



TALES OF THE DAMNED

A Collection of Classic
Horror Stories

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Dracula

The Diary of Jonathan Harker, 4th May, 1875

I'm terrified that my journey from London to Transylvania is doomed to end with a plunge off this precarious road and down the mountainside. All I can hear as the coach lurches and strains around me is the clatter of wheels on stone and the crack of the driver's whip. I grip my seat with white-knuckled hands as we career around another bend and mount a narrow road sloping steeply up.

The soft green woods and pretty villages of the Transylvanian lowlands are far behind me now. Night and snow falls on the Borgo Pass. Overhanging branches claw the roof, fog pours from between the pines, and I've not seen another person for hours.

I poke my head from the window – by *God* this cold nearly takes my breath! – and yell to the driver, “How much further?” He doesn't turn or speak, just lashes his straining horses all the harder. Why this terrible hurry? Are the hounds of hell chasing us? And even as that thought enters my mind, I hear the bone-chilling howl of a wolf.

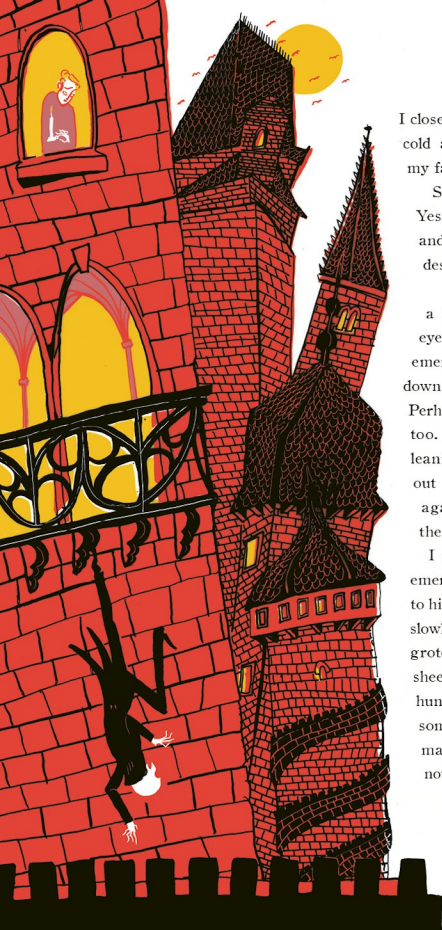
I nearly fall from my seat as the coach makes a full circle and comes to a rattling halt facing back the way it came. The driver bangs on the roof. “We're here, young Herr,” he shouts. “Quickly! Get out!” And the moment my feet touch the ground, he's off and disappearing into the gloom.

“Wait!” I cry uselessly into the freezing night. “Where am I to go?”

Feeling painfully alone, I turn, case in hand, and see the answer to my question.

Castle Dracula, home to the man I've come all this way to meet, rises jaggedly up from the mountain itself and into the moonlit sky. I cross the narrow stone bridge – gathering just enough courage to peer into the chasm below – bang my fist on the iron-studded door and wait, teeth chattering with cold and, I'm ashamed to admit, a touch of fear.

I gaze up at the heavy stone walls, ruined battlements and hundreds of windows letting out not a single scrap of light and think: I'm just a humble solicitor! How did I end up *here*?



I close my eyes and breathe deep the cold air. Flecks of snow settle on my face.

Slowly, slowly, my panic fades. Yes, the Count may be strange and his castle confounding in its design, but I'm not in any *danger*.

Movement from a window a little way below catches my eye. Something pale and round emerges, and I realise I'm looking down on the Count's bald head. Perhaps he wants some fresh air too. But wait...what's this? He's leaning his whole upper body out and placing his hands flat against the stonework beneath the window...

I nearly cry out when he fully emerges. But, instead of plunging to his death, Count Dracula crawls, slowly, insidiously, like some grotesque lizard, down the wall's sheer face. He descends some hundred feet before slithering into some hole or window. How can a man do such a thing? Perhaps is not a man at all.

6th May

Another long night with the Count has ended, and it took all my willpower to hide my fear and revulsion. Our business is concluded, all papers signed; there's no reason for me to stay, and yet I am compelled to remain. He's disappeared now, as he always does at dawn, leaving me mercifully alone to find the gate. I walk the corridors with purpose, checking every door and sketching a map as I go. After hours of searching, I find a room with a bed and a window overlooking the saw-tooth peaks of the Carpathian Mountains.

Feeling tired and dispirited, I lie on the bed and close my eyes...

The moment I awake I know that I'm not alone. I turn my gaze towards the window and see three young women silhouetted against the ghostly moonlight. They whisper to each other then advance upon me, casting no shadows and making no tracks in the dust. I try to get up, but some irresistible force holds me down on the bed.

My heart races – and not just with fear – as one leans over me. “A tasty fly has landed in our web,” she says, licking her lips, “and it's my turn to sup first.”

“Be sure to leave some for us,” the others reply.

The woman bends her beautiful head closer. Her breath is sickly sweet, her skin grave-cold. Her lips peel away from teeth grown into fangs and, with a soft purr, she lowers her face towards my throat.

I sense something dark rush into the room, and suddenly the Count rears up beside the bed. He grabs the woman – who I've just realised is about to sink her fangs into my flesh – and hurls her from me. The spell that's ensnared me is torn away and I lie quite still, shaking with terror.

Count Dracula's eyes blaze red, as if the fires of hell burn behind them. “How dare you touch him when I have forbidden it?” he intones. “He belongs to *me!*”



The Birth of a Monster

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1797–1851) was only eighteen years old when she wrote *Frankenstein*, her first and most famous novel. Dark and deeply shocking, this grisly Gothic horror story of an obsessed student bringing life to a corpse was an overnight sensation. People gleefully shared their copies of the book and stage adaptations were put on to sell-out crowds. Critics either loved or hated *Frankenstein* – but no one was indifferent to this young woman's tale of hubris, death and bloody revenge.

Tragedy was a constant grim companion during Mary Shelley's life. Her mother, a respected writer, philosopher and fierce advocate for woman's rights, died only days after giving birth to her. Her father, also a writer and philosopher, ensured Mary had a good education, and she grew up surrounded by some of the greatest thinkers of the age. All these influences inspired her to become a writer.

Mary was sixteen when she fell in love with Percy Bysshe Shelley, one of the most famous (and already married) poets of that time. Mary soon became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter in 1815. Sadly, her daughter

died only a few weeks later. Over the following years, Mary lost her half-sister to suicide, two more children when they were very young, and nearly perished herself from a miscarriage. All of this grief and death occurred before Mary had reached her mid-twenties; with a story centring on a man reanimating a corpse, it's impossible to imagine that these tragedies didn't influence Mary's writings.

In the summer of 1816, Mary, Percy and another poet, Lord Byron, were travelling together in Switzerland. One thundery night, Lord Byron suggested a competition to see who could come up with the most frightening story. Mary wracked her brains, but for several days could think of nothing suitable. Then, one sleepless night, from her fertile imagination a terrible vision appeared: "I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together."

Mary turned her startling vision into a novel, and in 1818 *Frankenstein* hit the shelves. Fearful that people might be so shocked by her book's disturbing themes that they'd consider her an unfit mother, she decided to publish anonymously. Now, over 200 years later, Mary's creation is famous all over the world, and her contribution to horror literature as well as popular culture is assured.



Beyond lay a staircase leading down into the dark. At the bottom Maeve found a chamber. First she saw the hooks, knives and cleavers strewn upon a table; then the lake of clotted blood lapping around her ankles; and finally the four severed heads hanging by their hair from the walls.

As Maeve stared at their bloated faces, maggot-filled mouths and mildewed skin, she realised these must be Bluebeard's previous wives, and that she was bound to face an identical fate. Quaking with fear, Maeve stumbled up the steps with but one thought in mind: *escape!*