready to receive them. They too were in black, and their unsmiling faces looked like carved stone. Rodolfo, the Count's butler, was a giant of a man, and had a large head with deep hollow eyes. Mania, the cook, was about half his size and even older than Gregory, with a shrunken head covered in thin white hair.

As Mania took them up to their room, the sound of their feet echoed through the empty castle. She said nothing, just grunted and puffed as she slowly climbed the spiral stone steps. Finally alone, Alfred threw himself on the big four-poster bed and felt the soft velvet covers.



"I don't know about you, old boy, but I've been looking forward to this moment for weeks."

Ernest was wide awake and examining the room with his candle.

"The silence is quite scary, isn't it? This place must be full of ghosts."

"You can't scare me, old boy. I'm so tired, I'd even share my bed with a ghost."

Just as he said that he heard a tap which made him sit up with a start.

Old Gregory half-opened the door and held out a letter.

"Mr Aleferd Shagswill, a letter from my master."

"That's funny. I thought the Count was dead."

"I expect he wrote it *before* he died."

Just as Gregory had left, Ernest let out a cry from the other end of the bedroom.

"You know, I think you've been given the Count's bedroom."

Ernest shone his candle on the portrait of the Count on the wall. The teeth were not visible, only the dark bloodshot eyes. Alfred looked at the pillow where the Count's head once lay.

"Do you mean to say that the Count died ... here?"

"Most likely, old sport. You wouldn't like to change beds, would you?"

Alfred broke open the wax seal and began to read.

"Dear Alfred, I feel my life leaving me. We may not meet in this world. Whatever happens, come and see me when you arrive. I will be waiting with a warm heart.

I have committed a crime, but not the crime of which I am accused. The time has come for my shame and that of others to be shown to the world. Don't leave a stone unturned and remember, "you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink". Beware of the vampire bat and the Lover.

I cannot go on. My mind and soul are preparing to leave for a better world. I leave the name of Dracula in your hands. I trust that, as an Englishman and a gentleman, you will tell the truth and nothing but the truth.

Your honourable servant, Count Dracula."

Alfred looked up at the Count's portrait, and for a moment he thought he saw the mouth move.

"That portrait is almost alive. I'd swear I saw his face move just now."

"Funny you should say that, old boy. The canvas seems a bit wet."

Ernest rubbed the canvas with a finger.

"Looks awfully like blood."

"Blood! Can't be. Probably just paint. This damp climate!"

"Unlikely."

Ernest smelt the substance on his finger, but said nothing.

"Now, what do you think the Count meant when he said, '*Come and visit me when you arrive*'. After all, he knew he was dying."

"He probably meant visit him in his grave."

"You mean dig up his coffin."

"It won't be too difficult. They only buried him a few days ago."

"Do you realize what you're saying?"

"Absolutely, dear boy. It might be more fun than sleeping in those coffins they call beds."

"Oh, all right. When shall we do it, then?"

"I know you're dying to get down to work, but I'm quite tired. How about tomorrow night? We can talk to the servants and find out more about the Count."

"Good idea."

Alfred yawned and started unbuttoning his shirt.

"By the way, did you mean it when you said you'd like to have the Count's bed?"

"Yes, dear boy, but I'd hate to spoil *your* fun."

"No, no, really, Ernest old chap, I insist."

"Are you absolutely sure?"

"Quite, dear boy, quite."

The Man in the Black Cape

Ernest leant over Alfred who was snoring peacefully.

"Boo!"

"Ah!"

Alfred screamed and sent the covers flying. Then he saw Ernest.

"Oh, it's you."

Ernest, who was fully dressed, handed him his dressing gown.

"Who did you expect it to be, dear boy? Count Dracula?"

Alfred looked over at the portrait on the wall, which, in the daylight, seemed even more alive than ever, the manic eyes staring at him.

Ernest gave him his razor and a shaving brush.

"Hurry up, old chap. It's way past breakfast time, and we've got work to do. Now, I've done a little exploring. I got Rodolfo to show me where the Count is buried. I'm afraid his English is a little basic, but he's got the general idea. Oh, you've cut yourself, dear fellow. Blood is running down your neck!"

As he took a handkerchief from Ernest, Alfred noticed the Count's eyes. Did they really light up at the sound of the word "blood"?

"The family graveyard is outside the castle, up a narrow path by the river. Beautiful spot; wouldn't mind being buried (here myself!"

They went down to the dining room and sat at an enormous wooden table loaded with eggs, steak, cheese, liver and fish,

along with bread, butter, honey, jam and coffee. During the meal, Mania and Rodolfo hovered over them like enormous bats with trays of food. Towards the end, old Gregory staggered in, carrying logs for the fire. Alfred saw his opportunity.

"Gregory, my dear fellow, can we have a word?"

Gregory grunted and came up to the table.

"Can you tell us a little bit about the old chap? The Count, I mean. By the way, it's awfully dark in here. Don't you ever open the shutters?"

A look of horror appeared on the old man's wrinkled face.

"No, Sir Aleferd. Not since the mistress died."

"Oh, so he was married, was he? When did the good woman die?"

"Forty-five years ago, Sir Aleferd."

"Forty-five years ago! Did I understand correctly? My Romanian is a little rusty. Good heavens! ... Any children?"

Gregory looked down at the floor and then whispered a reply.

"I see. No children. And the Count never married again. He must have been madly in love."

"Yes, quite mad. She was a very beautiful woman. Gentle eyes and long shining red hair. A tragedy! The Count was heartbroken."

"Are you sure you won't sit down, old boy? You look a little unsteady!"

Gregory appeared not to hear.

"When she died, the Count swore never to see the light of day again. After that, he only went out at night, on Warrior, his white horse. When there was a good moon and a clear sky, of course."

"Fascinating! Now how did these nasty rumours start about that vampire nonsense?"

Suddenly Gregory became very excited.

"The master is ... was ... a good man!"

"I'm sure he was, old boy. But all these dead people with funny teeth marks on their necks ... who or what made them?"

Gregory waved his thin old arms in the air.

"Not the master! Not the master!"

"Calm down, old chap! You'll do yourself an injury! I believe you!"

Gregory got down on his knees and took Alfred's hand, which Alfred found rather embarrassing.

"Sir Aleferd Shagwill Gons, I would die for the master."

"Quite sure you would, old boy. Fine. Now we're going to need some spades. Any chance you could find us a couple?"

"Spades?"

"Yes, you see, Lord Ernest wants to go looking for truffles. Well, no, actually we have to see the Count. He told us to in his letter."

Gregory drew away from Alfred.

"It's the only way, really."

"All right, Sir Aleferd. But Rodolfo must not know."

Gregory looked round in the direction of the servants' rooms.

"Oh, of course, we won't say a thing. And, by the way, could you open the castle gates at about midnight tonight?"

"Yes, Sir Aleferd. Anything for the master."



That night, Alfred and Ernest met as planned near the castle gates. As promised, Gregory turned the wheel to let them out. A strong wind had got up which roared through the valley. They followed the path with difficulty, as the moon kept hiding behind large black rain clouds. Every so often

they heard the screech of an owl or some other night creature. As they entered the graveyard, the rusty old iron gate squealed. The place was sheltered from the wind by massive cypress trees and was as silent as all the Draculas that lay buried there. Ernest pointed to a white marble gravestone.

"That's the one."

As they approached the Count's grave, he looked up into the sky at the pale light from the moon, which threw a white veil over the crooked gravestones.

"It's a full moon. They say it was on such nights that the Count went looking for human blood. Well, here we are. Got your spade, Alfred? Don't look so down, old boy. The exercise'll do you good."

The soil on the grave was loose and it was not long before they had dug a large hole. Ernest was the first to touch wood.

"Ho, ho! I believe we're about to meet the Count again. Is it just the moonlight or are you looking rather pale, dear boy? I know it's well past your bedtime, but I wish you would be a little bit more enthusiastic about it all."

"Are you sure we ought to do this, Ernest? I know that I wouldn't like to be disturbed just as I had started my eternal rest."

"You're forgetting, dear boy. He's not at rest. Now help me take off the lid."

At that moment they heard a screech above their heads. Ernest let out a cry.

"The vampire bat! I'd recognise that sound anywhere."

Ernest lit a candle and held it over the Count's head. Now it was Alfred's turn to cry out.

"Oh, my God, his eyes are still open! Just like the portrait!"

"Stop staring and let's search him. I'm afraid we're going

to have to turn him over. Just grab his left arm. That's funny. I'd swear he was warm."

They searched the coffin but all they found was the Count's silver cane.

"Well, look at that! The end of the cane is in the shape of *Desmodus Rotundus*."

"I beg your pardon. Who's he?"

"The vampire bat. Look at those pointed ears and the teeth. Just hold the candle a little closer."

"Ernest, this is not the time nor the place"

"Beautiful piece of work. Nothing here though. Pity."

They rolled the Count on to his back again. Ernest stopped dead.

"Look. His eyes are closed, and I think ... yes, I'm certain. I believe he's smiling. I can see his teeth. And what's that? Blood."

"Blood?"

"Oops. Sorry. I must have cut myself on a nail opening the coffin."

"This whole business is beginning to disturb me."

They put the coffin back, covering it with soil, and made their way back to the castle.



Just as they arrived, Alfred remembered something.

"Oh, dash it! I completely forgot to tell old Gregory to let us in again."

At that moment, they heard the grinding of the castle gate. When it was wide enough, a white horse charged out, ridden by a man in a black cape and hood. They watched in amazement as the figure disappeared into the night. Ernest grabbed Alfred's arm.

"You once asked me whether I believed in ghosts, old chap. Well, I have to say that I think I've changed my mind on the subject."

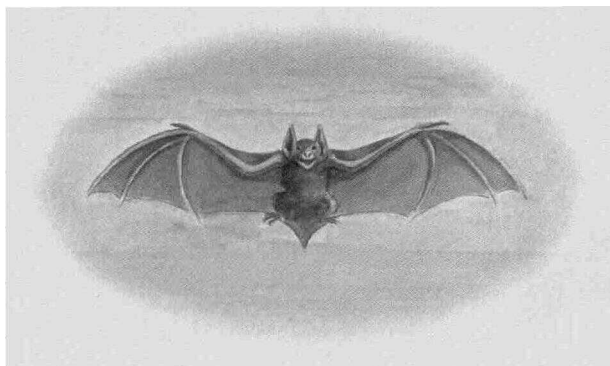
"A ghost! What an article this is going to be! The only trouble is *The Globe* won't believe a word of it."

They ran through the castle yard and up to their bedroom. As he was taking off his cloak, Alfred noticed the Count's portrait.

"Look, Ernest. The Count's face. It seems so much more peaceful than before, almost happy."

"Who's imagining things now? It looks like an ordinary portrait to me."

"That's exactly what I mean."





The next morning it was Mania who served the two men breakfast. Rodolfo was nowhere to be seen. Concerned, Alfred asked Mania where he was, but she was not one to waste energy on words.

"Rodolfo sick."

"Oh, dear, poor fellow. It's the climate, awfully damp. Almost as bad as England. Well, give him our regards, will you?"

By the time he had finished, Mania had already shuffled out of the room.

"A jolly nice chap Rodolfo. Takes life a bit too seriously, but ..."

"Alfred, don't dead people usually look sort of grey and ... well ... lifeless?"

"Don't ask me. You're the expert on death, old boy. I like to avoid it myself. Makes me feel rather insecure."

"The Count had red cheeks, as if he were alive. How very strange!"

"He looked as dead as a doornail to me. Probably put rouge on him. Undertakers like to have their customers looking their best on the 'big day'."

"Yes, maybe. By the way, I had a funny dream last night. We were at the Dracula Cemetery digging up the Count."

"That was no dream, old boy. It really happened."

"No, no. Wait! We'd stopped for a rest and you were sitting on a gravestone eating a sandwich ..."

"Eating a sandwich? I'd never eat a sandwich sitting on a gravestone!"

"I know you wouldn't. It was only a dream. Anyway, suddenly the coffin lid began to open ... very slowly, and out came long white fingers with pointed nails followed by the head of the Count, his eyes shining in the moonlight. When he was half out, he looked up at us, and his mouth opened in a broad smile and I could see his teeth dripping with blood. Suddenly, he spoke in his funny Romanian accent, '*Welcome, my friends. I am happy*'. But before he had time to finish the sentence, there was a horrendous screech and down flew a vampire bat, which landed on his shoulder. It was the screech that woke me up. Very unfortunate. I don't have many dreams and I really wanted to see how this one would end."

"I'm rather glad you didn't. You said 'scream'. About what time?"

"I couldn't go back to sleep, so I lit a candle to read a bit of Edgar and I happened to look at my watch. It was precisely 2.34. Why?"

"Well, at about that time I heard a scream too. A long blood-chilling scream that seemed to rise from the very heart of the castle. It sounded hollow, as if it was coming from the bottom of a well. Quite disturbing!"

"Yes, it was, rather. It hasn't affected your appetite though."

"Quite the opposite. I haven't had an appetite like this for years. I do recommend this fishy stuff. Very tasty with brown bread and butter."

"Alfred, old chap, this whole business is awfully good fun, isn't it? Screams in the night. Ghosts on white horses. What next?"

"I must say you have an odd idea of fun. As for ghosts on horses, I'm not convinced. Though the resemblance was quite astonishing, I must say."

"Well, I suggest we go into the village and try to get some information from the locals ... just as soon as you've had your fill of that fishy looking stuff. Ugh!"

"You should try it, old boy. Absolutely delicious. Ah, here's Gregory. I say, Gregory, would you be a good chap and run us into the village today? Lord Ernest and I feel like seeing a bit of the local colour."

"Of course, Sir Aleferd."

"I suppose you've noticed, Ernest, that I've joined the aristocracy. Sir Alfred ... it sounds rather good actually ... Sir Alfred ... em?"



The village was miles from anywhere, cut off from the rest of the world by tall, snow-topped mountains. It was pouring with rain and the main street was deserted, apart from the occasional wet bundle running from one doorway to another. They decided to go straight for the inn.

Ernest pushed open the door and entered a dimly lit room full of heavy wooden tables, where some of the locals were drinking and talking. An oil lamp hung from the wooden ceiling. When Gregory and the Englishmen entered, silence fell like a heavy cloud. Alfred raised his hand and smiled at the silent watchers.

"Good day to you all. Frightful weather, isn't it? Jolly fine inn! My compliments to the landlord. Ah, my dear sir. The barman, I suppose."

A large man with a red face and white apron was standing by a barrel.

"Yes?"

"I'd like to buy these fine fellows a drink. And if you have a moment, I'd be grateful if you could give us some information. I'm a journalist, and my friend here is a historian, and we're writing a history of the Dracula family."

At the sound of Dracula, heads turned towards the foreigners.

"You'd better ask some of them."

The barman indicated the drinkers at the tables.

"Now, who'd like to have a little chat about the Dracula family?"

No one answered. After a minute or so, a young man with fiery red hair rose unsteadily to his feet.

"You mean the 'vampire family'. I'll tell you about them. Come over here and sit down,"

Ernest and Alfred pulled up two stools and sat opposite the red-haired man, who seemed a bit drunk.

"Jolly nice of you, old chap."

"The Count likes human blood. Especially the blood of young women, just like his wife's, who died mysteriously years ago."

"What do you mean 'mysteriously'?"

"She was found dead with tooth marks on her neck. It is believed that they were done by her husband. He killed her then, just as he killed my sister last night."

"What did you say? Last night?"

"Yes, and she's still up there, with the marks on her neck for all the world to see. Count Dracula may be dead, but he can still kill. My sister, my beautiful sister, she's dead and I'm certain that he killed her."

The man began to sob into his drink.

"Steady on, old chap. Sorry to hear about your sister. But

these are quite strong accusations. Have you any proof?"

Just then an old man, with a country face, spoke up from the next table.

"That man doesn't know what he's saying. He's from another village. The Count was no vampire. He was a good man. He loved the people of the village. I'll never forget the winter of '82. It started to snow in September and didn't stop until April. The people were starving. What did the Count do? He opened up his stores to the people and kept all of us alive. He nearly starved to death himself. The Count is no vampire."

"Very interesting! So, how do you explain the deaths and the teeth marks."

The man stopped for a moment and thought.

"The vampire bat."

Ernest suddenly showed interest. He had learnt the word for vampire bat in Romanian.

"What's that about vampire bat?"

Alfred told him what the old man had said.

"I think we should go and see this young girl. I say, old fellow, you said your sister was killed by the Count. You wouldn't care to prove it, would you?"

The drunken young man got to his feet and dragged them to the staircase. They stumbled up, the man talking to himself all the time.

"We had to bring her here. She was very ill. Coughing blood. This was the nearest village with a doctor, Dr Magorsky, but ..."

They reached the bedroom door. Inside, they could see the body of a young girl laid out on a bed with a sheet covering the lower part of her body. A woman of about forty was crying beside the bed. On the other side of the bed, an old man in a black suit was gathering up some surgical instruments.

The drunken man fell into the room.

"Look! Look at the work of the vampire Count!"

Alfred and Ernest saw a beautiful pale face. On her neck were two red dots about an inch apart. The old man turned angrily at the intruders.

"Who are you? Get out of here at once."

"They're friends of mine, Doctor. They didn't believe that ..."

"Well, now you know what a devil the Count was ... and still is; you can leave."

"Well, thank you, Doctor. I hope we shall have the pleasure again."

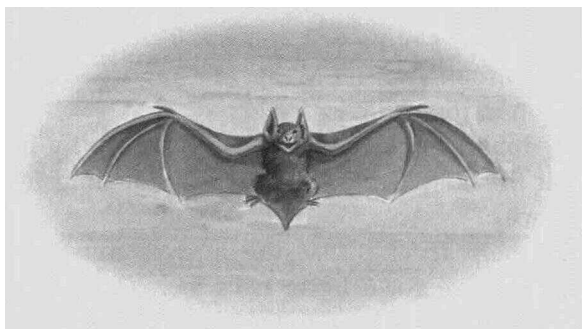
Alfred wished to get out as quickly as possible. Ernest, on the other hand, was quietly looking around the room. Alfred couldn't keep his eyes off the bloodless girl.

"I say, Ernest old chap. I think I need a drink."

At the table in the inn below, Ernest was thinking.

"I didn't like the Doctor at all. Nasty piece of work. Definitely not a gentleman. Did you notice that scratch on his hand?"

"I don't know what you're saying, old boy. As soon as we've had this drink I suggest we get back to the castle."





Back in Dracula Castle, Alfred and Ernest were sitting in front of a blazing fire after yet another wonderful meal, this time of roast goose and apple pie with cream on top. Alfred raised his glass of wine in the air.

"I would like to drink a toast to the Count and his superb hospitality."

"And his excellent taste in wines. The old fellow certainly knew how to eat and drink well. As for Mania, she's an absolute treasure."

"You know, Ernest, I am a little bit worried. The evidence does not seem to be in the old chap's favour, does it? A figure looking like the Count rides out into the moonlit night and two hours later a girl dies with two teeth marks on her neck. It can hardly be a coincidence now, can it?"

"The question is whether we believe in ghosts or not. As you know, I'd love them to exist, but my logic tells me that they don't. Therefore, that person on the white horse could not have been the Count. So, who was it?"

"Well, it certainly wasn't Mania or Gregory. And the only other person in the castle is ..."

"Good thinking, old boy. Perhaps that's why he didn't serve us at breakfast yesterday. He was catching up on his sleep. But why?"

"I can't help feeling that the answer must be in the Count's letter. I've got it here. Let's see. *"Don't leave a stone unturned ...'* stone ... we have to look under stones ... *"You can lead a horse to water ...'."*

Suddenly, a scream, just like the one they had heard the previous night, was heard faintly echoing through the castle. Alfred shivered.

"Did you hear it?"

"I certainly did, old boy. And I think it came from outside."

They ran out into the castle yard, but there was nothing to be seen except the well. They stood wondering where the sound could have come from. Alfred pointed to the well.

"Do you see that enormous stone covering the well? How on earth do they get the water out?"

"Interesting question, old boy. And what's that thick piece of wood for?"

"Ernest, come here! Quick!"

Alfred was holding his ear to the stone.

"What is it?"

"I can hear something like an animal in pain, crying or ... no, it's more of a moan. Can you hear it?"

"Sorry. Can't hear a thing. I think your mind's playing tricks on you, old boy. It's probably the rumbling of your stomach after that delicious goose. Let's get back inside. It's freezing out here."

Gregory was standing inside the door of the dining room with a worried look on his face.

"Sir Aleferd, what is the matter?"

"Probably my imagination. I thought I heard someone scream."

"Ah, that was Don Juan maybe. He has bad dreams."

"I beg your pardon. Don Juan?"

"I mean Rodolfo. Don Juan is his nickname. He was loved by many women, but he loved the master more."

"I see. By the way, Gregory, I've been meaning to ask you. Tell me about Dr Magorsky. Lord Ernest and I didn't take to him very much."

"He was the Count's doctor, but he is an evil man. He uses old medicine, the medicine of the witches. Herbs, leaves ..."

"Nothing wrong with herbs. My Aunt Agatha swears by them."

"Frogs, snakes, bats and mice and other living creatures."

"Well, yes, I think Aunt Agatha would draw the line there."

"He bleeds all his patients. He says losing blood is good for you. But he does not care about health. He is a greedy man, who loves only money."

"Thank you very much, Gregory old fellow. Bleeds his patients ..."

"Good night, Sir Aleferd. I am an old man and must sleep."

"Oh, of course, old boy. Sweet dreams!"

Alfred told Ernest what Gregory said. Ernest was intrigued.

"It becomes more interesting by the minute. I suggest we go for a walk before breakfast, when our minds are clear, and try and sort this out."

"Ernest, old boy, what has got into you? I thought you liked sleep. I wish you'd have pity on me. I'm exhausted."

"My dear fellow, we're on a case. We can't waste time sleeping."



The next morning, Alfred and Ernest got up early and went out into the yard for a walk. Through the thick mist they saw Rodolfo near the well carrying a tray of food. Alfred was surprised.

"That's funny. What's Rodolfo doing? I didn't ask for breakfast in bed."

Rodolfo had laid the tray on the well top and was holding an enormous piece of wood. Alfred called out. Rodolfo turned with a look of shock on his face.

"Bright and early, I see, Rodolfo. Or should I say, Don Juan? I wanted to ask you about this well top. How do you get the water out?"

"The well is not used. The Count put a stone over it many years ago."

"I see, what is that piece of wood for?"

Rodolfo seemed angry.

"This well is not used. The wood is rotten."

"Looks fine to me, but I won't argue with you, old fellow."

"Now I must leave."

"Of course. Oh, don't forget your tray. Em, those eggs and that bacon look good. Perhaps we should have breakfast now, Ernest."

Rodolfo took the tray and went quickly towards the kitchen.

"Come on, Alfred. Stop thinking of your stomach and let's go for that walk. I suggest we visit the Count."

"The Count?"

"Yes, I feel he may give us inspiration."



Dracula Cemetery was as quiet as an empty house. Even the birds seemed to have stopped singing. Because of the thick mist, they could hardly see more than a few feet in front of them. Suddenly Alfred couldn't see Ernest anywhere.

"Ernest! Where on earth have you gone?"

There was no answer, just the echo of his voice. He called again and this time got an answer.

"I'm over here, dear boy. At the Count's grave. And I've

found something rather interesting."

"Just keep talking, will you? In that way, I might be able to find you."

Finally, Alfred found Ernest leaning over the Count's grave.

"Don't you think it's rather strange that there is no sign of our footsteps? It's as if the soil was taken out and put back again."

"Don't forget; it rained last night."

"What I can't understand is why the Count told us in his letter to visit him when he had nothing to tell us."

"Hold on. I've just had an idea. You don't think that cane of his is hollow, do you? And that inside is a vital message?"

"My word, you're a genius, dear boy. Of course, it must be!"

"Oh, dear. Does that mean we have to do more grave-digging?"

"Afraid so, old chap. But you're getting quite good at it. By the way, have you been eating garlic?"

"Garlic? Well, yes ... em ... I ... thought it better to be safe than sorry. I got dear Mania to let me have a few cloves for emergencies."

"The smell is enough to keep away the Devil himself. As for the vampire bat, he wouldn't dare fly within a mile of us. Come on. Let's go and have breakfast."

They made their way back by the river to the castle gate, which Gregory had left open for them. Alfred was still trying to work out the connection between stones, water and horses.

"You know, Ernest. I feel that the solution to our mystery lies very close to that well. There's a big stone there, with water under it, and opposite the stable where the Count's horse is kept. I'm sure the answer lies under that stone."

Ernest touched Alfred's arm and held a finger to his mouth.

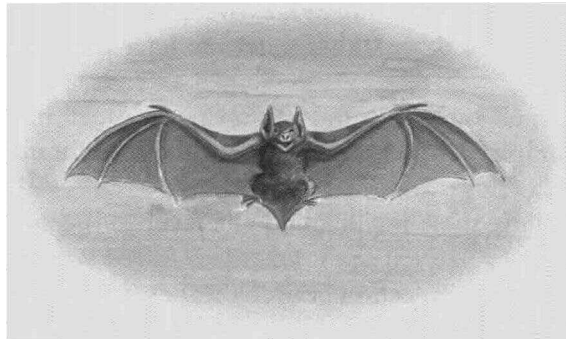
"Sh! Look, Rodolfo just got out of the well. And he's pushing the stone back by himself. Good heavens, he must be as strong as an ox."

Through the mist they saw Rodolfo carrying a tray from the well to the kitchen. Alfred slapped the side of his head in annoyance.

"Dash it! I should have thought of it before. Don Juan was a great lover, wasn't he? What did the Count say in his letter? '*Beware of the Lover.*' Do you think Rodolfo could be 'The Lover'? We'd better keep a very close eye on him and find out what's hidden down that well. Why was he carrying a tray?"

"All this detective work has given me quite an appetite. What about you, Alfred?"

"Oh, yes. And I think we deserve it. I feel we're getting very close to an important discovery."



The Missing Link

That night Alfred and Ernest were too tired to go grave-digging. They decided, however, that they would keep a careful eye on Rodolfo. They felt that he, and in fact all three servants, were hiding something which might provide the key to the whole Dracula mystery. So, next morning they got up early, before the mist had risen, and slipped out into the castle yard to wait for Rodolfo to appear with his tray of food, as they believed he almost certainly would. About ten feet from the well, Gregory had parked the carriage with the Dracula coat of arms and the head of the vampire bat painted in gold on the side. They decided that this would be a good place to hide. Ernest looked at his watch.

"Do you think he's not coming? We've been here for nearly an hour."

"Perhaps he heard us come out and realised that we're after him."

"Well, let's give him another fifteen minutes."

They waited another fifteen minutes and were about to give up when they heard the kitchen door slam shut.

"I think it's him."

Sure enough, Rodolfo appeared carrying the same tray as on the previous day. But instead of stopping at the well, he walked straight to the carriage. Ernest and Alfred began to feel uneasy. However, when he reached the driver's seat, he stopped and laid the tray on it. Then, he returned to the well and, using the thick piece of wood as a lever, pushed back the stone. He came back for the tray and, to their surprise,

climbed into the well and disappeared. Alfred whistled to himself,

"I think this is our opportunity. Let's follow him."

Alfred reached the well first. He could hear the sound of Rodolfo's boots on the stone steps as he went deeper into the well. At some point, they seemed to just fade away. Alfred looked in, but all he could see was a black hole.

"I say, I don't fancy getting in there. Looks like the way down to Hell!"

Ernest struck a match and held it over the hole. They could make out spiral steps built on the side of the well. There was nothing to hold on to, and the steps looked wet and slippery, so if either of them fell, he would almost certainly go hurtling down to a sure death. Ernest got into the mouth of the well.

"Be careful. The steps are all wet and slimy."

Step by step they climbed down into the darkness, feeling their way as best they could by leaning against the well wall. Suddenly, Alfred saw Ernest fall. For a moment he thought he had seen the last of his friend and he expected to hear the fatal splash. Instead, he heard Ernest's voice coming from the well. Then he realised what had happened. There was a large hole in the wall and Ernest had fallen into it and was now lying on the floor of what, by the looks of it, was a passageway, which led somewhere underground.

"Are you all right, old chap?"

"Well, just about. I thought I was on my way to meet the Count for a moment. Where the devil are we?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. The home of the vampire but I should think. Hold on a tick. I can just make out a dim light at the end there."

Ernest got to his feet and felt his way along the passage to

a door, which was slightly open. Inside, they could hear Rodolfo's voice and the grunts of some kind of animal. Ernest pushed the door slightly.

"There's only one way to find out. Let's go."

He opened the door just enough to see what was happening. Rodolfo had his back to them and was facing someone sitting on a chair. He appeared to have a spoon in one hand, feeding a baby. The room was warm and comfortable, with expensive Persian carpets on the floor. Rodolfo got up to put more wood on the fire, revealing the ugliest creature they had ever seen. One side of its face was twisted and shapeless, and its arms and whole body were all bent and moving out of control. Uneaten food and meaningless sounds were coming out of its mouth. Alfred could not help exclaiming.

"Good heavens! What is that?"

Rodolfo was speaking to the creature as if it understood what he was saying, but could not reply. Alfred pulled Ernest's arm.

"I think we ought to go."

Rodolfo must have sensed someone was there because he let out a wild cry and started to run towards them.

"You devils! Father said I should trust you because you are English gentlemen, but everybody hates the Dracula name and you're no different. You want a story for your newspaper. You don't care about the great family Dracula. Well, I'm going to kill you."

Rodolfo reached the two men and was about to lift Alfred into the air, when Ernest threw his *bolas*, which was made of thick string with three metal balls tied to the ends. The *bolas* went right around Rodolfo's legs. Alfred was thrown into the air and Rodolfo fell forward onto the floor. Ernest threw the end of a piece of rope to Alfred.

"Here, grab the end of this and tie him up before he recovers."

"Bravo, Ernest old fellow! Where on earth did you learn that little trick?"

"Didn't I tell you I spent three months with the rebels in Argentina fighting the Dictator? I brought that little fellow back with me."

Between the two of them, they managed to tie up the struggling Rodolfo. Ernest was afraid he was going to break the rope, but it soon became clear that it was too strong for him. When they had finally got him under control, Alfred started to speak.

"Now, Rodolfo, old fellow. I'm frightfully sorry to have to do this, but you simply must understand. We're here to help you."

"No, you're just like the rest."

"Look, old fellow, why do you think the Count asked us over here? Now I think you'd better tell us the whole thing."

The creature in the corner let out an animal cry.

"I suppose it was he who was making the screams in the night. Who is he? I suppose it is a he?"

Rodolfo said nothing, just boiled with anger. Then he spoke.

"Well, you know now and I cannot kill you. So, I might as well tell you the whole story. That is the Count's son."

"The Count's son?"

"Yes, he is forty-five years old. He should have died, but

"Hold on a tick! Forty-five, but the Countess died forty-five years ago. You mean that she died giving birth to that ... that gentleman over there?"

"Yes, Radu is the heir to the Dracula estate. He should

now be Count Dracula."

"Radu? That means 'handsome', doesn't it? Rather ironical."

"Naturally, the Count did not want the world to know about Radu. It would be a great shame for the family. But he felt great guilt for keeping him here in this ... this hole. But Radu doesn't know any better."

"Well, it looks as if you've let the cat out of the bag, Rodolfo. But don't worry. Your secret will be safe with us. I won't even mention it in my article. I promise. Now, one thing puzzles us. Who is this Doctor Magorsky?"

"Doctor Magorsky is an evil man, but the Count was a naive man and trusted him. I think he killed her."

"Killed the Countess?"

"By bleeding her. This is what he does, to make people better."

"I see. Fascinating! Oh, and one last little question, old boy, now that we've got you in this ... em ... difficult position, so to speak. That was you we saw on the Count's horse the other night, wearing his cloak and hood?"

Rodolfo was silent. Then hesitatingly he replied.

"... No."

"Are you sure you weren't sleep-riding, old fellow? Because if it wasn't you, I daren't think who it was, unless it was the Count himself. Now you must trust us. We can work together and sort this whole nasty business out. Our job is to clear the Dracula name and that's exactly what we will do."

"All right. I will help you."

"Oh, what a jolly good fellow! Did you understand that, Ernest? Rodolfo is going to help. I think we can untie him now."

"Are you sure we can trust him? He could throw both of us into the well with one arm."

"Well, perhaps you'd better keep your little thingyhandy just in case."

They first unwound the *bolas* and then the ropes from around his arms. He made no attempt to attack them. Alfred sighed with relief.

"Well, I don't know about you two, but I'm starving. How about breakfast?"

When Ernest and Alfred were having breakfast, Alfred was still unsure of the situation.



"There are still a lot of questions unanswered, aren't there, old boy? I mean, who was that chappy on the horse? Now, we don't believe in ghosts. Or do we?"

"I'm not sure we can trust Rodolfo. He may have been lying, or at least not telling us the whole truth. Might he still throw us down the well or something?"

"Oh, no, no, no. Rodolfo's a fine fellow. I think we need to investigate the Doctor. All this bleeding! Nasty business!"

"Well, in that case, I suggest that after breakfast, we get old Gregory to pop us into the village so that we can get to the bottom of this Magorsky fellow."

"Ah, Rodolfo, a superb breakfast as usual. I hope you didn't just accidentally drop a few spoonfuls of cyanide into the coffee."

Rodolfo did not reply or smile.

"Funny about foreigners. They can't take a joke."



They decided to go straight to the Doctor's house and face him. For some reason, Rodolfo insisted on driving them there.

After a two-hour journey, they arrived at an iron gate leading into a large estate surrounded by a tall glass-topped wall. A well-kept drive led up to the Doctor's house. On looking out of the window of the carriage, Ernest was surprised to see a large house with at least twenty rooms.

"Take a look at that, old boy. He's not doing too badly for a country doctor. A house like that must be worth a fortune."

The door was opened by a servant. After a long wait, the Doctor who was still an extremely handsome man, with long silver hair brushed back on both sides of his head, came into the room. Surprisingly, he spoke excellent English.

"I believe we've met before, gentlemen. Under less happy circumstances. You're English, I believe."

"Yes, Doctor, we're doing a spot of investigating for the late Count."

"They tell me you've been asking questions that have been upsetting some of the villagers."

"Not at all, Doctor. People have been very happy to tell us all they know. It seems that these rumours about the Count having a taste for human blood are totally unfounded."

"I don't know who you've been talking to, gentlemen, but I can assure you that the Count was, and I believe, still is, a vampire. You forget, gentlemen. I was his doctor."

"You say 'still is'. Do you mean to say that you don't believe that the Count is dead? Or do you believe in ghosts?"

"I believe he died, yes, but I also believe in his power to come back from the dead. In fact, I believe that vampires are humans who have died and come back to earth."

"Very interesting, Doctor. But you say the Count was also a vampire in real life?"

"Yes, the Count had very rare powers. I once examined his teeth at some length, and ..."

At that moment a shout was heard from the hall and all seven feet of Rodolfo came through the door into the sitting-room.

"That man is a liar. He is the vampire, not the Count. Tell them how you ..."

The Doctor looked at Rodolfo with an ironic smile on his face.

"You can't prove it. The Count never recognised you as hisson."

"Maybe not publicly, but I'm going to prove how you blackmailed the Count so you would keep his secret. You were the only person who knew about Radu."

"Rubbish! Nonsense!"

"I can get all the villagers to say how you forced large sums of money out of them and threatened to kill them if they did not pay."

The Doctor began to laugh hysterically.

"This man is mad, absolutely mad. He needs to be locked up. And if he doesn't shut up soon, I shall call my men and have him taken away."

During this confrontation, Ernest and Alfred just sat and watched, not knowing who was telling the truth. Suddenly, Rodolfo came towards the Doctor and took him by the shirt

collar. He probably would have broken his neck if Alfred had not stopped him.

"Gentlemen, there's no need to fight like animals. We're all civilised here."

"Civilised? This doctor is an animal. He has killed thousands by bleeding them to death."

"Lies! Prove it, you monster."

Suddenly Rodolfo calmed down.

"Yes, Doctor Lover. I will prove it."

"You can prove nothing."

"Yes, I can. Before the Count died he left me his diary, in which he wrote everything. When you killed the Countess with your so-called medicines and your bleeding, not one day went by that the Count did not write down everything. How you blackmailed him, how you got rich by threatening the poor and sick, how you used the vampire bat to do your dirty work for you, how everybody hates you and fears you!"

"No one would believe it. They all think the Count was the vampire. It's his word against mine."

"You know very well that if it's a question of your word against his, the people will believe his. The people loved the Count and never really believed the rumours."

Suddenly a fearful screeching was heard from the next room. Everybody except the Doctor froze.

"It's nothing, gentlemen. It's my falcon. He wishes to go hunting."

As soon as Ernest heard the screech, he showed great excitement.

"Alfred old chap, this is the moment I've been waiting for."

Ernest walked excitedly to the door and was about to open it when the Doctor shouted at him.

"Don't open that door unless you want to die, Lord Ernest. I have specially trained them to go straight for the neck."

"Doctor, you don't think I would come all the way from England and not see the vampire bat in the light of day. After all I am a specialist."

"I warned you."

No sooner had Ernest opened the door than a loud flapping of wings and the screeching of a starving bat was heard, and an ugly creature with pointed wings and a squashed nose, with black hairs sticking out of it, flew wildly at Ernest. Alfred screamed and ran to fight off the vicious creature, but by the time he had reached his friend, the bat had already got its teeth in his neck. To Alfred's surprise, Ernest just stood there while the creature got its fill from his neck. Alfred did not know what to do.

Soon, the bat drew out its teeth from Ernest's neck and sat on his shoulder like a parrot or a tame bird.

"Do you know, Alfred, old boy, I think this is the most exciting moment of my life! How many people back in England can say that they came in such close contact with a *Desmodus Rotondus*?"

"But won't it kill you, dear boy?"

"Good heavens, no! Of course, if I were one of the Doctor's patients and it fed off me three times a day, I wouldn't last long."

The doctor stood in admiration listening to the man talking about his bats so casually.

"A beautiful creature, Doctor. But also a deadly one, if you let it be."

"You have them well trained, Doctor. You don't mind if I see the rest of the family?"

At that, Ernest went into the Doctor's laboratory and looked up at the ceiling. Sure enough, hanging upside down on a wooden bar were four more vampire bats. Alfred, by now, had wrapped a scarf around his neck and was holding it tightly with both hands.

"How many people have you killed, Doctor, to keep your little family alive?"

"Yes, they are my family. I love them more than any human being because they love me with all their heart. They are faithful, not like women, who love you today and leave you tomorrow. All those people, they were going to die anyway. I couldn't save them. Nobody could."

"How can you be so sure, Doctor? I think we should let the police decide on that. Don't you think, Alfred?"

"Absolutely, old chap. I suggest we go right now."

At that, they turned and left the Doctor, who was shouting nonsense after them.

"You can't do anything to me. They're just peasants. They're all afraid of me. I have all the power."

As they reached the carriage, Ernest turned to the Doctor.

"Well, goodbye, Doctor. It was a pleasure. We shall meet again soon. Oh, and one more thing, you won't need to feed one member of your family tonight."



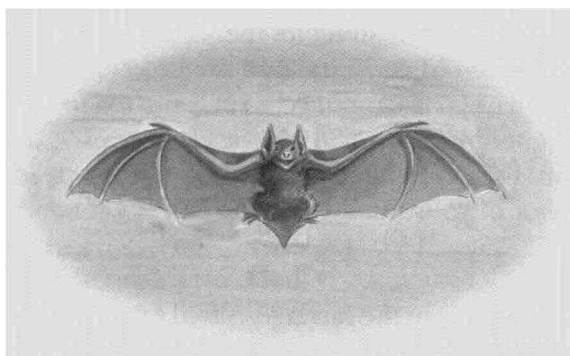
When they were in the carriage, Alfred felt a little better and let his hands go from his neck, but he seemed very concerned by the two pink spots on Ernest's neck.

"Are you all right, old chap? Horrifying experience!"

"On the contrary, dear boy. It was like a gentle kiss. You should try it some time."

"I think I'll give it a miss, old fellow. I'll stick to the female kind."

"Now, what I'm worried about is what the Doctor will do to get his hands on the Count's diary. He'll stop at nothing. I'll check my Derringer just in case. I think we'll be needing it."





By the time they left the Doctor's it had begun to snow, and by the look of the dark clouds there was going to be a storm. So they decided not to go to the police that night. Anyway, Alfred wished to examine the Count's diaries first to make sure that Rodolfo had got his facts correct. Alfred had two things on his mind that he had not had a chance to talk to Ernest about. He leaned towards Ernest so that he could be heard above the noise of the carriage and the rising storm.

"Did you notice, Ernest, that Rodolfo called Magorsky 'Doctor Lover'?"

"I'm afraid I missed that, old boy. Why? Do you think that the Doctor is the 'lover' the Count mentioned in his letter?"

Suddenly the sound of horses approaching the carriage was heard and then a shot rang out. Ernest quickly stuck his head out of the window. Through the falling snow, he could see three riders.

"I think we're being attacked by the Doctor's men. I hope you're a good shot old boy, because it's the only gun we've got."

Rodolfo was now going faster and the carriage was rolling dangerously from side to side. Another shot rang out, and they heard a cry from Rodolfo. At that, Ernest started climbing out of the window, much to Alfred's concern.

"Be careful, old boy. They're out to kill."

"I'm afraid you're going to have to join me, dear fellow."

You don't stand a chance of hitting any of them in here."

So, both men climbed out on to the carriage roof. Rodolfo had been shot in the arm but was still able to drive the horses. After nearly being thrown off the carriage three times, Alfred finally managed to get onto the carriage roof. He lay down on his stomach and aimed. His first shot knocked one of the riders off his horse. Ernest looked around in surprise.

"I say, well done! You never told me you were such an ace!"

The other two riders followed for a short distance and then dropped behind. Alfred relaxed, but was not happy.

"This doctor will stop at nothing to keep the world from finding out the truth. I think we've got a rather unpleasant few days ahead of us."

"Jolly good show! I was beginning to think things were getting rather boring."



They reached Dracula Castle without any further adventures. Rodolfo was bleeding badly, but Ernest, who knew quite a lot about first aid, cleaned and dressed the wound. While this was going on, Alfred thought it was a good opportunity to get some straight answers from Rodolfo.

"Rodolfo, did I hear you say that the Count was your father? And if so, why are you pretending to be his servant?"

"I should have told you everything from the beginning, but I have learnt to trust nobody. I am the son of Mania. The Count married her secretly. He brought a priest from far away so that no one would know. But the Count never treated me like a son, more like a servant. That made me bitter, and I hated the Count for that, but I loved him as

my father."

"I see, I see. Now what about Magorsky. Why did you call him Doctor Lover?"

"It is a name he hates. When he was young, he loved a beautiful woman from Vilcea, and they were going to get married. But she left him for another man, a rich man from the town, and after that people made fun of him by calling him 'The Lover'. It was that which made the doctor hate women, particularly young and beautiful women. I am sure now that 'The Lover' killed the Countess."

"Doesn't the Count mention it in his diaries?"

"No, you see the Count was such a kind man that he could not believe that others could be evil. He did not know how jealous the Doctor was of him. He did not even hate the Doctor for blackmailing him. The Count was the kindest man."

"But you say he treated you badly."

"Yes, you see my mother is not an aristocrat. She is nobody, and so I too am nobody, but I have the Dracula blood in my veins. That is hard to accept."

"Now this is all jolly interesting, Rodolfo, but who was that fellow on the horse the other night pretending to be the Count?"

Rodolfo looked at the ground and his pale bony face went red.

"I lied to you. It was me. I have a confession to make. I helped the Doctor spread these rumours about the Count. I would ride the Count's horse through the village whenever the Doctor told me to, so that everybody would think it was the Count. What I did was terrible, but I wanted to hurt the Count for the way he treated me."

"And it appears that you did. Well, there's no point in

crying over spilt milk. The important thing is to keep those diaries safe for the police and try and prove that you are the Count's son. Does he mention it anywhere in his diaries?"

"No. I have read them all."

"I can't believe that if the Count was such a kind man he would not recognise you as his son. We've got to search the castle high and low. Ernest, do you have any ideas where the Count could have hidden a letter or a will or something?"

Ernest, who was warming himself in front of the fire, looked thoughtful.

"Well, it was your idea really, old boy. You thought the Count's cane might be hollow."

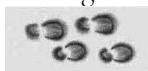
"Yes, of course. I'd completely forgotten."

"Deliberately, perhaps? You don't share my interest in coffins, do you, old chap? So it looks as if we've got work to do tonight."

"In this weather?"

"Sometimes Alfred, you surprise me. You call yourself a reporter, and yet you like putting things off. Yes, tonight! Not that I think we'll see the vampire bat, I'm afraid. It's too cold."

"Well, at least that's one good thing."



After supper they again set out with spades. This time Rodolfo came with them, though he had a great fear of ghosts. The snow was falling in large flakes, and the wind was bitterly cold. By the time they reached the cemetery, everything was so white that they could see their way without lamps. It took them about half an hour to dig

down to the Count's coffin. At the sound of his spade on the coffin, Rodolfo jumped out of the grave.

"I am sorry Sir Alfred, but the rest you must do alone."

"I agree with you, old fellow. I can't stand this part. To tell you the truth, I just keep my eyes closed. I leave it all to Ernest. He enjoys it."

The snow was falling so fast that already a white layer covered the top of the coffin. Ernest was removing the lid.

"I wonder if we'll see the end of my dream?"

"Have the white fingers started to appear then?"

Ernest laughed and pulled off the lid. Ernest could not believe his eyes. The Count's face seemed younger and more alive than ever. And the eyes had opened again. For a moment he thought the Count was going to speak.

"Alfred, can you help me turn the Count? I can't find the cane."

"Do I have to?"

They both lifted the Count over and underneath found the cane.

"That's funny. I thought I left the cane on top of him. Ah, well, let's see if all this was a waste of time or not."

Ernest began to unscrew the handle. When he had finished, he turned it over and tapped the end. Sure enough, a piece of thick paper fell out the end.

"Bingo! What does it say on the top, Alfred?"

"I can only just see but... Yes, 'Last will and testament' ... I think."

"Wonderful! Let's put the Count back to rest, hopefully for the last time."

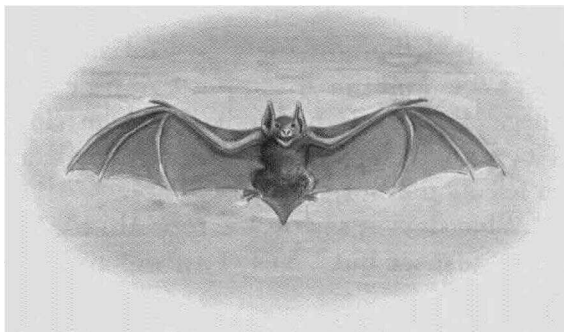
When they had got him laid on his back, Ernest noticed something very strange.

"Good heavens! His eyes have closed, and his face..."

"What about it?"

"It actually looks dead this time, but it's as if he's smiling. If I believed in ghosts, I'd swear that he knew everything that has gone on in the last few days."

"But you don't, do you, Ernest?"





Back at the castle, Rodolfo immediately went to tell his old mother the news and they all gathered around the fire, while Alfred read the will, translating it for Ernest as he went.

"In this, my last will and testament, I wish to undo a wrong I committed many year ago. I married a good and kind woman below my position, my excuse being that like all men, I needed human warmth and comfort. My greatest crime was being ashamed of it and never recognising the fruit of that marriage, my son, Rodolfo. In this will I ask his forgiveness and leave everything to him, declaring that he has the right to call himself Count Dracula. As for my first-born, the unfortunate Radu, I know that Rodolfo will take care of him as long as he lives.

I have taken this will to my grave, with the knowledge that if it is ever found, it will be because the Dracula name has been cleared of all the lies spread by that evil Doctor 'Lover' Magorsky.

I wish to thank Alfred Sackville-Jones and Lord Ernest Deboy for helping my son Rodolfo to get what is rightfully his. I can now rest in peace.

Count Vlad Dracula."

Alfred looked up from the handwritten letter with the Dracula seal and the Count's elaborate signature at the bottom.

"Well, Rodolfo old fellow, we shall have to call you Count from now on."

Rodolfo was so overjoyed that he got up and lifted his ancient mother into the air and kissed her a hundred times on her wrinkled old face so that she actually smiled. Gregory

too was jumping up and down, doing some sort of strange Romanian dance. Having put his mother down, Rodolfo then came and gave Alfred and Ernest kisses on both cheeks.

"May I suggest, Count, that we open one of the late Count's excellent bottles of German wine? I think this calls for a celebration."

So, the five of them celebrated to the early hours. They even got Ernest to join in singing some traditional Romanian songs. Of course, Alfred knew that many dangers lay ahead, but he did not wish to spoil the fun.



Next morning, as usual, Alfred first said good morning to the portrait of the Count, whose cheeks were all rosy red, as if he too had drunk a little too much the night before. Then, he looked out of the window over the castle walls across to the river and down Dracula Valley. The storm was over, but the snow was at least two feet deep. Ernest was still fast asleep. Now that he had no coffins to visit or vampire bats to see, the exciting part was over for him. Alfred shook him.

"Wake up, old boy!"

"Alfred really, why do you always have to interrupt my dream at the most exciting moment? I can see I'll never get to the end."

"Come on. We've got a long day ahead of us. First, we've got to bring these documents to the authorities. And I'm sure that the Doctor's men are already on the road and will probably do anything to stop us."

The snow was too deep for the carriage, so Rodolfo rode Warrior, while Alfred and Ernest took a carriage horse each. As they were not sure that they would be returning to the Castle, they took a bag full of their belongings and said goodbye to

Mania and Gregory, who both had tears in their eyes. Alfred paid one last visit to their room and said goodbye to the portrait on the wall. He was almost certain he saw the Count's lips move.

As they rode out of Dracula's Castle, the silence was immense. All that could be heard was the muffled sounds of the river near the cemetery where the waterfall was. About a mile out, Alfred turned to Rodolfo.

"If the Doctor's men try to attack us, where is the most likely spot?"

"Either where the valley narrows or where we have to cross the river about a mile out of Vilcea."

They said little, just kept their eyes on the hills and trees around them where a man with a gun might be hiding.

The Doctor's men were not waiting at the narrow pass, which surprised Rodolfo, and he wondered whether the Doctor was going to attack them after all. Alfred, however, was sure that he would, and so, when they were halfway across the river, he stopped.

"Gentlemen, get your guns ready."

No sooner had he spoken than a gun appeared from behind a tree and a shot rang out. The bullet whistled past Ernest's ear.

"Good heavens! That was close."

They jumped off their horses and ran for shelter. They could now see that there were three attackers. Ernest, who had more experience fighting than the others, took charge.

"Rodolfo, is it possible to cross the river at any other point?"

"About a half a mile farther up, but there is no road."

"If you'll let me have Warrior, I'll manage it all right. You keep them busy while I approach from behind."

So Ernest got up on the beautiful white horse, which was

almost invisible in the snow, and rode off up the river. About half an hour later, a shot rang out and they saw a body fall from behind one of the trees. Alfred saw his chance.

"Rodolfo, let's get to the other side. Ernest won't give them any time to think about us."

Two minutes later they were on the other side. By this time, Ernest had hit another and the third had laid down his gun and was holding up a white handkerchief. Ernest appeared from behind a tree, followed by Warrior.

"Well, that wasn't too difficult."

Then, out of the corner of his eye, Alfred saw a movement. It was the wounded man who was pointing his gun at Rodolfo.

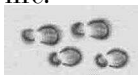
"Rodolfo, get down!"

But it was too late. Rodolfo fell to the ground, his blood spilling onto the white snow. Ernest pointed his gun and shot the man.

Ernest examined Rodolfo and found that he was still breathing, but the bullet had entered his chest and he was bleeding badly.

"We've got to get him to Vilcea quickly. Alfred, throw the men's guns into the river and get that man to put the dead men on to a horse. Then let's get going."

They reached Vilcea about twenty minutes later. Ernest held Rodolfo in his arms and rode into Vilcea on Warrior. At the first inn, they got Rodolfo on to a bed and Ernest set to work, trying to save his life.



Two hours later, Ernest had managed to get the bullet out and the wound dressed. Alfred looked on in admiration.

"I had no idea you were such an expert, dear boy."

"Oh, did I never tell you I studied medicine for two years

before turning to archaeology? You know, I think I would have made quite a good doctor."

"I suppose it's all that blood you like, dear fellow. What are Rodolfo's chances of pulling through?"

"Oh, he'll live, but it may take a few days before he can get back on to his feet."

Suddenly they heard Rodolfo's voice.

"Sir Alfred, get the Mayor and the Police Chief to come. I want witnesses."

"Straight away, old fellow."

Seeing Ernest's bare and bloody arms, Rodolfo realised that it was he who had saved his life.

"Lord Ernest, I now owe you a life. How can I repay you?"

"One day, Count, I'd like to spend some time at the castle, just going through the archives. Would that be all right?"

"Anything, Lord Ernest, anything."



Half an hour later, the Mayor and the Police Chief arrived and the documents were formally handed over. It was now up to the authorities to deal with Doctor Magorsky. Alfred was thinking.

"It looks as if our job is over, Ernest old fellow."

"I'd really love to see those vampire bats again. Can't I go with the police to arrest the Doctor?"

"First of all, we don't know where the Doctor is. He is probably hiding by now. And his main aim now will be to kill us, not Rodolfo, before we get back to England and publish everything."

"Quite so, old boy."

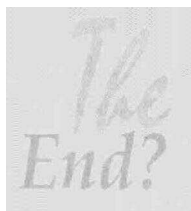
"Rodolfo's in good hands. So I suggest we get out of here

as quickly as possible. We have a long journey ahead of us."

"I'm going to miss this place, Alfred old fellow, it suits me."

"I can't altogether agree with you, old boy. But I do believe Rodolfo will make a very good Count. I always thought he was a very solid chap."





Alfred and Ernest said goodbye to Rodolfo, who could not thank them enough, and caught the 3.30 from Vilcea to Craiova, where they planned to pick up the train to Vienna. They, of course, had no news of the Doctor and wondered whether he would use his money and power to send a team to try to kill them. Strangely enough, it was Ernest who was most concerned.

"Do you know, Alfred old fellow, we're not home and dry yet! It was we who uncovered his evil deeds, and he's not the type who forgives easily."

"Do you really think he'll send some of his killers after us? Why would he bother?"

"It's a question of pride and honour. And these foreign fellows think such things are terribly important."

Alfred had great difficulty thinking of danger. He was already imagining himself back in his room in London.

"What's the first thing you'll do when you get back, Ernest?"

"What a question! Let me see. Yes, I think I'll open a bottle of your finest wine, dear boy. What'll you do?"

"I'll go for a walk through the fog of London and stand on Tower Bridge and watch the boats go underneath."

Ernest laughed.

"Really, Alfred, you're such a sentimentalist."

They arrived in Craiova at about 6:00 and had to wait an hour for their connection. They were waiting on the crowded platform when Alfred saw a man he thought he recognised.

"Ernest, do you see that man over by the entrance? The one with the beard and the scar above his left eye. Does he ring a bell?"

"Don't think so, old fellow."

"Probably my imagination."

However, Alfred kept an eye on him and noticed that he too got on the train to Vienna. There was something suspicious about him. He was dressed like a man of wealth, but looked like a boxer.



It was about 4.45 in the morning and they were about halfway to Vienna when the first attempt on their lives was made. Ernest was fast asleep and snoring so loudly that he was keeping Alfred awake. The door of their cabin opened, allowing a strip of light to enter. Alfred opened his eyes for a second and saw the man with the beard. He was holding a piece of rope in his hands and was obviously intending to strangle them both. Alfred wished he had put the Derringer under his pillow, and also that Ernest was not fast asleep. He decided to wait and grab the man by the legs as soon as he got close enough to the bunk bed. Alfred was about to jump when he heard the man grunt and fall to the floor of the compartment. Ernest switched on the light and looked at the man lying on the floor, apparently dead.

"It looks as if I saved your life, Alfred old fellow. It's a good thing I don't sleep as deeply as you do."

"But I don't."

"Don't what?"

"Sleep soundly. You were the one snoring. I was wide awake."

"Snoring? Was I really?"

Ernest looked at the body.

"I'm afraid I broke his neck. Well, what can a chap do if another chap tries to strangle him in the middle of the night? I suppose we'll have to explain this mess to the guard."



For the next two days, nothing unusual happened. It wasn't until they were outside Paris that the next attempt on their lives was made. They had got to know another passenger, a German by the name of Wolf Heinz. He said he was an ornithologist and was on his way to England to study a bird species there. Ernest, however, was quite suspicious because that particular species of bird wouldn't arrive in England for another two months. It all happened when they were having tea and cakes in the dining car. Herr Heinz had arrived first and had already ordered. Alfred was delighted to see the cherry cakes and tea waiting.

"I say, Wolf, old chap. Jolly nice of you!"

They sat down and Wolf offered them a cake each. Ernest noticed that they smelt strongly of almond and suspected that Wolf had put cyanide in some of them. Rather than cause a fuss, he pretended to knock the cake out of Alfred's hand.

"Frightfully sorry, old fellow! How clumsy of me! Good heavens! Look out there! That bird. Very unusual. What is it?"

Wolf looked out of the window and tried hard to see the bird, during which time Ernest changed his cake for the one on Wolf's plate. Then he winked at Alfred so that he understood what was happening.

"Oh, dear, it must have flown away."

When he turned round, Alfred and Ernest were pretending to be finishing off their cakes, which Ernest had put into his

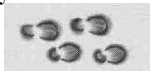
pocket.

"What lovely cakes, Wolf!"

Wolf joined in and ate his.

On arrival in Paris, they saw an empty coffin arrive and leave with a body in it. Ernest looked at Alfred and smiled.

"Poor Wolf! And they did look like awfully nice cakes!"



When they got off the train at Charing Cross they really felt their adventure had ended, but they did not see the young man get into the cab behind them and follow them all the way.

Suddenly, a shot rang out. Alfred pushed Ernest to the ground. A man was standing on the pavement, pointing a gun at them. Ernest was quite annoyed.

"Dear me! And I was so looking forward to a nice cup of English tea."

The man in the street looked mad, his eyes moving wildly in his head.

"You ruined my father! You will pay for this!"

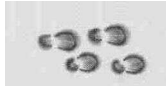
But by the time he had finished his last sentence, Ernest had got out his Derringer and had shot him straight through the heart. They ran to the body, now lying in a pool of blood. In his pocket, Alfred found a passport with the name Nikolai Magorsky.

"Really, these foreign fellows are hot-blooded, aren't they?"

Ernest was more concerned about the body.

"Now how are we going to explain this to the police?"

For the next three months, Alfred and Ernest went everywhere looking over their shoulder. But it appeared that Nikolai was the last assassin.



"Come on! Hold out your glass, Ernest old chap."

Alfred raised his glass in the air and Ernest filled it with champagne.

"Well, here's to a successful end to the Dracula affair. *The Globe* has been awfully good. Of course, they didn't believe a word of it, but they said that even as a work of fiction it was worth publishing."

"Oh, well done, old fellow."

"Yes, we're going to call it *The Real Count Dracula*, in ten episodes. I have to admit that I'm going to make a fortune."

"Well, I must tell you, old fellow, that you're not the only one who's had some success. I'm going to have an article published in *The British Bat Society* magazine on the vampire bat and I've been booked to give talks on the subject all summer."

"Oh, how superb! Let's drink to the late and present Counts Dracula!"

"I wonder what happened to the Doctor."

"Probably took one of his deadly potions. He had nothing to live for."

Just then, there was a knock on the door and Alfred's servant entered with a letter. Alfred opened it quickly.

"Ah, it's from Rodolfo. Let's see what he has to say."

'Dear Alfred and Ernest, I have some good and some bad news. The bad news is that my brother Radu died and was buried next to his father in the Dracula Cemetery. The good news is that the Doctor is dead. He was found with all the blood sucked out of him with his horrible bats standing on his body. He died as he deserved to: in the way that he killed his victims. The other good news is that I am getting married and would like you to come to my wedding. I am

marrying the daughter of a Count in Craiova. I know it may not be possible for you to come, but it would make me very happy as I owe you my life and much more. Your true and devoted friend, Count Rodolfo Dracula.'"

"Well, it is nice to know that everything turned out all right for him in the end. What about this wedding thing, then?"

"Let's decide tomorrow. Have some more champagne?"

Some minutes later, there was another knock on the door, and Alfred's servant entered with another letter.

Alfred opened it and looked at the name.

"Frankenstein. Have you heard the name Frankenstein before?"

"Yes, I believe I have. Wasn't he that chap who created a monster?"

"Dear Alfred Sackville-Jones, something terrible has happened. There have been reports that a family of monsters looking like the monster my grandfather created, have been seen high up in a mountain in Switzerland. I do not know whether it is a He or not. Could you please come and investigate? I have heard about your success with Count Dracula and I want you to do the same for the Frankenstein name. Please reply as soon as possible. Yours, Albert Frankenstein.'"

"Well, it sounds pretty exciting to me. When shall we leave?"

"Ernest, Ernest, old boy! I still haven't recovered from the Dracula affair!"

"Oh, what a spoil sport you are!"

"Well, I won't say no. I'll decide tomorrow. Come on. Let's enjoy this champagne and go for a walk to the Tower Bridge. I do love England at this time of year. Don't you?"