

STOKERS NIGHT IN HELL

BY ALAN N WEBBER

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As for myself, I should have never written that infernal tale. At times, I fear God hath forsaken me for having unleashed that hellish beast into this world. The demon haunts my nights. I fear he may be in pursuit of my wife, Florence; to heave her soul into the depths of Hell.

These thoughts cause me to peer over to my wife from the writing desk where I sit most nights, sleepless and on guard for her life. My beautiful wife, whom I bested from that rascal, Mr. Oscar Wilde, is slumbering peacefully, a vision of an angel in her white nightgown. She is hardly aware of the menace that would strike upon her, to bore its unholy fangs deeply into her pallid neck; to devour her red blood while she slept.

I beshrew myself again that I had taken that holiday at the dreaded Slain's Castle in North Yorkshire, where I created the Count. My situation may never have been the dread that terrorizes me now had I only continued my lodging at the more pleasant Kilmarnock Arms. It is there I drew inspiration for my first novel, *The Watters Mou.*'

"Damn you Bram, you fool," I say under my breath, shaking my head. Had I never stepped foot into the that damnable Castle overlooking the North Sea cliffs, I doubt the monster would have ever existed. Yet the castle had that enormous octagonal hall I wanted to replicate in a castle for Dracula. Now, my family is in danger because of the hellish creature I created. Had I never encountered the spirit of Victor Hay, the 21st Earl of Erroll, roaming the hall in the dark of night, I would have never set pen to paper to create such a monster. Have I now spawned the devil himself.

On more than one occasion in the last fortnight, I hast discovered the creature creeping through our manse, or hiding in the dark crevices. It flees from me as a coward might do, although I am at a loss to explain what the beast's repugnance to me might be.

This Romanian Beelzebub, whom I bestowed the name Count Dracula is larger than myself by at least a half a foot, just as I described in the novel. I know I wrote of the beast's demise, an execution befallen at the hand of Dr. van Helsing. Yet to my astonishment, the hellion has taken on a life of itself. Worse, the damn thing hast followed us to our Chelsea residence.

Placing my head in my palm, I ask myself how in the Good Lord's name is this possible. I am not a God and possess nothing more than writing skills. It seems unmanageable, but yet, here it is. I gulp gin from my flask on the desk. Such a fine nectar for the nerves.

At once, the heat in the room hath become stifling, as if I'm already in Hell's clutches, I think to myself. Loosening the thick neck drawstring of my nightgown, I fan myself with a nearby book. Finding little relief, I opened the window of our second-floor bedchambers to allow the cooler night air.

A comforting breeze wafts through the room, cooling me somewhat. Florence is now stirring, seemingly agitated. Making my way over to the writing desk once more, I landed heavily upon the oaken chair, which squeaks under my weight. I draw from the flask again. Not for the first time, I ponder should'st I take Florence to Clontarf in Dublin, where I was born, and my dear mother still resides, despite her many years.

Perhaps we should leave tomorrow. Surely the beast would not follow us there, across the rough Irish sea. I long to see my mother again. Alas, it would be a few months afore I might take leave again as Shakespeare's Cymbeline is still booked at Irving Henry's Lyceum Theatre. One could hardly leave him at this rather vital time. He would not understand his business manager leaving mid-play. I notice wearily Florence is stirring again.

Presently I am aware of a presence within the open window. Or is that the result from the gin? I turn to look but can see nought but blackness, the once bright moon since obscured by heavy clouds. My head snaps back quickly to the guttural sound of Florence who seems to be getting more agitated, yet still slumbering. Was she having a nightmare I wondered.

Turning back to the window, I am still unable to see aught, and yet, I sense something there. My senses are becoming heightened, as the hair on my arms rises and a pit grows in my stomach. I sense a presence, possibly of death. I turn to peer at the heavy oaken door on the other side of the room, which is shut tightly by my own hand.

Hark there I, a high-pitched click, barely audible sound. Or was that perhaps Florence lightly wheezing. At first, I had no imagining what the sound might be, nor 'twere coming from. It seemed to be everywhere bouncing off our chamber walls, yet how could that be.

After a few moments of mounting terror, it occurred to me what the sound was. It's called echolocation, the sound a bat makes to see, I reminded myself. I recall having heard the sound before, although it escapes me where at this moment. Taking my eyes off the slumbering Florence back to the window and there at last, I see what has been terrorizing me on this evening.

Therein, to my utter astonishment, is a bat seemingly air-drawn within the window frame, its blood red eyes focused on my Florence. Does that infernal creature intend to attack my wife whilst I sit here, I wonder. 'Not hardly,' I cry out loud.

I recognize the species. It's a vampire bat, the white-winged variety, and a blood sucker at that. I recall these details from my studies at Trinity University back in Dublin as well as years of researching East European folklore and mythological vampires. They are not supposed to be harmful to humans and more importantly, not indigenous to our locale. The infernal creatures were found only in the America's. "How in our Lord's name can this be," I asked myself, as a cry of small utterance escapes my throat again.

My vociferation was evidently heard by the acute hearing abilities of the blood-sucking bat who now turned its bloody stare my way, flapping its wings ever so lightly. Its blood-soaked eyes

were startling, a menace I had never seen before nor wanted to see again. Was it now stalking me, I wondered. Better me than Florence, I reasoned.

With the quickness of lightning, the bloody creature suddenly started at me, the wings flapping loudly. I was startled that the blasted beast may be attacking me, totally out of its nature, as well as the advancing speed of which it possessed. I raised my arms in front of my brow to begone the harmless bat yet was surprised by its tenacity to land upon my person. I struck it twice. A third attempt missed entirely and abruptly; the varmint had lit upon my neck causing me to stand again. I stifled a shriek in my terror at it crawling on my person. Alas, methinks my flailing startled the wicked little scoundrel, as it promptly hurled itself out the open window.

Presently relieved, I felt my neck to compose sure the little bugger hadn't bit me or taken blood. I was relieved to find no apparent puncture wounds, nor blood on my hand, just perspiration from my exertion. I took another long pull from my flask and rested, breathing heavily from the exertion.

Peering her way, I was relieved my wife was still slumbering. I marveled she had slept through my encounter and flailing with the bat. Another thought coursed through me, so I hastened to shut the window.

Alas, I was too late. To my utmost horror, the bloody menace was back. Arriving at the window at the same time there was now not one, but three air-drawn vampire bats, the larger one in the middle seemingly the one that had attacked me not more than a few moments since. I backed up to my writing desk as the bats held their air-drawn place. Each bat had their blood-red eyes affixed on me, or so methought. "Damn you," I cried, "you were but a figment of my imagination! You can't be chasing us now, it...it's not possible!"

Upon entering the chamber, the greater bat in the middle suddenly morphed into the very creature I had been watching for these many sleepless nights, the Romanian Beelzebub himself. Count Dracula now standing before me in my bedchambers. He looked exactly as I had described him in the novel, an undead ancient vampire, a Transylvanian noble descended from Atilla the Hun.

In the novel, he lives in a castle, not unlike Slains, but in the Carpathian Mountains near the Borgo Pass in Romania. As I depicted, he is tall and handsome with a strong hint of aristocracy. His dress is immaculate with black tails and a crisp white chemise, so white it almost illuminates the room. I notice the array of rings on his fingers and the large pendant hanging from around his neck. A bright red ruby appears in the middle of the pendant.

The two smaller bats remain at his verges, silently flapping their wings, eerily looking my way, as if boring a hole in my person. Were they mocking me or salivating over me, I wondered.

The trio remained in place for no other reason I surmised than to see what I might doth. I noticed the Count, should'st I bid him that title, was staring lavishly at Florence, a look I did not care for, yet the bats were fiendishly fixated on my person.

It occurred to me abruptly what they might be planning. I determined right then that it must be myself that must be the aggressor, not these creatures from Hell. I grabbed my trusty cane beside the writing table. 'Tis at this point in the narrative I should'st bring to the readers' attention that the cane is no ordinary walking device. An attractive gift from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for my success with this very Dracula tale, it hath an ornate helmeted Viking pate of some sort of metal on its silver hilt. Yet that in itself is not the true nature of what is actually a severe weapon. By the simple act of tilting the Viking's pate, a long thin sword slides out. I hast practiced this move many times, although I might not but confess not for this specific intent. Who could fathom such an event. I could only hope that this will be the weapon to end this nightmare.

I was not concerned the least with the two bats as I saw they were to be more a diversion of sorts, to assault me, whilst the monster was to attack my wife. I knew this due to my knowledge of bats and vampires; those bats were of no significance to me. 'Twere the monster I needed to attend to, once and for all.

Collecting my breath, I drew the sword, and suddenly advanced on the monster with what might now be considered a rage, or a ferocity of the type I had never known before, even if it was foolish. One of us was going to perish tonight, of that I thought as I advanced.

The monster easily side-stepped my first advance, though I didst fare to put a nasty nick in his side. Once beyond him by my own exertions, I swung the sword in an arc behind me to glance a blow on his shoulder. The Count turned to me, merely casting an evil smile upon me. I watched in horror as the severe wound on his side instantly healed itself, without bleeding a drop. Even his fine waistcoat repaired itself.

The monster hissed, a signal of sort, sending those infernal bats to attack me. I swatted one away easily with the sword whilst the other tried to bite my neck. In a fury I reached behind me, grabbing upon't the infernal beast with my hand, and in a single motion thrust its body against the blade of my sword, beheading the damnable creature as I hurled the body to our chamber floor, still holding its head. I threw the head toward the window as the other bat advanced on me immediately, again going for my neck. What was it with these infernal creatures that kept them going for one's jugular I wondered before realizing what a silly question it was. I caught the bat in my hand air-drawn and tried to extinguish its life as I did the other bat, but in the process the creature got away, fleeing through the window, cutting my own hand in the process.

'Twere at this moment I realized the Count was advancing around our bed and upon Florence. I might not but hast gone berserk at that moment and I say to thou what was relayed to me by my son, Irving, who slept down the hall from our bedchamber. Irving had been wakened by my blood-curdling scream as I watched in horror at the monster as he bore down on Florence. I advanced, almost in full flight over our bed, she betweenst us. The scream must have awoken Irving, who grabbed a pistol from his bureau as he headed towards the commotion.

'Twere Irving who told me in my frenzy to get at the monster, I must have pierced near its heart with the sword, although it might not but hast been nought more than luck on my part. About that time, Irving burst into the room and promptly shot the monster in the back of its head.

The Count fell to the floor, writhing in pain from the sword in his chest, grabbing to tear it out. Blood was dripping from his mouth and wound, although I was unaware if it was his or that of my Florence. It occurred to me the bullet to its head was not affecting him and had more than likely healed itself by now. If the Count was able to wrest the sword from its chest, it might most well recover enough to attack me, Florence or to flee in flight.

As Irving further relates, my fury was intensified more so, more than likely by the fact my entire family was now in danger. Irving boasted I became a mad man, leaping on the prostrate Count afore it could get up or doff the sword from its chest. And doff the sword was what it was working agitatedly, a loud piercing scream coming from the monster, as if it had come from the very depths of Hell itself. It reverberated throughout our manse and Irving marveled it had not awakened the entire staff.

Withal one motion I grabbed the sword myself and pierced the Count's heart again and again, eventually snapping the hilt in the process. Had I hit bone? The Count shrieked in utmost pain as it continued to writhe on the floor. It seethed and hissed at me, speaking a foreign tongue I had never heard before or since. It then flung me off of its person, as I crashed into my writing desk. Lying there almost in a daze at my body having been flung so far, I watched in horror as it stood and pulled out the blade from its chest, while seething at me. It then flung the blood-soaked blade onto the bed.

Irving attacked it from behind at this point, but the monster flung him away as if he was merely one of the harmless bats. The diminutive Irving slammed into the back wall of our chamber heavily, sinking into unconsciousness, his legs splayed out in front of him with his chin on his chest.

Mocking my very existence, the Count looked at me before attacking my wife once more, bringing its ungodly fangs down upon her neck. I watched in horror from my perch under my desk, but only momentarily. Perhaps I regained my berserk state, rising to my feet with a strength of ten men, as I surely hadn't been bested yet. I attacked the monster again, grabbing the blade of the sword on my way to attacking the Count's person.

I recall bringing the blade down up the monster's exposed neck. I stabbed so hard that my own hand was cut even more deeply from sliding past the hilt in fury. Blood exploded from my hand, or possibly the devil's neck, but I brought it down again and again against the monster's neck and back side. I surely had gone berserk from my emotions.

Alas, my exertions caused the Count to finally withdraw from my wife to deal with me. It seethed at me, its mouth opened wide exposing bloody fangs, the look of a mad wolf about to pounce on its prey. I could smell its acrid breath, as if not attended to for centuries, yet its teeth were as white as its chemise. I sliced it again with the blade, this time sideways in attempt to part the infernal monster's neck. It seemed though, no matter what I did to it, it healed instantly and incensed the beast further.

Finally having enough of me I was tossed off its back as it had done with poor Irving. In a daze, Florence stated I was flung across the room as if I were merely a ragamuffin or a street urchin,

hitting the back wall next to Irving. With that, it seemed all my air was expelled, and I passed out next to my son, the bloody dagger still in my bleeding hand.

I awoke the following day in my own bed. A doctor had evidently been hither as my right arm was in a sling, this worthless blood-soaked bandage on my hand, and a bandage upon my neck. My back pained me greatly from where I had landed upon the wall. My skull felt like mush. I looked sluggishly around the room, and there was Irving towards the other side of the bed, a sigh of relief coming over him that his father had returned. His pistol was shoved into his belt and could be detected under his coat. "Father," was the only word he could emit, nodding as tears welled up in his eyes as his lip quivered.

A thought then dawned on me. Where was my wife? I looked back to Irving who was close to full out bawling at this time. My son finally spoke, but tears were thundering from him now. "Mother," he uttered, but then stopped to bawl more.

Becoming impatient, I bellowed, "Out with it, boy! Where in God's good name is your mother?"

"She's...she's down the hall," he began between sobs, "in one of the guest rooms." He must have seen the look of terror that came over me, as he stopped sobbing to finish his report. "She's not recovered from whatever that monster did to her, father" he forced out. "She sleeps peacefully during the day but the doctors..." again he halted, "the doctors... they have to tie her to her bed at night, so she doesn't go out and about. The doctors have no idea why she does that."

Instantly, I knew what had befallen my bride. The monster had turned my wife into a zombie, an undead person. My own beautiful Florence, a victim of my own imagination. My fight with this monster was not over.

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Epilogue – Chelsea England, September 1898 – almost one year later.

Count Dracula was finally dead and gone by my hand. Whilst laying in that bed back in Chelsea, I befell the realization that the monster was somehow real and that only I, its creator, could dispatch it. I had no idea of the mysteries of why, yet while I was laid up with my injuries, a resolve befell me to hunt and dispatch the monster once and for all. Sadly, my poor Florence had not yet recovered and was still trying to rise at night.

In December of that year, I traveled to Romania where I found the Count in an old masterless Transylvanian castle, but surprisingly not the one I had made up in my novel. I had brought along a few of my corky war-time acquaintances, Johnathan Van Helsing (yes, he was a real person) and Timothy Morris, along with their sons, also soldiers. We hired a Romanian guide to take us through the rugged Carpathian Mountains in our search for the Count. We searched the masterless castles during the daylight when the monster should've been slumbering and within our grasp. I knew what I was looking for, the Count sleeping by day in a coffin in one of the abandoned castles, safe from the sunlight's rays, just as I had narrated in my novel.

Towards the sixth day we found it, just as I had written, slumbering peacefully in a coffin in a grand ballroom of an abandoned castle. Bizarrely, the scene looked just as I imagined it when I wrote of its existence, including an enormous dusty sun ray spilling violently through the high windows upon the coffin. As written in the novel, there were five other coffins around him with various females he had transformed into carrions, all as pristine and beautiful as my Florence.

I had brought along a sideboard of sorts with the various apparatuses that had been needed to once and for all purge the world of the monster I had created. Johnathan and Timothy, upon my decrees, were building a fire in the nearby fireplace. From my vantage point I could see the flames begin to roar to life.

We slowly dupp'd the lid of the coffin, yet to our shock, the monster was awake and staring back at me. Fortunately for it, or unfortunately for us, the coffin lid blocked the sun rays from the Count. Blood red eyes glared at me with a horrible malicious look of which I knew so well. As I returned its stare, it hissed at me as its eyes met mine. The bloody look of evil in those eyes seemingly turned to triumph with the knowledge of the oncoming sunset. Its countenance nearly froze me in my tracks.

Yett, towards the present came the sweep and flash of the younger Van Helsing's great knife. I shrieked as I saw it shear through the monsters' throat, decapitating the Count in one violent thrust of the young man's mighty hand. Whilst at the same moment Timothy's son's bowie knife plunged into the monster's heart, nearly exploding it. Blood oozed from its body as the two men looked on triumphantly upon their prey.

The monster shrieked, but how was that possible with its head hanging by its side, only a piece of sinew holding it from falling away entirely from the body. Blood and entrails gushed from the neck, as its jugular spouted rich red blood into the coffin and the monster's 'body. The stench was nearly unbearable, and I watched as the usually valiant Van Helsing heaved where he stood, almost involuntarily.

If we thought that was a spectacle, we were to see even more unnerving sights as yet before our very eyes, almost in the drawing of our collective breath, the body of the monster dissolved into dust, falling away to the bottom of the inclined coffin, passing from our sight. Only its head remained, stuck at an odd angle in the coffin, its face frozen in a hiss, as if in mocking us in its demise. Having enough of the spectacle, it was then that I snatched the head by the hair and lofted it across the room and into the fire on one bounce. We all stood there dumbfounded as we watched the head sizzle before turning to ash.

In fact, Dr. Van Helsing was not able to exterminate him as I originally wrote, in the end it had to be me. I think I understand that now but have none to confer with. Apparently, in the end, nobody could dispatch the monster I had created except for me. I am still at a loss as to how it befell life in the first place, and I wonder if God or the devil were tempting me. In the end, I surmised Satan had sent the Count my way.

Just as strange, my Florence has come back to me, seemingly no worse for the wear, or so it seems. Irving recanted how, just about dusk one evening Mother sat up in bed screaming shrilly,

as if in a horrible pain, then fainted back to slumber. The sound had horrified the house staff, it was so loud. Florence then slept for two days, awakening one morning as if nothing had befallen her. The doctors had no explanation why, nor did my dutiful son. Yet, my mind determined it was too bizarre to tell any of them that the date and time Florence sat up to scream was nearly the exact same time as we decapitated the monster.

I've decided not to write horror stories for a while, if aye again. I have started a couple diverse novels, the first a simple romance story bid "Miss Betty," of which I am kind of uncomfortable about writing, yet which I feel confident shall not join back to haunt me or my family. I am nearly done and willst publish it next year, sooner if the publishing house has their way.

I hast also started another bid "Mystery of the Sea." The second novel shall take more time to finish yet it shall have some intrigue about it, I warrant. Just no more monsters from Hell. At this date, the publishers are unaware of this novel.

We leave for Dublin in the morrow, a chance to get aroint from dreary old England for a few months to see my mother. Irving will stay on here to watch the manse in Chelsea until we return. He has married and his wife's parents are now living with him. Fortunately, the manse is large enough for us all to live comfortably. His presence will ensure the staff stays on.

Oh yes, I nearly forgot to inform dearest reader. The puncture marks on Florence have never healed. On nights of a full moon, they seem to ooze blood and sometimes unsightly and foul bodily fluids. She had to change her wardrobe in order to hide the infernal marks. She says they are not painful, but rather unsightly. I'm at a complete and utter loss to explain them.