Summary

A Jonathan Harker less inclined towards the seductions of men and more loyal to his beloved Mina would no doubt react in a way reminiscent of the lunacy depicted in my more respectable – and fictitious – journal. If nothing else, this journey has made quite clear that I am not such a man. The Count has a most willing prisoner, for a find that there is little I would not do in exchange for another scrap of his affections.

Notes

I found your prompt while looking through the Yuletide 2016 requests archive, and I knew immediately that I absolutely had to write this story. The idea of it just gripped me in an instant, so I really hope that you like it!

7th May – … ‘ ‘We are in Transylvania; and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things. Nay, from what you have told me of your experiences already, you know something of what strange things here may be.”

‘This led to much conversation.’ Indeed, it led to a strange evening that I will document here for perversity’s sake, for I shall have to consign these pages to the fire before my return to England. A more accurate account of our conversations will take its place to preserve the detail of my journal and so guard against any accusations that may arise. However, I find that I must record the true events of this night in order to believe them.
The Count was in the mood to talk for talking’s sake, and so I took advantage of the opportunity to discuss with him some of the stranger parts of my journey. Some aspects, such as the coachman’s back-and-forth route, were evaded with a sharp-toothed smile although he did elaborate on the blue flames and the treasures concealed beneath them. Of most other things, he spoke with great frankness and eloquence. His claims that his English is poor again struck me as false, but the Count proved himself a charming companion and I found myself relaxing as he spoke of the traditions and superstitions of his fellow countrymen.

I found myself watching his hands as he spoke. They moved in time with his words, and for all that their appearance and touch had chilled me the previous night, I found myself seeing elegance in their motion. A memory of their strength surfaced, and I had to tear my eyes away; my heart pounding in my breast. It was a strange and sudden attraction: the Count is not a handsome man, rather he has a collection of striking features that – individually – may have given a plainer face a more attractive character. Combined in him, they tend toward saturnine cruelty. Yet there is a hypnotic quality to him that, despite my wariness, drew my gaze once more and kept me enraptured.

If my host noticed any impropriety on my part, he did not reveal it. Indeed, our conversation flowed until, at some dark hour when the moon hung fat over the castle, he excused himself to enquire as to the whereabouts of dinner. I remained in the library for a time, my heart pounding and my breath shallow. There was – I feel I must admit this, to put it to paper in order to come to terms fully to terms with it. There was a yearning inside of me. A craving for the Count’s touch. Mina! Forgive me! In that moment, my body and mind were consumed with desire. I sat, entertaining wild fantasies of seduction – each more elaborate and fantastical than the last – until it became unbearable. I leapt to my feet and began to pace. The ache in my body was a torment, but despite my earlier imaginings, I had no desire to defile the Count’s library. I paced and paced until my whirling mind began to calm and the heat faded from my blood. Cold shame left me trembling and I sank back into my seat.

There is little to be gained by lying here, when these pages are shortly to be consumed by fire. The desires the Count inspires in me are, to my shame, not unfamiliar. I have been discreet in my visits to the molly houses, but what few dalliances I have had have been enough to educate me in the ways I wish the Count would use me. Use me. He does not, for all his charm, appear to be a man prone to displays of affection. Whatever fantasies I may harbour can never be ones of love – indeed, I do not believe the Count is capable of such an emotion – and they must be kept to myself. He can never know. God! Mina must never know.

I rose from my meditations some time later and made my way to my chambers to refresh myself. The walk was short, and my ablutions shorter, as when I passed through the main chamber of my quarters, an evening meal was set for one and the Count was reclining on a sofa by the fireplace. He offered me a smile as I entered, and an excuse that he had eaten while out on business earlier in the evening, which I was too distracted to question. Now that I write, it occurs to me that I have never seen him eat. At the time, however, I was so raw with emotion, my cruel desires so fresh and vivid in my mind, that I could only nod and make my way to my bedchamber with haste.

A cold splash of water to my face revived me somewhat, but it did nothing to sate the hunger gnawing at my belly. Hunger not for the rich, paprika-spiced stew I had seen on the dining table, though my memory of its flavour is a pleasant one, but for the graceful sprawl of the Count’s limbs.

8th May – I return to these pages with some strange feeling in my breast that I cannot, and I fear, should not, identify. They are written in shorthand and so I feel little urgency immediately consign them to the fire as I have no doubt that the Count will find them unintelligible. No, it is by my
return to England that they must be destroyed. For safety’s sake, I shall resolve to do it on my last night in the castle – I will then have the long journey by land and sea in which to resolve myself once more to a life of contentment with Mina at my side.

For all my wild fantasising, the remainder of my time with the Count last night was spent in pleasant conversation. After dinner, he engaged me on the subjects of London, law, and of aspects of English culture with which he was not quite so familiar. He is a fascinating conversationalist, and I found myself growing quite animated in his presence. Our conversation, again, lasted until the last, cold hour before dawn in which the world becomes heavy, and we parted well.

Sleep, I believe, came quickly for me. I awoke late this morning feeling lethargic and with a weight to my bones that reminded me of those times in London and Exeter I had been desperate enough to sate myself with some rouge-painted boy. It cannot be so here: though the Count with his strong hands and cruel, red mouth haunted my dream, there was no trace of issue upon my sheets when I inspected them. Nor on myself. There was, however, a faint trace of blood that appears to have come from a strange wound on my inner thigh. Two punctures, each ringed with white. It appears almost as if I have been bitten, but by what manner of creature I cannot tell.

A preliminary search of the castle for the Count has shown me many locked doors and no trace of another soul. I sit writing this in a new corner of the Count’s exquisite library, under the watchful gaze of an ancestor of his: a man with the same strong features as my host. Indeed, they are so similar that were it not for the date in Latin painted onto the canvas and the startling green with which the artist rendered his subject’s eyes, I would have suspected the man to be the Count himself. Indeed, there is something about the Count that is not quite natural, and while I have recorded the manner of our encounter this morning in my other journal, I feel as though it must also be included here. Some instinct is calling me to collate the experience with these others, as if my mind realises there is a pattern that cannot yet be seen.

After my late awakening, I dressed and stood at my shaving mirror by the window of my chamber. I had lathered my face and had just picked up my razor when I felt a hand upon my shoulder. The Count bade me a “good morning” and I startled at the greeting for I had not seen his reflection in my mirror despite the fact that it showed the whole room. I have mentioned in my other journal that my jolt of surprise led me to nick the skin of my neck, and that when I turned to face the Count I saw a fury in his eyes unmatched by any force outside of Hell itself. What that account neglected to tell is as follows: the Count regained himself without any outside influence. The rosary I had been given, I confess I removed after my first night, and tucked safely into my bag; my mirror was indeed flung from the window to smash in the courtyard below, however, the unholy gleam faded from the Count’s eyes afterwards and he seemed most apologetic. He bade me to sit before him, and with confident strokes, it was he who finished shaving me. I found myself quite soothed by the repetitive motions despite the strangeness of the man performing them, and quite against my better judgement, by the time he finished, I was leaning back against him. His legs, I fear, are quite as strong and solid as his arms, and will fuel further indiscretions on my part. As will the strange caress he gave to my hair when he finished – petting me almost as if I were some docile cat! He blotted the cut on my neck with a soft towel and instructed me to take care of the wound as “strange creatures haunt this land, and this castle is little protection should they choose to prey upon you”. The bite on my thigh seemed to throb in time with the cadence of his speech, and I pressed my legs together lest it somehow manage to betray me.

The intimacy of our encounter and the Count’s earlier display of queer violence have served to confuse me. I have written elsewhere that I am a prisoner here. In truth, I fancy that even were an escape from this castle possible, I would yet be held captive. I can state, if only in these pages, that my incarceration has not inspired any such fit of madness as may be described elsewhere. A Jonathan Harker less inclined towards the seductions of men and more loyal to his beloved Mina
would no doubt react in a way reminiscent of the lunacy depicted in my more respectable – and fictitious – journal. If nothing else, this journey has made quite clear that I am not such a man. The Count has a most willing prisoner, for a find that there is little I would not do in exchange for another scrap of his affections.

12th May – Again, I awoke to a feeling of lethargy and blood on my bedding. The wound from which it came bears striking similarity to the first and there is no doubt that it was caused by the same manner of creature. This one, however, is at the juncture of my groin and I am reminded of it with every movement. The skin around each wound is red and inflamed save for the thin white ring about each puncture. It appears as whatever is causing such wounds is sucking upon them with some force. It is strange that these encounters have not awoken me, particularly due to the intimate nature of their locations, but my slumber in this castle is deep.

A curious note, and one that I am loathe to admit, is that these wounds seem to appear after my dreams of the Count. In these dreams, I am held down by his weight upon me. The iron strength of his hands keep my own pinned and my hips still as he uses his mouth upon me. So vivid are these dreams that in the hours we spend together I half expect him to make some reference to them. I find myself anticipating his touch as we speak through the long nights. It is maddening! Maddening to await kisses that will not come, or caresses that he will not offer. My fantasies are quite out of control, and the presence of these wounds makes matters only worse as their tenderness makes me too aware of them when my mind should be occupied with other things.

The count asked me this evening of some of London’s more famous sights. I have shared with him my own experiences of the city, barring those that impropriety forbids. He seems most interested in theatre and the new cinematograph, and while I have not yet been to the latter, I was able to point it out on his map of the great city, which he assured me was quite helpful. I must confess that I made upon this juncture a most bold offer: that would he be interested, I would be most willing to accompany him on any excursion he took through London that he felt may require a guide, or indeed, congenial company. The Count seemed quite surprised by my offer, but before I could muster enough wit to beg his pardon, he accepted.

“Forgive me,” he said, “for I have lived a long and lonely existence. I am quite unused to such offers of amiable companionship. I would be delighted to continue our acquaintance once we have reached your homeland.”

It seemed to me that, as he spoke, his gaze dropped to those places where beneath my clothes my skin was punctured. A flush coloured my cheeks and though my heart beat wild in my breast, my voice was steady when I told him that such an acquaintance would give nothing but pleasure. My words were true, for though he torments me, I yet delight in his strange company.

Once I had dined, again alone, and with the Count’s watchful gaze upon me, our conversation turned to the history of his people. My favoured portrait – that which hangs in the library and so reminds me of the Count – is indeed a distant ancestor. A warlord-prince who once ruled these lands and held back the Turks from their conquest of Europe, but who was betrayed by a brother and his boyars both. The Count’s narration of his fierce battles and merciless character was somewhat odd, as several times he spoke as if it had been he who marched armies through mountain passes and trod upon bloody fields. The brother, he noted with a rueful smile, had been the lover of the Turkish sultan in his youth and had, for a time, also ruled as puppet before the great man in the portrait once again took the throne and deposed him. Once again, when he spoke of the brother he called cel Frumos, I fancied I saw his gaze drop to my hidden wounds as if comparing my injuries to the actions of a long-dead catamite. My pulse raced and I shifted in my seat as the heat in his eyes inflamed my blood, and his white teeth flashed before he continued his tale.
I had not realised before coming here quite how long and bloody this history of this land is. It is a
dark and treacherous place – a “cauldron of humanity” as my host described it – and yet his words
and countenance have made me fall quite in love with it.

16th May – “How dare you touch him, any of you? How dare you cast eyes on him when I had
forbidden it? Back, I tell you all! Beware of how you meddle with him, or you’ll have to deal with
me.” The fair girl, with laugh of ribald coquetry, turned to answer him: -

“You yourself never loved; you never love!” On this the other women joined, and such as=
mirthless, hard, soulless laughter rang through the room that it almost made me faint to hear; it
seemed like the pleasure of fiends. Then the Count turned, after looking at my face attentively, and
said in a soft whisper:-

“Yes, I too can love.”” And oh, my heart raced to hear it for the Count’s hand did rest in my hair,
and his fingers were as gentle as they had been the day he shaved me. So desperate I have become
for his favour that the mere mention of possible affection is enough to make me swoon. I fear,
however, that I have strayed ahead of myself. I have not put pen to these secret pages in some days
and so I have been prompted to immediately deny the horrific narrative written in my other journal.
Truly, the thing has come to resemble one of the Gothic romances favoured by Mina’s friend Miss
Westenra and I continue it now for sheer entertainment during the relative solitude of my days
here.

In the days since my last entry here, I have seen many strange things that cannot be explained by
the Count’s foreign nature. No manner of man may crawl head-down a wall like some sort of
lizard. But where my journal speaks of unholy terror and panic at the thought of the strigoi I was
warned of being flesh and blood instead of mere fairy-tale, I am in truth almost unnaturally calm
about the matter. Excited, even, for I have seen the Count’s long, white teeth and I know that he is
the creature responsible for the bites on my most tender areas. What pains me is the knowledge
that, had he asked, I would have permitted his using me so. That he took without my consent has
been troubling, but it has occurred to me that the people of this land would not tolerate his feeding
on them and so made deception a greater part of his nature. I fear that I am making excuses for
him, but my heart has become prone to cruelty – it demands that my mind follow it in all matters
concerning the Count.

It was a mixture of boredom and curiosity that led me to explore the castle. I had seen the Count
crawl down to one particular window on more than one occasion, and so in his absence, I had
chosen to investigate it. He was making the final arrangements for his journey to England – and,
perhaps, my own, for that hope remains – and so I knew that I had little time in which to explore.

The rooms I found through that window had been well lived-in before being abandoned. Beneath
layers of dust, the furniture appeared worn and comfortable. Faded tapestries hung on the walls,
and next to the grand fireplace was a portrait of three children. All of them boys, dark-haired and
pale, in clothes that dated them to the same period as the portrait in the library. The elder two of
the boys appeared to have the same green eyes although the low light made it hard to tell, while the
younger – a sweet-faced toddler – had eyes of an undeterminable darkness. I recalled, then, the
treachery brother of the Count’s stories, and remembered the expression on his face as he had
spoken. Hate and wistfulness mingled as if the brother was his own.

There was a melancholy atmosphere to the rooms that suited me well, so I dragged a sofa to sit by
the fireplace beneath the boys’ portrait, and I pulled my journal from my pocket. I wrote until my
eyes ached in the gloom and my head began to nod. I had not intended to disobey the Count’s
instruction to sleep nowhere but my chambers, but a heaviness stole over my body and I drifted into
dreams without resistance.
What I dreamed, I cannot truly recall. Wisps of childish laughter and female weeping seem to echo
in my mind; whispers in the strange local tongue too quiet for me to hope to understand. Those
whispers evade me even now. As I write, I can feel them escaping me, slipping through my
attempts to put them to paper. I do know this: that I woke with a start, feeling cold and
uncomfortable, with a chill on my neck that told me I was being watched. By what, I did not
immediately see, for the shadows in the room had grown even darker, but after a moment, my eyes
lit on the forms of three women.

They waited just out of reach of the moonlight that slipped through the narrow windows. What
light there was, just enough to make their eyes gleam like hellfire and reflect the white shine of
their long teeth. I sat up straight, startled, and they laughed even as they glided toward me on silent
feet. My breath was caught from fear; these strange women terrified me far more than the Count
ever has. I was frozen, listening as they debated amongst themselves who would be the first to sup.
The youngest-looking: a voluptuous blonde with pale eyes and long, languorous limbs was
reaching for me when the Count flew in. His rage I have already described: his form more fierce
than ever I have seen it. My heart leapt at the sight of him and once he had flung the blonde from
my side, I was unable to stop myself from reaching out and capturing the ends of his cloak between
my fingers – seeking comfort from him as if I were a child. He reached down to me as he berated
them, carding his claw-tipped fingers through my hair.

I watched as the women drew back into the shadows, hissing and wailing as they went, vanishing
as if they had never been. There was a pause after their departure in which I sagged against the
Count, closing my eyes and breathing in the strange smell of him. He smells of earth and dust and a
metallic scent that I now know to be blood. I plastered myself to his side, seeking what comfort he
could offer, and his hand lingered against his scalp.

“I will guide you to your rooms,” the Count said after the moment passed. “There is much we
should discuss, it seems.”

I nodded against his hip before drawing away, mustering my nerve once more. I stood without aid
and followed him through the gloomy corridors of the castle until we had once again reached the
rooms designated as my own. I retired to my bed, trembling and exhausted, while the Count
excused himself immediately. I, unable to sleep, am writing this while resting on the side-table
next to my bed, wrapped in my sheets like a shroud. My other journal remains in the inner pocket
of my jacket. I will have much to add to it when I choose to return to my storytelling, but for now I
shall ease my heart on these few pages. I do not know what will happen to me when the Count
returns. I can only hope that whatever affection he feels for me is strong enough to overwhelm the
disappointment and anger he must feel at my failure to obey his instructions.

Later - Joy! Ah, such joy as I have never before known! I write briefly as so to return to my host,
but I must write this while my elation is still fresh. The Count does indeed feel, and he has said that
he feels for me!

17th May – The castle is bustling with activity. Gypsies loyal to the Count are preparing for the
journey to England by filling great boxes of earth from the bowels of the castle. The Count has told
me that it is a flaw of his race that they are unable to rest outside of their native soil, and so to settle
at the property I have acquired him, he must transport enough to cover the area of the ground floor.
It is a strange symptom of his condition, and I must confess that I find it quite baffling, but I cannot
help but feel flattered that he has confided in me.

I still feel aglow with joy at the Count’s confession. By the time he returned last night, I had
dragged myself from my bed and made myself presentable. He brought with him food: thick-cut
bread slathered with butter, and a soup made from goat and local vegetables and spices. Despite my
nerves, the smell of it was irresistible, and I fell upon the simple meal with gusto while he watched me. Truly, I believe the Count takes some pleasure from watching others eat; I suspect it is due to the activity having been denied him for so long. Once I had finished, I joined the Count by the fire. He had opened a bottle of wine and allowed it to breathe as I ate, and he poured a generous glass for me as I took my seat by his side.

“You are unharmed, I trust,” he said, and when I confirmed that I was, he nodded. He offered no explanation for the women’s presence, nor for their actions; he did not demand my obedience or question why I had entered those rooms. He sat in a silence that was inhuman in quality: when he speaks, he is so animated that it came as something of a shock that when he was still, he did not even breathe.

He roused himself when I offered my apologies, and he waved them away. “You have, I hope, learned from this. That the castle holds more horrors than any one man can hope to confront.”

I assured him I had, and I offered apologies again, assuring him that in future I would endeavour to obey his instruction. He seemed reassured by my insistence that my falling asleep in those strange chambers had been unintentional, and when I had finished, he clasped my hand with his own. At our first meeting, his touch caused revulsion in me. I wonder now how I could ever have felt that way. Though his hands are cold and painfully strong, with me he has always been gentle to the point of reverence. He was reverential then, as he spoke of his gladness at my safety and of the arrangements he had made for us both to return to England.

So close to him, I could see flecks of green in his strange, red eyes and could count each eyelash. I found myself admiring the way his fangs seemed to curve slightly towards their fatal points, and the way they pressed into his full lower lip as he spoke.

He had spent his day arranging a ship for us and for his boxes of earth; one that will take us to Whitby. When I asked about the destination, he gave a slight grimace and confessed to me that the journey would likely be unpleasant for the crew and so it would be best for there to be distance between the end of our sea journey and our ultimate destination. I deferred, naturally, though my heart was troubled. Those poor souls! To know what the Count intends for them…and yet his feeding has not, I believe, harmed me any, so I cannot help but think that my worries are unfounded.

I shall travel with him, he told me, and upon our arrival at Carfax, he would have me remain with him: a companion as well as an employee. I would take control of his legal matters, he explained: a hefty portfolio and an invaluable opportunity to further my career in law, not to mention a noble patronage as society in England will accept his title if nothing else. But while my mind turned this proposal over, that cruel heart of mine desired more.

“As your companion, Count, what would you desire of me?”

“I…would have all of you,” he told me, drawing me close so that our knees brushed and the tip of his long nose brushed lightly against my hairline. My breath left me in a long, shuddering exhale and I reached up to grasp his shoulder on reflex. “My dear friend, I would have all that you are, and all that you will be – and I would have you for a far longer span than your mortal years can imagine.”

I looked up at him then, at the glow of his eyes and the long points of his white teeth, and I knew what my fate would be. The Count will indeed use me. Use me and treasure me for an eternity; he will take my life and give me a new one. I shall be as those women are: beyond the world of the living, deadly and seductive, and I will forever be his slave.
I leaned up to him and pressed a kiss to his soft mouth. I shall go willingly into this eternal darkness, as the Count has had me ensnared since I first was welcomed into his home.

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