The Ending That Should Have Been

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Summary

This is an alternative ending to Francis Ford Coppola's film version of Bram Stoker's Dracula.
Chapter 1

Vlad lurked in the shadows of Carfax Abbey. He had assumed a shape somewhere between a bat and a man. It was not a form he chose willingly; recent events had left him... Unstable.

She'd left him. Again. He had waited hundreds of years to find her again and she had chosen him instead. A weak, snivelling child. Jonathan Harker did not deserve a woman like Mina.

'Do you?' His conscious – the one constant companion in his very long existence – mocked him.

Vlad snarled incomprehensibly but his conscious paid him no mind. It never did.

'What would your dear, sweet Mina think of you if she knew that you had murdered her best friend in a fit of temper?' his conscious demanded. 'Do you think that she would find you worthy if she knew of that?'

As much as he would like to deny it, Vlad knew the truth of it. He had lashed out in a jealous rage after reading Mina's letter and Lucy had borne the brunt of his fury. It was just as well her menfolk had disposed of the vampire she had become, Vlad thought. It saved him the trouble of doing it later. Mina was a pure, innocent soul. Her friend, however, had not been. She'd had a wicked heart. He thought of the three "brides" he had left behind. No, he did not wish to bear the responsibility for another of their ilk.

The only bride he desired now belonged to another.

Vlad was lost in the turmoil of his own thoughts. If he had not been so preoccupied, he may have noticed the gang of men who entered his sanctuary, shouting and bearing torches as they tore into the boxes housing the precious soil of his homeland. As it was, he only became aware of their presence when her scent wafted up to him.

Mina.

Her scent clung to the men – one in particular. Jonathan Harker. Vlad felt the dark beast of jealousy rise, hungry and murderous in his chest, clamouring for Harker's blood. It took every ounce of willpower Vlad possessed to remain where he was when every fibre of his being demanded that he swoop down upon the unsuspecting man and bury his fangs in the bastard's throat. Digging his clawed toes deeper into the wooden beam that supported his weight, Vlad shrunk deeper into the shadows as he surveyed the scene.

Harker was wide eyed and nervous. His gaze shifted constantly, restlessly, and he jumped every time an axe swung down to crack open a box. Vlad sneered. The man was pitiful. The other three he knew only from Lucy's descriptions of them. Seward, the doctor in charge of the sanatorium nearby... Holmwood, the wealthy lord she had been promised to wed... Morris, the brash Texan with the big knife...

And, of course, Van Helsing. The old man grinned as he barked orders; he was the only one who appeared to be enjoying himself. Vlad had felt a moment's shock when he first laid eyes on Van Helsing but now he felt only loathing - for as sure as Mina was the reincarnation of his beloved Elizabeta, that man was the image of the slain priest who, with his dying breath, cursed Vlad to suffer eternally for his sins. He wanted to kill the old man even more than he wanted to kill Harker. But he was in no position to take on five men at once, even if one was past the prime of his life. Many nights had passed since he last fed and the loss of Lucy and his powers were weak. No, he could not face them as he was now. He must first feed.
He could hear the cries from the nearby sanatorium. One voice rose above the others, a shrill voice screaming about blood and eternal life. Ah, Vlad thought, it was time to pay Mr. Renfield a visit...

Gathering the last of his strength, Vlad spread himself out, scattering his essence into fine droplets of water. An unnatural mist, he rolled toward the asylum, following the sound of Renfield's voice. He felt the man's guilt, even before touching his mind – but when he did force his way into Renfield's thoughts, what he saw threatened to send him into another mindless rage.

'Renfield...' He spoke directly into the man's mind. 'You have betrayed me.'

Vlad saw it as clearly as if he had been standing there: Renfield calling out to Mina... Begging her to flee... Putting his filthy lips on her perfect flesh...

It was too much to bear. Vlad wrapped himself around Renfield without changing form. He curled around the man's legs and torso, lifting him off his feet, and hurled him at the rusty metal bars that prevented his escape. Once, twice, three times he repeated the gesture until Renfield lay in a bloody heap at his feet. Only then did Vlad pull himself back together into something resembling a man. He fell on Renfield's corpse, latched onto his throat and sucked him dry.

Slowly rational thought returned. With it came awareness. Vlad gradually became aware of the sounds and smells of the sanatorium that surrounded him: hoarse, wordless cries of pain, the smell of rotten food, inmates rattling the bars of their cells, human waste, human despair and... and...

Mina.

Vlad lifted his head and sniffed the air. Under the oppressive stench of the sanatorium, her smell was unmistakable. He would know her scent anywhere; it was a mixture of old books and ink, with a hint of sweet summer flowers – the smell of a school mistress in the bloom of her life. And it was close.

Mina was here, in the sanatorium.

'Of course she is,' he conscious mocked. 'How else would she have been speaking to Renfield? You could ask him why – Oh, wait, you can't because you killed him.'

Vlad refused to feel guilt over the death of Renfield. He had planned on killing the man from the first moment he stepped foot in hist castle. Renfield's death was inevitable and the blood was much needed. However it would have been useful to quiz the man before killing him. He shrugged off the thought. It was obvious why Mina was here: the men who failed Lucy would not want to fail Mina as well. They would keep her close, protect her with all their might...

Vlad nearly laughed out loud at the futility of their efforts. While they were next door, tossing holy water on piles of dirt and chanting in Latin, he was here with Mina. So much, they say, for best laid plans.

He allowed himself to spread out once more, shifting easily this time into mist, and slipped through the bars of Renfield's cell. He doubted anyone would find the body until morning. There were but two guards visible and they both appeared more concerned with the bottle of whiskey they shared than the welfare of their patients. He doubted anyone would care when they did find the body, even after the effects of the whiskey had worn off.

Since the guards were so conveniently preoccupied, Vlad helped himself to one or two of the least disgusting of the sanatorium's inhabitants before stealing into Dr. Seward's office. He was aware of Mina's presence every second he was in the building; she was like a bright beacon, shining on the edges of his vision. There wasn't a place on the world Mina could travel that Vlad would not
He found her now in the doctor's bed, wearing nothing but her thin shift. Swallowing down the jealousy that rose at the sight of his Mina in another man's bed, Vlad pulled himself together, taking the form he knew Mina found most pleasing. Catching sight of himself in a small, dirty mirror that stood on a cluttered dresser, he could not help but smile. Pleasing, yes, but his nude form might be more of a shock than Mina needed upon waking. He helped himself to a pair of the doctor's trousers and a loose shirt, not bothering to button it in his eagerness.

When he could stand the distance between them no longer, he slipped silently under the covers. Mina's hair was loose and splayed across the pillow in a tumble of dark waves. Her lips parted in a sigh as he rose above her.

"Yes," she said without opening her eyes. "I knew you would come for me. I've been waiting for you..."

A shiver of anticipation ran through Vlad at her words. So... She had tried her virginal young man and he had not measured up? Good. He wondered if she had been thinking of him when she lay in bed with Harker on their wedding night...

"My princess," his words were both an exaltation and a plea.

She opened her warm brown eyes and fixed him with a look that stole his breath away. "My prince."

Many times during his endless existence, Vlad had thought his heart a cold, dead thing. But to see the look of love on Mina's face and to hear the word "my" on her lips when she spoke of him, his heart felt full to bursting.

"My love," he whispered. Then he claimed her lips.

Mina breathed a sigh of pleasure into his mouth and Vlad drank it in, drank her in. He took all her warmth, all her love - everything she had to offer - and fed it back to her, fused with all the passion he didn't know he could still possess.

Mina smiled when he broke the kiss, reaching up to touch his cheek. He leaned into it, savouring the feel of her flesh against his.

"I should not have left you," Mina told him, her eyes filling with tears. "This is what I wanted. Us. I know that now."

At that moment it was not just Mina speaking, it was his lost love, Elizabeta, too speaking through aeons. Vlad stared at her in speechless wonder. Words could not cross time and space to heal past wounds and yet... He felt the balm of her words spreading through him, filling the cracks in his heart, soothing the pain that went soul deep.

"Mina..."

"I want to be with you," she said. "Always."

His conscious, which had been blissfully silent until that moment, screamed in protest.

"You cannot know what you are asking for," he said sadly. What he would give to be able to give Mina the happily-ever-after that she deserved...

"Yes." There was a certainty in her voice that Vlad was not expecting. She fixed him with a
knowing stare. "I do know."

"Of course she knows,' his conscious taunted him. 'How could she not know?'

But if Mina knew what she was asking, if she knew what he was, how could she still be looking at him with love in her eyes? No. She must still be in blissful ignorance. It broke his heart that she must shatter her illusions. She would hate him, no doubt, but it was better that she know the truth about him.

He would tell her, he promised himself. But first, a kiss to see him through the next few hundred years – because once she learned the truth, she would run screaming and he would lose her. Again. He would be alone. Again.

Vlad lowered his head for one last, desperate kiss.

Mina clung to him when he tried to pull away. "I feared I'd never feel your touch again," she said. "I feared you were dead."

He heard her breath catch and cursed himself for what he was about to do. With a sigh of resignation, he leaned back, pulling Mina up with him until they sat facing each other on the bed.

It was time for the truth.

He took her hand and placed it on the bare flesh of his chest, right over his heart. "There is no life in this body," he told her.

Vlad watched helplessly as confusion turned to realization. He saw the exact moment that the look of love in her eyes was replaced with one of horror. Finally, Mina saw him for the monster he was.

Mina recoiled, moving as far from Vlad as she could get. "What are you?"

The question wounded him to the quick.

'What right have you to be hurt? You are a monster. It's time she sees the real you, not the pretty face you put on to woo her."

At that moment, he would have given anything to carve out the part of his brain where his conscious dwelled.

Vlad could not stand to see the revulsion in Mina's eyes when she learned the truth. He turned away. His shoulders slumped, he hung his head in shame.

"I am... Everlasting. Lifeless. Soulless, hated and feared..."

He faltered when he heard her breath catch.

"I am... Death. To all the world."

"What..."

Vlad raised a hand to silence her.

"Hear me," he pleaded, choking out the words. He knew that if she stopped him now, he would never find the strength to say it again.

His conscious mocking him all the while, Vlad told Mina exactly what he was. "I am the monster
that breathing men would kill. I. Am. Dracula."

The moment of silence that followed his revelation felt like the longest moment of his existence. Then Mina found her voice.

"You!" she said, her voice full of accusation. "You killed Lucy! You... You bastard!"

Vlad could feel the waves of anger rolling off her. Yet there was pain too. He saw the tears that flooded her eyes and hated himself for every single one that rolled free.

Mina buried her face in her hands and sobbed. He did not know what to do, what to say to take away the pain.

'The pain that you caused?'

The fact that he had been the cause of her pain made it that much harder to witness. Vlad could not sit by and do nothing; he reached out a hand, lightly touching her shoulder.

"Mina."

Her head snapped up. "You!"

She attacked him with all the ferocity she could muster, screaming in rage. Her fists pounded his chest as she cried out in pain and frustration. Mina's attack was no more than the brush of a butterfly's wings against an elephant's flank yet every strike that landed would leave an invisible bruise that Vlad knew would never heal.

He caught her wrists in his hands only when he became worried that she might hurt herself. She surprised him by collapsing against him, by burying her face in the fabric of his borrowed shirt and crying. When her sobs eventually died down, Mina raised her head to look at him. Her lips trembled as she said, "I love you. God help me but I do."

Vlad was staggered. He had anticipated her anger, her pain... He could never have imagined that she would also give him her love. Knowing what he was, could she really still love him? Even his conscious was stunned into silence.

"I want to be what you are, see what you see, love what you love."

It took a moment for the meaning of her words to sink in. Now he was certain Mina understood exactly what she was asking for – he just did not know if he could give it to her.

"No," he said, shaking his head. "Mina, my love... To walk in my world, you must die to yours."

"You are my world."

Vlad had not had the need to draw breath in centuries yet he suddenly found that there was not enough air in the room. He drew in a deep, shaky breath, and tried to force his brain to work. Why was he fighting her again? Didn't he want what she wanted?

His arms reached out of their own accord, sliding around Mina's waist and drawing her close. He brushed a strand of hair away from her face, noticing as he did that his fingers trembled. Vlad the Impaler, Count Dracula, the monster that haunted children's nightmares and brought grown soldiers to their knees was trembling. Because of Mina.

He knew at that moment that he would do anything for her.
"Then I give you life eternal," he told her. "Love everlasting, power of the storm and beasts of the earth."

Vlad slid one hand up her back. He caressed the tender skin at the nape of her neck.

"Walk with me to be my loving wife? Forever?"

Mina nodded, her eyes shining. "Yes."

Urging her head to the side, Vlad trailed kisses down Mina's neck. The intense pleasure pain along his gums told him that his fangs were sliding free. Tightening his hold, he took a fold of flesh into his mouth and bit deeply. Mina fought for only a moment. The pain from his bite faded as she gave herself freely to him.

It was impossible for him not to take pleasure in the way Mina's chest heaved against his, the way her fingers tangled in his long hair, the way she moaned softly as she writhed against him... Her every movement was a sweet torture. There was only so much he could stand... Vlad lifted her easily and shifted so that she straddled him, her sex nestled against his growing desire. He moaned low in his throat.

It was hard to pull himself away from the sweet elixir that was Mina's blood. Eventually he managed, supporting her weight with one hand as he drew one sharp nail across his chest.

"Drink, Mina," he urged. "Drink and join me in eternal life."

Mina did not hesitate. She lowered her head, pressing her lips against his chest. When her tongue darted out to lick away a trail of blood, Vlad thought he would explode.

The pleasure of holding the woman he loved, of making her his bride for all eternity, was overwhelming. Vlad could not remember the last time he had felt so... Happy.

His conscious was trying to spoil the moment. It screamed at him that what he was doing was wrong, that he was bringing both death and damnation upon Mina. It told him that it was not too late; she had not taken enough of his blood to turn her... If they stopped now, she could go back to her boring, safe little life... Her boring, safe little human man. If they stopped now...

He tried. He really did.

"No." Vlad gently but firmly pushed Mina back. "I cannot do this, not to you..."

"Please," Mina said. She tried to lean forward again but Vlad held her firmly by the shoulders.

Her eyes were bright and her cheeks were flushed. "Make me what you are."

Vlad shook his head but the gesture was meant more for himself than to Mina. His conscious was quickly losing the battle for her salvation.

"You will be cursed as I am," he warned her, "To walk in the shadow of death for all eternity..."

His voice was thick with emotion but his denial lacked conviction. He was trying to convince not just Mina but himself as well – and he was failing on both counts.

"Please." He begged her to save them both, knowing he was too weak to refuse her. "I love you too much to condemn you."

She fixed him with a steady eye. "Take me away from all this death."
Vlad's hands dropped, useless, to his sides. Mina leaned forward and latched on to his chest once more, nuzzling him like a hungry kitten. He groaned aloud as her hot little tongue slid across his cold skin. When her mouth travelled lower, closing around one hard nipple, he lost control.

With a sound more animal than human, Vlad pulled Mina's head up and captured her mouth in a rough kiss. Their blood mingled as their lips met and their tongues danced. It was heady, it was intoxicating – but it wasn't enough. He didn't deserve it, he knew, but Vlad wanted more than just her blood, more than just her love – he wanted *all* of her. Without releasing his hold on her, he freed himself from the doctor's ill-fitting trousers.

Mina gasped when she felt the hard length of his arousal pressing against her through the thin fabric of her shift. She opened her eyes and she found Vlad staring at her, asking her a silent question with his eyes. She answered in kind, rising up just far enough to lift her shift. Without breaking eye contact, she slid down, claiming him with her body, one agonizing inch at a time.

Vlad had to grind his teeth together, his hands clenched into fists, to keep from rushing her, to let her go at her own speed. It was the hardest thing he had ever done but when he was finally settled deep within her, he knew it had been worth the wait. Time faded into nothingness. It did not exist. Nothing existed but the two of them.

Mina began to move and he gripped her waist as tightly as he dared, urging her on. He had not felt anything like it in hundreds of lifetimes. She welcomed him into her hot center and he was a young man again, bedding his bride for the first time. Their pace increased, their mingled blood rushing through their veins in a frantic tempo as they raced together toward completion.

Later that night, Vlad watched Mina sleep, mesmerized by the steady rise and fall of her chest. He knew that he must go - soon the men would be back and he did not want to be found here, like this, with Mina – but he fought it as long as he could. Leaving her now, now that they were one, would be like severing one of his own limbs. He sighed. It must be done.

He could not rest safely without his native soil and the smoke that rose in the distance told him that the human men had been successful in destroying his sanctuary. The overzealous Dr. Van Helsing had undoubtedly consecrated every centimeter of Carfax Abbey. If he was to protect Mina, he must travel back to his homeland – and soon. Reluctantly, he eased himself from the bed. He bent to place a tender kiss against her brow.

"Goodbye, my sweet," he whispered. Then, with one last look at her sleeping form, Vlad shifted into fog and disappeared through the open window.
Mina knew a moment's anxiety when she woke, alone, in a strange bed. She did not immediately recognize her surroundings. Then an inmate howled and one of the guards replied by banging on the bars of his cell. It all came back to her: the men leaving her at the sanatorium where they believed she would be safe while they raided Carfax Abbey next door. But she hadn't been safe, had she? Despite the best efforts of Jonathan and the others, she had been found and she had been taken - right under their very noses!

Her cheeks flamed as she remembered the time they had spent together, the things they had done. She was another man's wife and yet Mina had given herself willingly - eagerly! – to the man known as Dracula. She cringed inwardly at the word, hating the shiver of fear that it inspired. Let the men call Vlad what they would; whatever else he might be called, to Mina he would always be her Prince.

Her Prince!

It was only then that Mina realized she was alone in the doctor's cluttered little apartment. Scrambled into a sitting position, her gaze wildly swept the room, searching for Vlad. He was nowhere to be found. Alone. She was utterly alone, naked and vulnerable in an unfamiliar place. The room started to spin as panic swelled in her chest. Mina gasped for air, her fingers tangling in the sheets, trying to breathe... Trying to keep a grip on reality...

Had he ever really been there? Or had her desire for him been so great that she had dreamed him up? Mina started to doubt herself, began to wonder if she could trust her own mind, her own memories...

But wait... there was a tell tale stickiness between her legs that proved she had not spent the night alone. Mina wasn't losing her mind; Vlad had been with her. But where had he gone? Why had he gone? An awful feeling settled in the pit of her stomach as she realized what Vlad's absence meant. He'd left her. Her Prince had given her the most remarkable night of her life – and then he'd left her.

Was this her punishment for choosing Jonathan? Had Vlad come to her, given her her hope, made her believe that he loved her, promised her forever – just to make her suffer the same feeling of loss that he suffered when she sent him that awful letter? Or – oh, God! - had he used her to get back at the men who, even now, were probably watching the embers of Carfax Abbey burn to nothing? Was she to be his revenge for Lucy?

All those things he said... The way he made her feel... Was none of it true?

_Hush, now, my love._

Mina jumped, startled by the voice that seemed to come from nowhere.

"Vlad?"

She looked around the room again, thinking that she had somehow missed him the first time, even leaning over to peer under the bed. But her second search was as fruitless as the first. Mina was alone in the apartment and yet...

_You are not alone_, he said. _I am with you._

This time, Mina realized that he spoke only in her mind. Her hand came up to cover her mouth in
a gesture of surprise. How was that even possible?

_We are one._ Vlad told her simply - as if that should answer any questions. _Now and always._

Her heart swelled. It hadn't been merely a ruse after all; he _did_ care!

"I thought..." she couldn't form the words. If he _had_ abandoned her... She didn't know how – if – she could go on.

_Never,_ he said to her. _Never think that I would treat you in such a way._

She sagged against the headboard, relief making her weak. He _hadn't_ left her! It was nearly too good to be true. Her mind still swam and her pulse fluttered wildly. How could she have doubted him? Her Prince would never leave her. Except, well... he was not actually there with her.

More curious than concerned now, Mina sat up straight, gazing around the room as she spoke. "Where _are_ you?"

_I cannot rest without my native soil. Your men destroyed several boxes of it last night._

Mina bristled at his words. She did not like the way he said, 'Your men.' They were Lucy's men, surely, not hers! Even Jonathan did not feel like _her_ man. He hadn't been hers since the shrunken skeleton of the man he used to be rushed into her arms in Budapest. No, she thought, it was long before that. He had not been "her man" since the first time she laid eyes on Vlad.

Oh, dear God in Heaven! What was she going to do about Jonathan? She _couldn't_ go back to him, not now. Now that she'd had a taste of real passion, the thought of Jonathan's awkward fumbling was repulsive. Her stomach churned at the thought. She would be ill if he actually touched her, she was certain of it.

Feelings of pride and love washed over Mina. It took a moment to realize that the emotions she felt were not her own. She could not only hear Vlad's words but shared his feelings as well. It was a kind of intimacy she could never have dreamed of – one that was a great comfort to her and held, she imagined, _very exciting_ possibilities. As soon as the thought crossed her mind, she felt masculine approval rumble through her. It seemed Vlad also looked forward to exploring those possibilities.

I- he began as the door to Dr. Seward's apartment flew open. In a moment the room was filled with male bodies. The men had returned, weapons drawn, their eyes searching the room for something they clearly did not find. Mina could feel Vlad's anger at their interruption as if it were her own. Remembering her state of undress, she quickly pulled the bed clothes up to her chin.

The smell of smoke and earth reached her, clinging to their clothes and reminding Mina of the their deadly work. Her ire rose as she realized that the destruction they wrought at Carfax Abbey that night had driven her love away. "What is the meaning of this?" she demanded as anger and embarrassment brought a flush to her cheeks.

Arthur, Jack, and Quincy did the gentlemanly thing and averted their eyes. Jonathan coughed and shuffled his feet, suddenly very interested in a diagram of the human mind that adorned the wall nearby. Only Van Helsing stared boldly back at her, his hungry eyes brazenly raking her body.

Vlad's thoughts were murderous.

Mina's were not much kinder.

It was Jonathan who spoke first. His voice was, as it always was these days, timid – apologetic,
even. Had it always been so? She couldn't remember; the memory of the nervous clerk Mina once fancied herself in love paled in comparison to the dark passion of her immortal prince.

"The monster has eluded us again," he said. "Dr. Van Helsing worried that he might have made an attack upon your person, to thwart us."

Mina knew with absolute certainty that the rage that filled her when she heard Jonathan utter the word "monster" was not Vlad's, but her own. How dare he say such a thing about Vlad! She wanted to set them straight - to tell them that they were the monsters for hunting the man she loved as if he was some sort of rabid beast – but Vlad's voice urged her to stay silent.

_Easy, my love_, he told her. _They cannot know, not yet. I am not strong enough to protect you_.

"Mina?"

She blinked, surprised to find all five men staring at her. Concern was written plainly across all faces but one: Van Helsing's, of course. His beady little eyes were narrowed in suspicion and his lips were pressed together. The professor had made Mina uneasy from the very start. His wild, unorthodox ways were never predictable and always inappropriate. The others seemed to respect him, though, looking to him for guidance, but Mina had only ever felt mistrust for the odd little man.

"Sorry," she said, trying to gather her wits. "It's just the thought of that... that... thing. How... dreadful."

The lie made her feel very dreadful indeed – and did not sound in the least bit convincing - but Vlad radiated his approval.

_Yes_, he said. _They must believe. You must not give them any reason to suspect us until I am strong enough to face them._

Of all the men, only Van Helsing did not seem to believe. He did not seem to believe at all. The searching look he gave Mina made her want to squirm.

"Are you certain that you have been alone here?" he asked her. "All night?"

Mina evaded the question as best she could.

"I think that I would notice a strange man creeping into my bed in the middle of the night!" she said, indignation making her voice rise. Clutching the bed clothes closer around herself, she forced herself to return Van Helsing's unblinking stare.

"Perhaps we should search her for bite marks, like the ones Miss Lucy had," Van Helsing suggested to the others as if Mina was not even present, stroking the stubble on his chin thoughtfully. The professor's tone was cool and analytical yet his eyes revealed how much he would like to be the one to perform such a search.

_That one I will kill slowly_, Vlad growled. Mina had to admit that the idea had merit. The strange little professor made her very uneasy indeed. His death would be no great loss.

"Now wait a goddamn minute!" Quincey said. To Mina's great relief, the Texan's interruption put an effective end to Van Helsing's suggestion.

"Indeed." Lord Holmwood, ever the gentleman, agreed. He tugged at his cravat, apparently uncomfortable by the current breach of decorum that he found himself embroiled in.
"I will not be searched like some criminal!" Mina said firmly before any one else could add their opinion to the debate. "Now if you'll excuse me, I would like to dress – before anyone else takes it upon themselves to come to my aid!"

She was shaking with both anger and fear. What would the men do if they found the swollen bite marks currently hidden by her long hair, she wondered. Would they drive a stake through her heart and cut off her head as they did poor Lucy? The thought sent a shiver of dread through her.

*I would never allow that to happen,* Vlad assured her. *I will rip every one of them apart with my bare hands before I allow any one to touch you.* His voice alone was enough to reassure her. She drew strength from her prince's metal presence. Straightening her back, Mina looked each of the men directly in the eye, daring them to refuse. No one did.

"Yes, well..." Dr. Seward said, shifting uncomfortably under her determined gaze. "We should see to... ah..."

Then they were spilling out of the room in a rush, leaving Mina in peace. Van Helsing was, not surprisingly, the last one out. He stared at Mina for a long moment by the door before he turned and let it swing shut behind him. The curtained door gave Mina the impression that was she was alone but she could still hear the low rumble of voices from the other side. Afraid that the men had not believed her and were listening, just outside the door, for her to give something away, Mina kept her voice low.

"What shall we do?" she whispered. What could be done? She was trapped! The men who thought they were protecting her would be the cause of her ruin. It was only a matter of time before they saw through her flimsy lies.

*Patience,* Vlad said, his calm voice soothing her nerves. *Trust in me. I will free us from the oppression of Van Helsing and his minions.*

Mina had an idea of how he would free them but she did not want to dwell on it long. It sent a chill straight to her bones. With the exception of Dr. Van Helsing – whose beady eyed stare truly frightened Mina – Arthur, Jack, Quincey and Jonathan were good men. She did not want them to die, just to leave her and Vlad alone so that they could be happy together. Hadn't they waited long enough? Didn't they deserve a chance to be happy?

*They are good, loyal men,* Vlad agreed, picking up on her thoughts, *which is why they will not rest until they have destroyed me. They see it as their duty to your Lucy, to avenge her death,* he explained. *No, my love... This can end only with their deaths – or mine.*

Mina would not be able to stand it if Vlad was taken from her now. She thought she understood finally why he had become what he was, what had driven him to embrace the darkness. If the men who claimed to be her protectors took away the only thing that mattered to her, would that not be enough to drive her into the same darkness, never to return?

*Never,* Vlad said. She felt the rush of protectiveness that he felt for her. *I will never allow you to face the darkness that once claimed me. I will free us both,* he vowed.

Mina knew that, by freeing them both, Vlad meant that he would kill them all: Van Helsing, Arthur, Jack, Quincey, Jonathan – all dead. The thought gave her a pang of regret. But, if it came down to being without Vlad or their deaths, she would always, always choose Vlad. She would kill every single person in London herself if they stood between her and Vlad!

The ferocity of her own thoughts frightened Mina. She had, since her youth, fought feelings of impatience and frustration on many occasions but she had never before considered herself a
violent person. Now, however, she could picture herself clearly, standing over the dead body of Van Helsing, her hands stained red with his blood, his still beating heart in her hands.

Mina felt a quick twinge of fear from Vlad but it was quickly suppressed.

"My prince?" she said, instantly full of worry.

*It is naught.* He was quick to reassure her - perhaps *too* quick. Mina wanted to press the issue but he evaded her.

*Leave the men to me,* he told her. *I will do what needs to be done.*

"And then we will be together?"

She could *feel* him smiling down at her. Like a flower under the brilliant rays of the sun, Mina bloomed under Vlad's affection.

*And then we will be together,* he promised. *Forever.*

"Forever."

Mina rose, still smiling, from the bed that she had too briefly shared with her love and hurried to dress before anyone – Van Helsing in particular! – could come ask what was taking so long.
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The train lurched, making Abraham stumble. He cursed his arthritic knees as he caught himself, leaning against the wood paneled wall for support. Traveling by train was, certainly, more comfortable than traveling by horse but, at his advanced age, it was still a bit of a trial.

If he was honest with himself, Abraham was starting to think that his adventuring days were behind him. When he had answered Jack Seward's summons all those weeks ago, he had not anticipated the cross continental trek at break neck speed that it would become. He could not deny, though, that it was exciting, to say the least. Being in pursuit of an ancient evil did get one's pulse racing!

Abraham's old body was not happy about the punishment he was putting it through – and it was telling him so with various aches and pains that plagued him both day and night. His body ached but his mind... his mind, which had started to feel as dusty as the old books he was surrounded by at that old university, had been blown wide open by the discoveries he'd made since taking up young Seward's cause. The cobwebs were gone from his mind, their places filled with shining rays of possibility.

He was already planning the book he would write when this was all over – assuming he lived through it. In no time at all, Abraham Van Helsing would be the first and foremost expert in the world on all matters occult. He would make a fortune from the talks he would give on 'The Hunt for Dracula' (as he was planning to call it.) Then, he would retire somewhere warm and dry to enjoy the rest of his days in comfort.

There was another option, of course... one that lurked in the back of his mind and taunted him in the dark of night.

He did not have to die.

Ever.

Instead of hunting this Count Dracula, could he not perhaps strike a deal with him? Was there nothing the beast wanted that Abraham could provide? If only he had the right bargaining tool...

He shook the thought off. It was tempting... of course it was! Who wouldn't be tempted by the thought of living forever? But Abraham was a doctor, for God's sake! He had taken vows, sworn to put others first, to heal...

It was only at times like these, with the arthritis in his knees screaming at him, that his willpower slipped and he found himself entertaining the thought of pursuing the Count for reasons other than destruction.

Sighing wearily, Abraham pushed himself away from the wall. He continued his journey through the narrow corridor until he reached the Harkers' room. Jonathan answered his knock. He greeted the doctor and stepped into the hallway – but not before Abraham heard the sounds of someone being violently ill in the background.

'Curious,' he thought, returning Jonathan's greeting.

"Is Madam Mina unwell?" he asked, trying to appear only concerned when, in fact, he was
burning with curiosity.

Jonathan nodded, looking nervous. It was not saying much – the poor man always looked nervous. Being held captive by a trio of bloodthirsty women was, apparently, not beneficial to one's nervous system.

"Mina has been often unwell during our journey east," Jonathan confirmed. He frowned. "I do not think travel by rail agrees with her."

Abraham, looking up from his pocket watch, nodded but said nothing. He had other ideas about what ailed Mrs. Harker but did not express them, lest he upset the man's already frail nerves.

Though Mrs. Harker still swore that she had spent the entire evening in Mr. Seward's bedroom alone, Abraham did not believe her. There was something altogether too erratic of her behavior of late. It put him on his guard.

The others put Mina's behavior down to the death of her dearest friend, or her anxiety over Jonathan, or her fear of the monster they faced, even the journey itself but they - aside from Seward - had not made a living out of studying people, as Abraham had. Frankly, he was ashamed of the man he had once hoped would be his protege.

Jack Seward had once been a brilliant pupil. Abraham had expected great things from him. He had not expected Jack to become a waster, a common opium addict. Oh, yes, Abraham knew of Seward's addiction to the mind altering narcotic. Frankly, he was surprised that the others could not see it. As long as it did not affect Jack's ability to be a useful member of their party, Abraham would keep his secret. He would not, however, allow Jack to put their lives in danger. The moment the drugs started to affect his judgment, Abraham would call him out.

"Professor?"

Harker's voice brought Abraham back to the present.

"Sorry," he said, giving his head a shake. "I was miles away. What were you saying?"

"I was wondering if there is anything that might be done to cure Mina's motion sickness?"

"Ah." Abraham had to bite his tongue on the response that sprang to mind. "Perhaps. I will see to her later," he promised.

They continued walking. Abraham led the younger man past the dining car; he had questions to ask and did not want an audience. When they got to a mostly empty carriage, Abraham motioned for Jonathan to have a seat and eased his aching bones into the seat across from him.

He was silent a moment while he gathered his thoughts. How to broach a delicate subject?

"How have you been?" he said finally.

Jonathan shifted nervously in his seat. "I am well, thank you," he said without looking at the doctor.

Abraham knew it was a lie. Half the train could hear Harker screaming in his sleep at night. "It is only natural," he said, "after an attack like the one you experienced, to suffer both physical and psychological symptoms for months – even years – afterward."

Jonathan nodded, still refusing to meet the doctor's curious gaze. "Of course, of course..."
"Would you mind if, as your doctor, I asked you one or two sensitive questions?"

"Yes, of course," Jonathan replied without hesitation. His tone was neutral.

Over the last few months, he had already been subjected to a battery of unusual questions about his time spent in Dracula's castle. Hopefully, Abraham thought, one or two about his life afterward wouldn't raise his suspicions. He began by asking general questions about his health: Was he sleeping well? Was he eating well? Was he feeling anxious? Was his strength returning?

"Are you able to... ah... perform? In the bedroom."

Shifting uncomfortably in his seat, Jonathan turned to face the window. He did not immediately answer the doctor's question.

"Are you asking if I am able to obtain an erection?" he said finally, sounding merely sad, rather than affronted.

Abraham cleared his throat. "Yes, I am."

Finally, Jonathan met his eyes. "I have," he said. "Once or twice."

Abraham nodded in a way that he hoped was sympathetic. "I see."

"You must understand..." Harker started. Suddenly animated, he grabbed the doctor's hand. "What those women did to me - the acts they forced me to perform..." His eyes were wild. They darted back and forth, watching, as if the three seductresses would appear any moment.

"Easy, easy," Abraham said. "You are safe here, Jonathan."

It took several long moments for Harker's breathing to become less labored. His eyelids dropped. He took a shaky breath and pulled his hand away.

"My apologies, Professor," he said, lowering his eyes to his lap where his hands gripped each other tightly. "It has not been easy to forget," he said.

"Some things can never be forgotten," Abraham said kindly. He allowed a few minutes to pass in silence before he pressed the issue.

"Perhaps," he said finally, "I can help you to cope with these terrible memories. I have had some success with hypnotism..."

Jonathan listened attentively as Abraham described some of the experiments he had conducted in that ancient art. When the older man had finished, Harker nodded and said, "Whatever you think is best."

Abraham fought the urge to shake his head. It was too easy; Jonathan Harker had very little – if any – will of his own.

"It might also be an effective way of dealing with Madame Mina's motion sickness," he suggested in what he hoped was a casual manner.

"Yes, yes," Harker said. "Of course. Anything for Mina."

It really was too easy.

Mina, on the other hand, was not as willing to be hypnotized as Jonathan had been. When the two men returned to the Harkers' room and explained their intentions, she refused. Vehemently.
"I'll not have anyone poking around inside my head!" she exclaimed. She did not say, "Least of all you," but she did not need to.

Abraham was well aware of Mina's dislike for him, even if the others were not. He did not know the reason for her dislike but suspected it had something to do with Lucy's death. She, like Lucy's three suitors, had expected him to perform some sort of miracle by saving the poor girl.

He did not like to tell them that only those who wanted to be saved could.

Now, however, he was starting to suspect that Mina's dislike ran deeper than that. If his suspicions were correct, she had very good reasons indeed to be wary of him.

"Please, Mina," Jonathan was saying. He tried to take his wife's hands in his own but she recoiled, moving to the back of the cabin, away from both men. She stared out the window at the frozen landscape flitting past.

Abraham exchanged a look with Jonathan. Mina's reaction was irrational and they both knew it. He made a small gesture with his head toward the door. Harker seemed to catch on for he said, "I believe Arthur wanted to discuss our travel arrangements. If you'll both excuse me."

Without waiting for a response, he quietly let himself out of the compartment. Mina, who had come forward when her husband's intentions became clear, retreated once more to the rear of the cabin, putting plenty of space between herself and the doctor. Her eyes darted nervously to Abraham, who stood between her and the room's only exit.

"You have no reason to fear me," he told her.

'Unless you're in league with our enemy,' he added silently.

Abraham moved forward slowly, like a hunter stalking his prey. There was nowhere else for Mina to go so she stood her ground, head held high, eyes narrowed as she stared at him.

"It is only a simple exercise," he told her. "Not dangerous in the slightest. I'm sure it will be beneficial..."

Mina seemed on the verge of arguing but then a strange, far away look crossed her face. It cleared after a moment and she gave Abraham a sweet smile. The change in her demeanor was so abrupt that he had to suppress a shiver. It was unnerving.

"Of course," she said, complacently, moving to take a seat. "If you think it will help."

Though the sudden shift in Mina's mood put the professor on his guard, he pulled a seat up to the couch where she sat.

"It really is quite simple," he assured her as he removed his pocket watch. "I will simply hold this chain, like this, before you. All you need to do is watch the chain and listen to the sound of my voice."

He let the watch dangle at the end of its chain, swaying in time to the movement of the train. Mina's eyes obediently followed the motion.

"Hear me," Abraham told her in a cool, even tone. "Hear only me, only my words..."

Her eyes still followed the watch, her pupils growing dilated.
"You can feel yourself growing sleepy..."

Her eyelids started to droop.

"Let yourself go," he told her in that same, calming voice. "You want to sleep. Sleep now."

Her eyes closed.

Abraham waited a moment before waving a hand in front of her face. Nothing. He lifted her hand and let go. It fell limply to her side.

Grinning to himself, Abraham surveyed his handiwork. Mina Harker was, for the time being, completely at his mercy. He had to tear his gaze away from the steady rise and fall of her chest. Oh! If he were a younger man, he might be tempted to take advantage of the situation. Hell, he was tempted now – though partly just to teach her a lesson. To make up for every look of disgust, every time she recoiled from his touch...

He caught himself, hand outstretched, fingers inches from Mina's bare flesh. Jerking back, Abraham gave himself a hard shake.

'You're a doctor, man!' He reprimanded himself sharply, ashamed by his own actions.

It took longer than he would have liked before he had pulled himself together enough to say, "Can you hear me, Mina?"

"Yes," she answered, barely moving her lips.

"Good. I'm going to ask you a few questions and I want you to answer honestly, can you do that?"

"Yes."

"Good. Now... Tell me... Have you, at any time, been alone with the creature known as Dracula?"

Chapter End Notes

I haven't given up on this! I will be finishing it, I promise!
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The hunt is on.

Chapter Notes

I promised I would come back to this!

It's been so long... I hope it all still fits together.

Abraham slid the compartment door shut and turned to his companions.

“Gentlemen,” he began, “it is as I feared. Madam Mina has, in fact, consorted with the devil we hunt.”

Jonathan Harker’s gasp of shock and subsequent collapse was in no way unexpected. Abraham did manage not to roll his eyes at the feeble young man, however, and for that, he gave himself credit. There was no doubt that being held prisoner by one such as Dracula must have been taxing in every way imaginable, but Abraham thought that Jonathan Harker must have been cut from very thin cloth, indeed, to have come back quite so lessened by the experience. 

‘It is hardly any wonder that his woman would seek her pleasure elsewhere.’

Abraham thought of the information he had gathered from the hypnotized woman and smothered a smile. Everything had gone exactly to plan. They had the beast now.

While the other gentlemen busied themselves with reviving, then consoling, a distraught Jonathan, Abraham crossed the car and helped himself to a glass of brandy. It was not, he thought, too early to celebrate their victory over Dracula.

Mrs. Harker’s mind, under hypnosis, was like an open telegraph line to the Count, feeding information to Abraham. All he had to do was ask, and everything he needed to know to defeat his long-time foe had been handed to him on the proverbial silver platter.

It was almost too easy.

Abraham congratulated himself on his ingenuity as he eased his old frame into one of the train’s cramped chairs. He very nearly had the thrilling conclusion to his book. The trap had been set; all they had to do was wait.

“Forgive me,” Jonathan said. “I- You said, of course, that it was a possibility and I ought to have known better than to doubt you but…” he gave himself a shake. “I could not believe it. Not of my Mina.”

“You mustn’t think like that,” Arthur told the other man reassuringly. “The beast has the ability to
control one’s mind.”

Of course, Arthur would be the first to rise to Mrs. Harker’s defense. After all, his own bride-to-be had also given herself to the vampire. Telling himself that she had done so under duress was undoubtedly the only way he could live with it.

Abraham said nothing. He need the other men’s assistance (especially their resources) to bring his plan into fruition. Angering any of them by saying that both women had gone to the beast willingly, while true, would not serve his purpose. He merely nodded when Harker looked to him for assurances.

“Yes, yes, of course,” he said vaguely. He sipped his brandy to avoid having to anything else on the matter.

Comforted, Jonathan seemed to gather his resolve.

“Then what,” he asked, “must be done to release Dracula’s hold?”

“Yes,” Arthur said, rising, “do tell us how you intend to rescue Mrs. Harker, Professor. What might we do for her that you were not able to do for my dear Lucy?”

Lord Holmwood did nothing to disguise the bitterness in his voice. It was no secret that the man blamed Van Helsing for his fiancée’s death every bit as much as he blamed Count Dracula. The young man was extremely vocal about the fact that he endured Van Helsing’s presence only because Jack and Jonathan insisted that his expertise was essential.

Endure his presence. As if the fool had any value that wasn’t attached to his title!

Abraham ignored Arthur’s acidic tone. “It is, in one sense,” he said, “a good thing that Mrs. Harker and Dracula exchanged blood.”

The cabin erupted in disagreement. Arthur and Jack were on their feet at once while Jonathan’s hands fluttered nervously in the air in front of his body.

“Why that’s the dumbest damned thing I’ve ever heard!” Quincy exclaimed, slamming the knife he had been sharpening down hard enough to embed itself in the table.

There was something to be said for allowing the men to express their disagreement but that would have required both time and patience – two things Abraham found himself in short supply of.

“Gentlemen, please!” he said loudly, pushing himself painfully to his feet. “Allow me to continue.”

Jonathan looked as though he might be violently ill. He clutched a hand to his chest as he stared wide-eyed and betrayed, at Abraham.

“Yes, yes,” Jonathan said weakly. “We must hear him out.”

He caught Arthurs sleeve, stopping the man from… whatever he intended to do once he crossed the cabin to Abraham.

“Please,” Jonathan continued, pleading with his friend. “If there is any hope of saving Mina and defeating this monster once and for all, we must consider it. Whatever the cost.”

Arthur’s eyes flashed angrily but he conceded to the other man’s will. “Continue,” he barked at Abraham.
“Consider that the exchange between Mrs. Harker and Count Dracula goes both ways.”

Seward, glassy-eyed as usual, caught on before the rest. He frowned.

“You mean,” he said, “that the vampire drank Mina’s blood and Mina drank his?”

Abraham nodded. He was, despite himself, impressed that his protégé possessed some sense of reason, even under the influence of narcotics.

‘Imagine what he might have become if he had tasted neither love nor opiates…” Abraham thought sadly. It was a terrible waste of a life.

“Exactly,” he said aloud. “And, because the exchange went both ways, there is a kind of… connection between Madam Mina and the Count. If such a connection existed between Miss Westenra and Dracula” he said pointedly in Arthur’s direction, “we were unaware of it because, you will recall, I was forbidden from using hypnosis on the young lady.”

A muscle jerked in Arthur’s jaw, but he said nothing, merely balled his hands into fists at his side.

Seward nodded, as if it were all coming together in his mind. “We can use the connection between them to anticipate Dracula’s movements!” His eyes were wide with excitement.

Abraham nodded. “That is correct.”

“In fact,” he said, “I have already done so. With her husband’s permission, I put Mrs. Harker under hypnosis which was, as I’m sure you have gathered, how I learned that the vampire has baptized her with his own blood.” Jonathan paled visibly at the words.

“I was able,” Abraham continued, “through the unholy connection, to learn that the Count’s ship will sail past us in the night fog to the northern port of Galatz.”

None of the others appeared particularly pleased as they digested the new information.

“We have missed our chance then,” Arthur said gloomily.

“No,” Jonathan said. He rose and went to the small table where a map lay. His fingers traced the distance between Varna and Galatz. “It is only two hundred miles,” he told the others.

Quincy joined him at the map. “With good horses we can cut him off,” he agreed, “reach him before he reaches the castle.”

Abraham nodded. Exactly the conclusion he had expected them to reach. Also, he was certain, the one Dracula expected them to make – which was why he had made other plans.

“It would be prudent, I believe,” he said, “if Mrs. Harker and I were to travel straight to Borgo Pass.”

The others turned to stare at Abraham. Jonathan’s eyebrows drew together in consternation while Arthur narrowed his eyes suspiciously.

“Please forgive me,” Jonathan said, “but it sounds as though you intend to make Mina our decoy.”

Yes, it certainly did sound that way.

Jack frowned but didn’t go against his mentor. “It is for the best,” he assured Jonathan, with a comforting hand on the other man’s shoulder. “If Dracula can track us through Mina, he will
know our intentions. If Mina believes, however, that we are all traveling the Borgo Pass, it buys us precious time.”

Jonathan fought an internal battle that was written plainly across his face. Abraham imagined that the man was torn between protecting his wife and defeating the creature that held her captive. Eventually, he agreed with the plan.

“You are right, of course,” he assented miserably.

It was agreed. Jonathan, Arthur, Jack, and Quincy would travel by horse to Galatz, while Abraham escorted Madam Mina along Borgo Pass. Abraham excused himself from the remainder of the night’s deliberations and slipped from the car. The other men were a flurry of preparation as Abraham retired to his own cabin. At least one man present was glad to have Abraham out of the way while they worked.

He was happy to leave the younger men to their schemes. What he knew that they did not was the information that he, Van Helsing, had passed along to Count Dracula through the creature’s bond with Mrs. Harker. Jonathan had called his wife a decoy. He was incorrect.

Abraham, anticipating their plans, had told them plainly to Madam Mina, knowing, as he did so, that Dracula would hear. If all went according to his plan – and there was no reason for it not to – the men would waste their time rushing to Galatz while Abraham faced off with the monster alone on the Pass.

It was almost too easy.

There were, of course, other things he knew that they did not. Abraham intended to keep those things to himself until they were most useful. No, Madam Mina was not a decoy. She was a bargaining tool.

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