

The Worst Thing About Having Dracula as a House Guest

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The Worst Thing About Having Dracula as a House Guest

by [rallamajoop](#)

Summary

"I make no secret of my purpose upon these shores," Dracula pronounces, snapping shut the book in his hands. "I have journeyed here with the anticipation of settling a long-held and very *personal* matter of revenge. Information has reached me that upon this very island, my ancient enemy, Van Helsing, has been reborn."

"Ohh..." says Nadja, nodding in a way that makes her whole upper body bob slightly. "Yes, okay. That would about do it, I suppose."

The camera doesn't linger on her. It's busy capturing Guillermo having what looks to be a small, quiet panic attack.

Notes

Because I have far too many thoughts on just how *absurdly* compatible the Hammer Dracula films are with the WWDITS universe—especially with regards to the greater Van Helsing family tree and their grand, multi-generational, vampire-hunting tradition (complete with implied reincarnation mechanics*). Though also because the image of the WWDITS cast having to deal with Christopher Lee's Dracula raised far too many wonderful possibilities to pass up.

Not that you should need to have seen any of the Hammer Dracula films to follow this fic—your average pop-cultural understanding of the Dracula story should mostly do you fine. For those who haven't seen them though, I've taken the liberty of including a few handy visual references along the way.

* None of the Hammer Dracula films ever *say* any of their assorted Van Helsing are the reincarnation of any of their predecessors, but I think we all know what's going on there.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Grinning from ear to ear and practically glowing with excitement, Guillermo beckons the camera down the hallway.

"You'll never guess who we've got staying with us right now," he says, opening the door to one of the guest bedrooms. The room beyond is, inexplicably, wreathed in smoke, which gradually clears to reveal...



Although the dark-robed figure is posed dramatically to best effect, he doesn't appear to have noticed the camera. Guillermo dutifully closes the door again, presumably not wanting to disturb their 'guest'.

"Yuh-huh," he tells the camera, still grinning as he thumbs backwards over his shoulder. "*Dracula. The Count Dracula himself!* This is such an enormous honour for the whole household." He glances briefly back over his shoulder at the closed door, like he can't quite believe anything inside that room is really there. "And seriously, it's just *so cool*."



"Bloody Dracula," says Nadja, seated beside her husband. "*Ridiculous* gothic peacock man! Thinks he's *sooo cooooool*." The last two words come out in a dramatic squeal as she rolls her eyes.

"Man's a complete wanker if you ask me," says Laszlo. "Ever since he got that book deal, he's been completely insufferable."

"*Lookit me, I am Dracula, everyone knows my name, I am so famous!*" squeaks Nadja, hands raised, wiggling her fingers. "*I have virgins practically throwing themselves at my feet! I have so many angry mobs outside my castle they have had to form a queue! I have been in more movies than anyone dead or alive! Feh! There is no end to it!*"

"*And it's not even true,*" says Laszlo. "I for one have been in *far* more film productions than Dracula could *ever* lay claim..."

"Lazlo, my dear, love of my life," Nadja cuts in, her smile suddenly rather wooden, "we agreed we weren't going to mention your 'movies' again."

"*You* agreed. *I* only said..."

"Laszlo, do you really want to do this now?" Nadja continues smiling, with all the enthusiasm of someone still waiting to see the flash go off a full minute after being told to say 'cheese'. "In front of the cameras?"

Laszlo gives an exaggerated sigh and gestures between them. "*One day*, he's been here, and look what he's driven us to!"

Previous digressions notwithstanding, Nadja plainly agrees. "*Obviously* it is a great honour for us, the new Vampiric Council, to host our distinguished cousin from the old country, and so on and so on," she says. "But frankly, it is an honour we could do without."

"Obviously, we can't *tell* the Count that there's a Van Helsing descendent living in the same house with him." Guillermo laughs nervously. "So, for the duration, I'm... back to being a familiar again. Officially. I mean, as far as *he* knows. The rest of the household knows better, of course, but they're all playing into it, to keep up the illusion. Maybe a little too enthusiastically, in some cases." An attentive viewer could find volumes of subtext in Guillermo's strained smile. "Meanwhile, I'm packing up most of my gear and hiding it up in the attic while he's here—just in case he comes snooping around."

A bandolier of stakes lies across Guillermo's bed, along with his crucifix knuckle-dusters, a jar of garlic powder and various other odds and ends. Gathering the whole pile up in a roll of black cloth, he looks nervously both ways down the corridor before stepping through his closet door. Moving as quietly as he can, he starts up the stairs.

He's just reached the landing at the top when a voice hollers, "Guillermo!" making him yelp and fumble the package.

Behind him, Nadja emerges from a doorway, looking in entirely the wrong direction to notice that the person she's yelling at is only paces away.

"Guillermo, have you still not done the dusting?" she calls, in that particularly pointed tone people use when they intend to be overheard.

"*Nadja!*" Guillermo hisses, making her jump and turn around. "This isn't a great moment," he tells her in an urgent whisper, now fumbling on the floor for everything he'd been carrying.

"Well get to *dusting* then!" Nadja returns. "In case you haven't noticed, we have a *very important guest* here at the moment!" A significant elbow movement indicates the figure of Dracula, who's emerged from somewhere down below, and is even now crossing the entrance hall beneath them, a faint trail of smoke wafting in his wake. "Is that not very important among your *familiar* duties?"

"I will, I *will!*" Guillermo promises, juggling loose items inside the cloth. "I've just got to get this stuff up to storage first—Nandor asked me to do it, it's important too," he stammers, briefly losing the battle with his load.

To his horror, a single stake slips out of his fingers and falls point-downwards through the railing to the floor, far below—missing Dracula by inches. The Count himself looks up briefly at the sound of a falling object, but pays it no mind.

Frozen in horror up above, Nadja and Guillermo watch him leave with baited breath, before the inevitable urgently-hissed follow-up argument commences.

"Yeah," Guillermo admits, later, back in interview mode, "things have just been a *little* tense."

"I know what you're thinking," says Nandor, reclining on his sofa. "What is it like, having him around? It must be so awkward: a former Ottoman Viceroy sharing a house with the infamous Transylvanian warlord, Vlad Dracula himself—but who are we to hold grudges over so small a thing as a few centuries of Wallachian border conflict? Oh, we tangled a bit back in the day, him and me, but that's just what international diplomacy was *like* back then. You kidnap their young princes and attempt to raise them as brainwashed puppet rulers, they impale ten thousand of your

peasants on wooden stakes and leave them to die in the sun." Nandor waves a hand and grins broadly. "It's all in good fun!"

The camera cuts briefly to a scene of him and Dracula engaged in a heated debate, which ends with Dracula flipping a table and he and Nandor hissing at each other like angry housecats. The cameraman panics and backs rapidly out of the room.

"Really," says Nandor, still sprawled on his sofa, "there's hardly any tension at all!"

"What are you talking to me for?" asks Colin Robinson, from within his basement bedroom, looking uncharacteristically irritated about being disturbed. "I thought you people were turning this into *The Dracula Show* this week. That walking stereotype has got *nothing* to do with the likes of me." What may have been an attempt at a smile instead turns Colin's face into more of a sneer. "Oh, did that come across as a little bitter? Do you have any idea how *long* we energy vampires have worked to reform the image of modern vampirism? I mean, we're not judgemental, we're not gonna get on your case about a pale complexion and a *little* gothic décor—but *he* walks in, and suddenly it's swooning Victorian maidens as far as the eye can see." He rolls his eyes. "*Fucking* guy..."

"So, it's been about two days now," says Guillermo, looking just a little strained, "and to be honest, we've had an... *incident*. Or two." He shifts uncomfortably in his seat. "The trouble with being a... you know," leaning conspiratorially close, he whispers, "*a Van Helsing* in the same house with Dracula is that some things... just kinda come naturally. A little *too* naturally.

"So, yeah—I may have *accidentally—almost—*killed Dracula." Guillermo's smile is extremely nervous as he adds, "A couple of times."

The camera cuts to a scene of Guillermo on his way out of the house. Checking something in his bag, he reaches for the door without looking, and has it halfway open before he looks up, only to see Dracula lurking in a corner.

Yelping in surprise, Guillermo slams the door shut again, inches away from letting the sunlight fall on their guest. Dracula regards him coldly as Guillermo clutches his chest and turns around, panting, apparently oblivious to how close to fiery death he just was.

"He's up at the weirdest hours," says Guillermo, back in his room. "And he has this awkward habit of kind of sneaking up on you. Appearing where you don't expect it."

Another scene shows Guillermo checking the curtains against the late afternoon sun, then dutifully lighting candles around an open coffin in which Dracula lies in repose, fast asleep.

Turning to attend to candles on the dresser, Guillermo gives a startled yelp and jumps half out of his skin at the discovery that Dracula is now suddenly *standing right in front of him*, looming from the corner of the room. In his surprise, Guillermo throws the lighter into the air, which flies across the room and falls into the curtains, setting them ablaze.

"Oh *shit*... I... you... I am *so* sorry, I didn't mean... I'll just..." he gabbles. Now frantic, Guillermo is caught between trying to tear the curtains down and put them out, and the risk of opening them with the sun still shining outside.

With a look of disinterested disdain, Dracula stalks from the room, finally leaving Guillermo to tear the curtains down properly and stamp them out on the floor.

"I mean, he's *Dracula*," Guillermo narrates. "Even if I did kill him, he'd probably come back, right? Right?" He drums his fingers nervously on the table. "I don't really wanna test it though."

"As vampires, we are all undead," says Nadja, "but it is what it is. Most of us don't like to make a big deal out of it. But Dracula, he will *never* let you hear the end of it—I am the immortal Dracula! I have been reborn more times than the phoenix! I have returned from death more times than the little death has come to you! I have..."

"Which is not even *close* to true," Laszlo puts in. "Why..."

"*Laszlo*," Nadja pointedly cuts him off. "*We are not doing this now.*"

Laszlo coughs self-consciously. "The point is, he expects you to be *impressed* with all that bullshit about coming back from the dead all the time."

"You know what would be *really* impressive?" agrees Nadja, thumping her armrest with some force, "Not *dying* so much *to begin with!*"

"And some of the ways Dracula has died over the years—*any* decent vampire would be ashamed," says Laszlo. "I mean, stakes, sunlight—that'll happen to the best of us, but if *half* of what you hear about Dracula is true, he once died of getting hit by lightning, because he was holding up an iron rod on his own [castle roof!](#)"

"They say he once died of standing too close to a church window," says Nadja. "That *he* walked in front of!"

"Not to mention that time he was killed by the [shadow of a windmill](#). I mean—come on, that's just taking the piss!"

Nadja hesitates, looking at Laszlo uncertainly. "Are you sure that one was him?"

Laszlo gives an expansive shrug. "It certainly had his name on it."

"Well, if it wasn't him, it might as well have been," says Nadja, declining to let herself get side-tracked by this point. "And that's not even getting into his *ridiculous* thing with running water!"

"Ah, but what's wrong with that, you say?" Laszlo waves a finger. "Surely running water is among the *oldest* of traditional vampire weaknesses!"

"And no-one is more traditional than Dracula," Nadja agrees, "But as usual, he just *has* to take this sort of thing too far."

"The good news about that last incident," says Guillermo, standing in the foyer, "is I've finally talked everyone into shelling out to get our sprinkler system fixed. We had one installed years ago, but it was never properly hooked up to the smoke detectors, and with how much they all love candles, this place has been a fire hazard for too long. So now, the *next* time someone..."

He trails off in response to a hissing noise, followed by a sudden shower of water from a sprinkler above. Guillermo looks up and around himself in alarm.

"THAT WASN'T A SUGGESTION!" he hollers.

Nandor materialises beside him in a whirl of dark smoke.

"Guillermo," he says, oblivious to the preceding moments, "the attic door is stuck again! I was just up there, I had to turn into smoke to get..." He pauses, finally noticing the water, his fingers twitching as he holds up a hand. "Is it raining indoors now?"

Guillermo puts his head in his hands. He's yet to come up with a more eloquent response when a blood-curdling scream rises from near the stairs. The camera pans to reveal Dracula, twisting and writhing on the floor in pain under a shower of water.

"Shit. SHIT!" Guillermo babbles, dashing for the sprinklers' emergency cut-off. Nandor looks awkwardly at the still-writhing Dracula, gives the camera a nervous grin, and sidles out of the scene, evidently deciding that the better part of valour now involves making himself scarce.

"When we say 'running water'," says Laszlo, "I think we can all agree the implicit meaning is *like in a river or a stream*. You're not supposed to find yourself suddenly incapacitated by taking [a bloody shower!](#)"

"I mean, *hello?* We are supposed to be *vampires!*" agrees Nadja, "Not the fucking Wicked Witch of the West!"

"But you just try telling *him* that." Laszlo shivers at the thought. "And that's not even getting into the time he was apparently killed—I shit you not—by walking into a [bush](#)."

"*This* is what we have living in our home." Nadja rolls her eyes and throws up her hands. "And what an *honour* it is!"

Stopping by the curtain separating off the fancy room, Guillermo takes a deep breath and self-consciously straightens his cuffs. Only then does he step inside.

Dracula is sitting on the couch, wearing his usual expression of undirected disdain.

"Hi," says Guillermo, nervously. "I just wanted to let you know, sir, that we've had your curtains replaced with new ones that are flame retardant, and we've deactivated the sprinkler system again, so there shouldn't be any more..." he gives an awkward cough, "so nothing like that should happen again."

Dracula gives him a brief, dispassionate look, but declines to respond.

Guillermo rocks awkwardly on his heels, unsure how to proceed. "Well, unless there's anything else I can do for you, I'll just..."

"There is one thing, *boy*," Dracula intones, rising to his feet—and he's tall enough that the rising goes on for some time.

Guillermo swallows as the imposing figure of Dracula looms over him, waiting.

"In future," Dracula pronounces, with dread solemnity, "you shall address me only as *Master*."

Somewhere in the distance, thunder rumbles. The lights flicker dramatically. Guillermo swallows again.

"Uhh..." he manages, clearly torn. "*Technically*, Nandor is supposed to be..."

"*Guillermo!*" The interjection comes from Nandor, appearing at the curtain. He beckons urgently at Guillermo, who gives Dracula a quick, nodding semi-bow, and hurries over. Nandor lets the curtain fall behind him, giving them at least the illusion of some privacy.

"I know it is unusual," he tells Guillermo, still visibly nervous, "but maybe just while he is here, you could call him Master too? Just to be polite."

Guillermo looks at him in disbelief, and possibly just a little betrayal. "What, *really*?"

"I just think it might be a nice gesture, you know?" Nandor tries, vaguely wringing his hands. "As hosts, and that sort of thing. You see, it turns out he is still a *little* bit bitter about that whole thing with the Ottomans and his brother—I wasn't even really involved, you understand, but it was only a few hundred years ago—it is understandable if he is still a little raw about it."

"What... thing?" asks Guillermo, who is now completely at sea.

"Vlad Dracula and his brother Radu," Laszlo explains, "were raised in the Ottoman court during the reign of Murad II. And in that time, they say Radu grew and blossomed into a young man of *remarkable* beauty."

"They called him Radu the Handsome, you know," Nadja puts in.

"Beautiful enough to catch the eye of Mehmed, the young Sultan-to-be—a man who could have surely had his pick of the entire court, so Radu must have been something truly special. Not that things got off to the most auspicious start—the story goes that the first time the young Sultan *pressed his suit*, so to speak..."

"They say he invited the beautiful Radu to his bedchamber and fell upon him with kisses before he had hardly closed the door," Nadja supplies.

"...well, the young Radu panicked, drew a knife and stabbed him in the leg. And upon realising he'd just wilfully wounded one of the most important men in the entire Ottoman Empire, he panicked *again*, ran away, and hid himself up a tree. And there he stayed, refusing to come down, until Mehmed himself limped over and assured him that he wasn't going to be in any trouble."

"It's all so *very* romantic!" Nadja sighs.

"Anyway, they must have sorted it all out," Laszlo goes on, "because they say that not long after, Radu the Handsome had become Mehmed's lover—and he remained a loyal supporter of the Ottomans to the end of his days. Which *can't* be said for his brother Vlad, who was swift to cut all ties with the Ottoman court in that characteristically decisive fashion he's so known for, once he assumed power in Transylvania after their father's death. When next the brothers met, it would be at the heads of rival armies, warring for control of the territory."

Nadja nods. "It is always so very sad when a little thing like international politics comes between a family in that way."

"This was all long before Vlad became the Dracula we know today, of course," says Laszlo. "Say what you like about the man, he's never one to let go of a grudge. In fact, it turns out that's pretty much what brought him to these shores to begin with."

"Well *I* can't ask him, can I?" says Nandor. "He won't even hardly talk to me!"

He and the others are standing in a huddle outside the curtain dividing off the fancy room, which Dracula appears to have taken over. Guillermo peers nervously through a crack, but quickly lets the curtain fall back again.

"I don't even see the point of broaching the subject," says Laszlo. "It's perfectly obvious what this is about. It's always the same with his type: he's here to conquer the New World and all the rest of that tired, old song-and-dance. It'll be like the Baron all over again—and don't imagine one big night out on the town will make any impression on *him*. We may as well just accept it and move on."

"If it's so important, why don't you just send Gizmo to ask him?" suggests Nadja.

"Uhh..." says Guillermo, who is clearly not a fan of this plan.

"Oh, *that'll* do it," says Laszlo, rolling his eyes. "Just send the help in to do a vampire's job. Yeah, that'll send exactly the right impression." He twitches and looks around as the curtain billows faintly. "Shit, is he looking this way?"

"He knows we're here!" Nandor hisses. "He's not stupid! Better someone goes in to ask him now, and then at least we are not all hanging around for nothing!"

The conversation fades into hushed whispers as the camera moves into the fancy room proper, where Dracula sits, apparently engrossed in some old book—though closer inspection would reveal the spine identifies it as the New York street directory of 1897. A moment later, Nadja enters, having evidently been delegated for this task.

"Um, hi! Hello?" she begins, hunching forward a little, in the universal language of one who fears that bowing might be the only safe way to approach. "I hope I am not disturbing you from your obviously very important... whatever it is you are actually doing in here."

Dracula raises his eyes from his book to look at her, but doesn't respond.

"So, we were all sort of just thinking," Nadja offers, with a very awkward smile, "now that our guest, the Count, has had a couple of days to get all settled in and make himself comfortable—perhaps we might now know *why* it is that we have had the honour bestowed on us of having such an honourable guest in our house, in this particular place and part of the world, and in this particular time, and, like, what he's even doing here and stuff?"

Dracula regards her coolly for some moments before offering any reply.

"I make no secret of my purpose upon these shores," he pronounces, snapping closed the book in his hands. "I have journeyed here with the anticipation of settling a long-held and very *personal* matter of revenge."

On the far side of the curtain, Nandor gives the camera an extremely nervous look. "He's not talking about me, is he?"

"Nandor, my friend," Laszlo whispers back, "I sincerely doubt he'd bother to leave his own *house* on your account."

"Information has reached me," Dracula goes on, "that upon this very island, my ancient enemy, Van Helsing, has been reborn."

"*Ohh...*" says Nadja, nodding in a way that makes her whole upper body bob slightly. "Yes, okay. That would about do it, I suppose."

The camera doesn't linger on her. It's busy capturing Guillermo having what looks to be a small, quiet panic attack.

Chapter 2

"So, good news!" says Guillermo, brightly. It's daylight again, on a sunny suburban street. "He *wasn't* talking about me!" The smile he gives the camera is at once immensely relieved and still rather nervous. "I don't think he has any idea I... yeah, and I'd kind of like to keep it that way. So, you won't believe this, but there's *another* Van Helsing, living right here on Staten Island!"

The camera pans to the middle distance, revealing a skinny, middle-aged man with pleasantly mild-mannered features. He's wearing a cardigan, and is busy watering the front garden of a mid-sized suburban home.



The camera returns to Guillermo, who shrugs. "Yeah. Apparently that's him."

"It is true that Dracula has been killed a great many times, by a great many people," says Nadja.

"Not to mention by his own bloody-minded stupidity," Laszlo adds.

"But *no man* has killed Dracula more times than the notorious Van Helsing. In all the annals of vampire hunting, there is no name that is more feared! And there is *no* vampire with more reason to fear that name than Dracula."

"Of course, they say he's killed Van Helsing too, once or twice," says Laszlo. "And since he's only human, that ought to be the end of it. But apparently the bastard has this habit of being reincarnated. Often as not, within his own family."

"Which is in *very* bad taste, if you ask me!"

"Normally, as I understand it, it tends to be Van Helsing who tracks Dracula down. He's rather known for it. But this time, I suppose Dracula's hoping to get the drop on him," Laszlo explains. "Whether that'll make the difference, I couldn't tell you. But at least it'll get that bastard out of the house a bit."

"Dracula and Van Helsing?" says the Guide. "*Ugh*. Don't even get me started. An age-old and *unspeakable* rivalry. And so we shall not speak of it." So saying, she folds her hands in her lap. A beat goes by before the temptation gets the better of her. "I'll tell you *this* much for nothing, though: you may remember that among the old and most treasured items held in the collection of the Vampiric Council, we possess the preserved penis of the original Abraham Van Helsing himself. Or at least, we did until this week. Can you guess which item has just mysteriously *gone missing*? No-one will admit to having seen anything, or to having the first idea who took it, but don't you find it just a *bit* of a coincidence?" She gives a long-suffering sigh. "Yeah, we're not getting it back, are we?"

Back at 'Van Helsing's' house, someone has got around to approaching him for an interview.

"Oh, we moved out here about four or five years ago," he tells his interviewer, as captions introduce him as 'Professor Lauchlan Van Helsing'. He has a cultured British accent and the general air of someone's favourite professor. "Nominally because I'd been offered the teaching position down at the college, but of course it was mostly to be closer to my daughter—she's married to an American, you know." His smile is that of a proud father who almost certainly has photos in his wallet, but who is at least a little too savvy to volunteer to show them to strangers, let alone the media.

"The name? Oh, yes—it's Dutch in origin, as far as I know, but that's going back quite a number of generations. I realise there are some very famous fictional Van Helsing, but what can I tell you? It's a real name, attached to a great many real, very ordinary people—much like 'Holmes' or even 'Frankenstein'. I don't imagine most people put much stock in that sort of fictional nonsense nowadays—vampires and whatnot. But then, that's not really my field." He gives the camera another pleasant smile. "What was it you said this film project of yours was supposed to be about?"



"Van Helsing and Dracula, when was it they last clashed?" Nadja wonders. "Eighty-something? Ninety-something?"

"Was it the nineteen nineties or the *eighteen* nineties you're thinking of?" asks Laszlo, unhelpfully.

Nadja throws up her hands. "Oh, whatever, who can even keep track? The point is, it was not even that long ago. And already, here he is, practically begging to be killed yet again!"

"Now, you know I'm the *last* man to judge someone's lifestyle choices, however questionable or self-destructive," says Laszlo, "but you've got to wonder what he thinks he's doing." He turns to his wife. "How *did* the Count go last time? Certainly nothing worth making a movie about, was it?"

"Well," says Nadja, "you cannot believe *everything* you hear, but from what *I* heard, it involved some sort of wagon and a very large delivery crate of *garlic bread*."

Laszlo gives a bark of laughter. "Really? You're not having me on?"

Nadja raises her hands. "I heard it direct from Eketerina the Strange—she always has the *best* goss. And she was one of his brides for a while, you remember?"

"Oh yes," Laszlo taps his chin. "Messy divorce, that one. *Very* messy."

"She's had a lot of work done since then, you know," says Nadja. "You can hardly even tell anymore."

"She gave as good as she got, I hear. Or maybe she just gave Van Helsing his address," says Laszlo. "Word to the wise: *don't* mention her to Dracula. He wouldn't take it well."

"Mind you," says Nadja, "if you are going to mention her, I'd do it now. He's so focused on Van Helsing right now he probably won't even notice."

"Total one-track-mind," Laszlo agrees. "Not that it ever helps."

"Obviously, as the household's official bodyguard," says Guillermo, "another vampire hunter living so close to us a serious matter, so I've been staking out the place—uh, no pun intended—for a couple of days now, keeping track of his routine, trying to assess his status as a threat."

Guillermo is sitting in the upstairs room of what looks to be an abandoned house, a pair of binoculars and other assorted paraphernalia laid out on the table beside him. Through the window, Van Helsing's house is visible across the road; the man himself is currently out front, checking his mailbox.

"I even managed to sneak into a couple of his lectures over at the college," Guillermo goes on. "He's some kind of professor of history over there. But to be honest, so far it's all been a bit underwhelming." A notebook sitting beside him on the table contains such startling entries as '7:45 AM—Left for work', '4:17 PM—Returned with groceries', '5:30 PM—Light gardening' and '9:21 AM—Greeted neighbour, offered to walk her dog.'

"I haven't been able to keep an eye on him full time, of course—I've got my other duties. Maybe this is all a front and he's secretly sneaking out to hunt vampires at night or something, but so far... it all looks pretty normal." Guillermo shrugs vaguely at the camera, not even bothering to hide his disappointment. "I don't know, I'm sorta wondering if we've got the right guy."

"It is *he*," pronounces Dracula. "I would know that face anywhere. Each night since my resurrection, it has haunted my dreams. Though the century may have turned since last I

encountered my old foe, he has returned once again. As have I. And upon this day, I shall have my satisfaction."

Out in his front garden, Professor Van Helsing turns around and jumps in surprise, clutching vaguely at his chest.

Just beyond the low boundary hedge at the edge of his property, the imposing spectre of Dracula himself stands silhouetted against the evening sky. The suggestion of a few wisps of smoke waft vaguely from somewhere around his knees.

"Oh, my goodness!" Van Helsing exclaims. "I'm sorry, you gave me such a start! I didn't realise anyone was there." He offers Dracula a wide, self-deprecating smile. When Dracula remains silent, he adds, "I don't know you, do I? Can I help you with something?"

The look in Dracula's eyes, as they slide helplessly towards the camera, is that of a man with absolutely no idea what just happened.

"According to Nadja, when someone's reincarnated, usually they look the same," says Guillermo, sitting once again in his stake-out room. "Unless they're reincarnated as a horse or something. I, uh, I probably shouldn't ask her how she knew he was Gregor when he was a horse, should I?" Sensing that he's getting side-tracked, Guillermo shakes himself a little. "Anyway, according to Dracula, this guy looks *exactly* like the last Van Helsing to kill him." He hesitates briefly before adding, "And the one before that. And probably the one before that too." He shrugs faintly. "But I'm not completely convinced that reincarnation is even what's going on here. I think this might be just, like, *genetics*."

Down below, Van Helsing is watering his garden. Shifted into the body of a cat, Dracula lurks just beyond his boundary hedge.

"That doesn't mean we're all clear," Guillermo adds. "He's still a Van Helsing. Maybe the moment Dracula actually jumps out at him, the reflexes'll kick in, like what happened with me. But then, I was living and working around vampires full time for more than ten years before I had any idea I was a Van Helsing. So who knows?"

Outside, a chance movement of the hose directs a stream of water through Van Helsing's garden gate, showering the Dracula-cat, which had been watching him through the bars. The cat yowls and skitters off around the corner, where it transforms back into Dracula, sprawled and gasping on the pavement.

Guillermo twists his lips awkwardly at the camera. "Do you think maybe I should warn him, about how Dracula's... lurking around?" He appears to consider this for a moment. "Yeah, there's pretty much no way he's going to take me seriously, is there?"

"Obviously, there is no love to be lost between myself and Dracula," says Nadja, her demeanour now much subdued, "but upon this one matter, I must sympathise. You can only *imagine* the disappointment when you discover that a great warrior whom you knew and held in the *highest* regard in ages past has at last been reincarnated... into the body of a complete human loser." She grimaces; Dracula's current dilemma has clearly touched a very personal nerve. "I'm just gonna say

it: Van Helsing has not simply let down everyone who has been waiting for him all this time, he has let *himself* down. What *is* it with this generation and the lame reincarnations?

"As a last resort," she goes on, gathering herself somewhat, "memories of one's past lives can always be revived using hypnosis, but that is asking a *little much* of Dracula if you ask me. I mean, Van Helsing is supposed to be like his *mortal enemy*! Does he expect the Count to do him such a favour, just to have the proper satisfaction of besting a worthy opponent?"

"Between you and me," says Laszlo, the camera panning to reveal that Nadja is not alone in the room. "I wouldn't put it past him."

Nadja throws up her hands. "That is not even the point! Is Dracula supposed to be the one doing all the work in this relationship? You'd think Van Helsing could at least make a fucking effort! It would serve him right if Dracula did not even bother to kill him in this lifetime. Just leave him to live out his sad, *miserable* little human life for however long that might be. Honestly, I don't know why they bother being reincarnated at all if this is how it's going to be."

"I feel like I should be keeping a closer eye on the whole Dracula/Van Helsing situation," admits Guillermo, leading the camera through the hallway back at home, "but y'know, I've got other duties, and Dracula's generated enough extra work for me as it is. It's not even him so much, it's his *entourage* that's been the real hassle."

He opens the door to what is recognisably Dracula's room, which presently contains three beautiful, revealingly-clad vampire women, and one twisted, elderly man with wild hair, missing teeth, and a grin that would be very much at home in a padded cell. All three women fall upon Guillermo with eagerly wandering hands the moment he steps into the room, crooning unintelligibly. With some difficulty, Guillermo elbows them all aside as he passes through, eventually resorting to holding all three off with a cross as he reaches the elderly man, who's seated in the far corner. Guillermo continues to brandish the cross one-handed as he fishes a jar out of a pocket.

"Your lunch, sir," he says, dutifully. "Fresh as I could get them, just as you like it." Close inspection of the jar reveals a lot of tiny legs, many of which appear to be moving.

"Oh, you are too kind!" simpers the man, accepting the jar with something approaching reverence. "Would you like one yourself? I would *hate* to be greedy!"

Guillermo shoots the camera a very flat-mouthed look. "No thanks, I just ate," he tells the man, before turning back to the women with a sigh, already resigned to the gauntlet remaining between himself and the exit.

"I guess I can't *really* blame them?" he admits to the camera, later. "I've seen what Dracula's like, it's not like they're getting any real attention from *him*. But—aha, oh *boy*," Guillermo shakes his head with a faint laugh. "I don't even know how to *begin* to tell them how many ways they're barking up the wrong tree with me, every time I have to go in there."

"And that's not even getting into the trouble we've had with his *luggage*..."

Footage plays of a flashback to Dracula's arrival. Down on the docks, the household have gathered once more by a mid-sized boat. Having obviously learned from prior experience with the Baron,

Guillermo is the one signing for the delivery of Dracula's coffin, packed up in another large, wooden box, which is wheeled off the ship.

"Alright," says the man on the boat, "what'dya want done with the rest of the load?"

"The rest of what load?" asks Laszlo.

The camera pans to show an enormous pile of boxes of similar size, all stacked on the deck of the boat.

"Well, *shit*," says Laszlo, with feeling.

Back at the house, it's pretty apparent the current interview topic is bringing Laszlo no joy whatsoever.

"Look, we all understand the importance of a vampire's native soil," he allows. "Given recent events, I think the whole household has a new appreciation of the value of keeping a little *reserve supply* of your native soil around too. Common sense."

"But *fifty boxes*?" exclaims Nadja.

"That's just going overboard. Fuck, we should've just thrown the whole *lot* overboard, then and there! Would've saved a lot of trouble."

"*Fifty boxes* of soil!" Nadja repeats, thumping the arm of her chair for emphasis. "*And* he wants them all stored in different places! Does he expect the vampire council just to *give* him all that property? I realise the man dies a lot, but this is not the solution! This is like, putting fifty locks on your door! This is like, you have to set a password, so you pick one with fifty letters that are *all* funny symbols! This is not going to keep you safe!"

"Trust Dracula," Laszlo grumbles. "That man can never do anything by halves."

Elsewhere in the house, Guillermo is on the phone. The laptop in front of him shows the name and address of a series of storage companies.

"Is that a charge-per-week, or...?" he says. "Okay. Okay. Thank you. I'll be back in touch." Hanging up, he scribbles something in a notepad beside him, and turns to look at the camera. "So that's what's been eating up all the rest of my time lately. Apparently now the duties of a bodyguard—*temporarily* masquerading as a familiar—include finding somewhere to send all Dracula's spare soil." He sighs. "And no, the irony isn't lost on me, of how the only person who currently knows all Drac's potential hideouts is, y'know, also a *Van Helsing*. I even tried to bring it up! *Should* I be the one doing this? So they all umm'd and aaah'd at me a bit, and they looked at just how much work it was gonna be for anyone else to do it, and they gave the job right back to me." Another sigh. "I guess they all know *I'm* not gonna stake Dracula, so what the hell."

Muttering quietly under his breath, the microphone only barely picks up the words, "*But gimme another week and who fucking knows.*"

Back at the other Van Helsing's house, Dracula is currently lurking outside in the form of a bat. After a couple of minutes, Van Helsing himself comes outside and shoos him away with a broom.

"As co-leader of the vampire council and nominal head of this household," Nandor announces, his back imperiously straight, his hands folded significantly on the table, "the important duty falls to me to report that... we have had a minor... *incident*... resulting in the unfortunate and completely accidental loss of... well, there is no nice way to put this. One of Count Dracula's brides is, well, *dead*." His serious expression breaks just long enough to give the camera a rather nervous smile. "I mean, he has still got the other two left, so I don't see that it's really all that bad, but one must approach this sort of thing with due and appropriate ceremony."

In the foyer, 'due and appropriate ceremony' involves emptying a dustpan full of very fine dust into a plastic waste bin. Guillermo coughs a little as some of it billows into the air. Plenty more of the same dust is still lying on the floor and stairs around one of the pointier wooden embellishments protruding from the bannisters, in an arrangement which unavoidably tells a story.

"This is *not*," Nandor goes on, "the time to worry about such minor things as *how* and *why* and *by whom* the bride came to be killed. What matters," he declares, with a solemn and perhaps slightly artificial bravado, "is that *I* have taken upon *myself* the solemn duty to... to explain the situation to the Count, to make our sincere apologies... and to make what reparations he feels necessary."

Back in the foyer, Guillermo has rather different feelings on the matter.

"Obviously, it was me," he grouches. "She jumped out at me, I just reacted! But now Nandor's got this idea he's got to make out like *he* caught her trying to eat his familiar and threw her off the balcony, like Dracula's *less* likely to want his head for it than mine!" Bending down, he begins viciously sweeping another load of dust into his pan. "But I guess at least this way he doesn't have to *admit* there's been a Van Helsing living in the house this whole time."

"Guillermo! I can hear you, you know!" Nandor hisses at him, from somewhere just off screen. The camera pans to reveal him kneeling just a couple of feet away—armed with his own dustpan and brush, where he is (incredibly) helping. "We have been over this! When you go around killing our guests, it reflects..."

"...badly on *you*, I know!" Guillermo argues. "That doesn't..."

"He will blame *me* anyway!" Nandor makes a sharp jabbing motion with his dustpan, wincing a little as he manages to half empty it onto his shirt. Undeterred, he goes on, "He would probably blame me even if *Nadja* had done it and he was *watching* when she did! There is no point in getting you involved!"

"I'm not letting him kill you! Not if I have to—"

"It may not even be a death he wants as recompense! He may... he may simply require that we replace his lost bride!"

Guillermo hesitates. "He what?"

"And if a human was involved," Nandor hisses, voice low, "he may even demand that it *be* that human!"

"Wh... you mean *me*?" Guillermo drops his brush. "Why would... but he's... is he even *into* men?"

Nandor looks at him with disappointment. "Guillermo, really! Must you be so close-minded about these things?"

"I'm *not*," Guillermo protests, "I just... he wouldn't want..."

"Do you have *any idea* how many times he has tried to turn members of the Van Helsing family?"

Guillermo drops his dustpan too, then swiftly regrets it. Coughing and waving his hands helplessly in front of his face, he rises to his feet, seeking clearer air, emerging from the spreading dust cloud just in time to see Dracula sweeping in through the outside door. With a hacking yelp, Guillermo falls backwards onto his hands, briefly locking eyes with an equally frozen Nandor as the Count moves towards them, passing between them as he strides directly through the remains of his former bride without a glance at anyone or anything else in the room.

Nandor and Guillermo remain frozen as Dracula disappears down the hall, before Guillermo finally recovers, stumbles to his feet and hurries after their retreating guest.

By the time Guillermo reaches the Count's room, Dracula is already in his coffin, the lid closing with a thud. Guillermo stares at it for a moment, before turning his eyes to where the two remaining brides are cowering in the corner of the room, clutching their master's discarded cape between them. They shrug helplessly at Guillermo, who can do little but shrug back.

Chapter 3

"So, it's been about a day and a half since *the incident*," Guillermo reports, "and, um... honestly I don't think he's even noticed." Grimacing, he runs a hand down his face. "I don't even... I mean, *damn*, even for him... that's *cold*. I don't know what to think."

"I don't know why you are so surprised," says Nadja. "This is only how Dracula has *always* been with his brides! It is like one of those revolting hoarding addictions that he refuses to get any help for. *Yes*, there is certainly a kind of woman who needs only one smouldering look and she is swooning at his feet—*oh, yes, my dark lord, make me your eternal bride!*—but no-one is *forcing* him to bite so many of them! And by pretty much the next morning, he's lost interest already."



Nadja turns to her left, expectant. "Isn't that how it is, Ioana?"

The camera pans to reveal one of the two surviving brides, reclining comfortably in the opposite seat, holding a teacup. "Oh, you have no *idea*!" she agrees, in what may be a Romanian accent. "You know, it was only the two of us when we got here—myself and dear Francine. But every time we travel, he just *has* to pick up some cheap souvenir—and then most often he's lost it again without even noticing! So we are two, and then we are three, and then we are two again, and does he care? Feh! Anyone who tells you the Count loves to count has never lived with the man." Her obvious frustration with this topic doesn't stop her beaming at Nadja. "It is so *nice* to talk to someone from outside the household for a change!"

"We were just talking about what it is like to live with the Count Dracula, for as long as Ioana has put up with him," Nadja tells the camera. "You know, I have to ask, why *do* you stick around? There are always plenty more bats in the sky!"

"Well, he *does* have his qualities, you know," says Ioana, with a sly smile. "What can I say—after so *many* years and so *many* brides, he could not help but have picked up a thing or two! And the life has its other privileges—you don't get such a regular stream of deliciously naïve young travellers stumbling into *every* castle in the Carpathians. Nowadays, of course, they all want to see your yelping reviews and to know the wifi password, but they keep on coming all the same! Besides, Dracula is... let us say he is *away* so much that you have the place to yourself most of the time." Smile slipping, she adds, "Not that he's all that much more present sometimes in what we like to call his *inter-mortem* phases." Ioana lets out a dramatic sigh. "You think you know what you're getting into, becoming his bride, but I swear, as soon as there is even a *whiff* of a Van Helsing on the horizon, it's like there's a *fifth* person in your marriage!"

"Ah," says Nadja, "Always, it comes back to the thing with Van Helsing!"

"I'll bet that's where he is right now." Ioana's lip curls in distaste. "Hanging around there like a bad smell. You won't believe it, but he's even moved one of his dirt boxes into the empty place across the road, just so he can lurk all the closer."

"No!" shrieks Nadja. Ioana nods animatedly.

Back on Van Helsing's street, Dracula emerges from the lower story of the house Guillermo's been using for his stakeouts, awkwardly, brushing some dirt from a shoulder. Across the road, Van Helsing gives him a cheery wave. He's watering again.

Moving stiffly, Dracula crosses the road to approach him. An attentive observer might notice his eyes occasionally flickering to the nozzle of the hose, which he stands as far away from as possible.

"Hello again," Van Helsing greets him. "I thought I'd seen you around lately—have you taken the old place at number 6?"

"I have... lately taken up residence there," Dracula manages, in his usual sonorous tones. "It was... *unoccupied*."

"Yes, it has been for some years now—so nice to see they've finally found a buyer," says Van Helsing, every inch the friendly neighbour. "If you're not busy, would you like to come in for some tea? Call me old-fashioned if you will, but I always like to get to know my neighbours."

"You would... invite me into your home? So freely?" Dracula shoots a side-look at the camera, obviously having trouble with the notion it should be so easy.

"I just did, didn't I? Come along, I'll put the kettle on."

At the house, Guillermo is also pouring tea—or at least, he's topping up Nadja and Ioana's teacups from a teapot, though close examination would reveal the fluid within isn't precisely tea-coloured.

"It was *just* the same with the *last* Van Helsing reincarnation," Ioana is saying, "Did you hear how that went down?"

Nadja leans in expectantly. "Oh, yes—Eketerina was telling me..."

"Oh, *her*," Ioana makes a face. "You cannot believe the *half* of what that woman tells you. Honestly, why Vlad ever bothered with her to begin with... but that is neither here nor there. We were talking about Van Helsing! And I tell you, by the time Dracula found him, he was *more* than ready! You know, I think he'd been taking ideas from those movies they made about him."

"Movies..." says Guillermo, "you mean that one with Hugh Jackman?"

Ioana frowns at him, displeased at being interrupted by the help. "No, I mean the ones where he is for some reason a *black* Van Helsing who is part vampire! *Those* ones!"

"Oh, the *Blade* films?" says Guillermo, catching on.

"Yes, the Blade Van Helsing!"

"But they're not..." is as far as Guillermo gets before giving in, sensibly realising this isn't a misconception worth the argument.

"What I mean to say," says Ioana, turning back to Nadja, "is there was no mistaking the *real* Van Helsing knew what he was doing! But you were telling me this new Van Helsing has been born with the weak brain of a helpless nobody? Is that true?"

"You tell her, Guillermo!" says Nadja, "You've seen him, yes?"

Guillermo has other things on his mind. "Hang on, the last Van Helsing... that was *after* the Blade movies? That was only like twenty years ago!"

"Yes, it would be about the turn of the millennium," says Ioana, "what is your point?"

"But the new Van Helsing—the guy Dracula's been stalking—he's way older than that. He'd have been alive back then—he's like, 40? 50, now? You can't have two reincarnations at the same time, that doesn't make sense!"

Ioana waves a hand, disinterested. "Eh, with Van Helsing, who can even keep track? Sometimes he is one man, sometimes he is another, sometimes he has killed Dracula while he was already dead! He just gets around somehow!"

Guillermo turns to Nadja, "But that's how it works, right?"

"I guess?" says Nadja, who doesn't seem to get his point either.

"But that means either Dracula has the *wrong* Van Helsing," says Guillermo, looking into the camera in horror, "or this is the *same* Van Helsing who killed him back in the 90's, and..." He dashes for the door.

A second later, he comes back to put the teapot down, and dashes off again.

At Van Helsing's house, the owner is just showing his guest inside. The front door opens on a short hallway, the walls largely obscured with sheeting.

"Excuse the state of the place," says Van Helsing, closing the door behind them, "we've been redecorating."

"Ah," says Dracula, faintly.

"Yes," Van Helsing reaches with something on the wall, "we were thinking perhaps something in a *religious* theme..."

With one tug of a cord, the sheeting falls away—revealing ornate, metal crosses lining every wall.

Gasping in pain, Dracula turns to flee—but his way is blocked by Van Helsing himself, brandishing another crucifix inches from his face.

"Really, Dracula?" says Van Helsing, conversationally, "*Cameras* this time? How many hints did I have to send you, just to get you over here, and this is how you thank me? As if all that nonsense with the book wasn't bad enough."

"*You...*" Dracula manages, between writhing shrieks. There's nowhere for him to move that doesn't leave him vaguely ping-ponging between one source of pain and another.

"You know, I genuinely wondered if you were playing along when I first pretended not to recognise you," Van Helsing goes on. "But I actually had you going, didn't I? I must say, I'm not at all impressed. You'd think we'd been through this song-and-dance enough times for you to have acquired *some* grace."

Dracula, now crawling away, grasps for the doorknob of one of the hallway doors, only to flinch away in pain.

"Silver-plated," says Van Helsing. "Don't they look nice? Quite the expense, and they take no end of polishing, but there's no substitute for the real thing."

Dracula flops back over onto his hands. "*Van Helsing...*" he groans.

Van Helsing sighs. "Is that all you've got to say for yourself?"

Dracula does manage a further series of hissing gurgles as Van Helsing and his advancing cross force him to the floor, but this seems to be about as much intelligibility as he has left.

Kneeling beside him, Van Helsing shushes him gently. "It's not as though you give me much choice, you realise. Quiet, now." From some unseen pocket, he draws a wooden stake. He's still wearing the gardening gloves he had on outside. "It'll all be over soon."

The camera cuts to the front porch, where Guillermo has his hands pressed up against the front door, watching the scene as best he can through a decorative stained-glass panel. As Dracula's gurgles fade, he turns to the camera with a look of horror.

The scene fades out.

"So!" says Nadja, "Dracula is dead! Van Helsing killed him! What a *shocking* ending that no-one could have predicted to such a *shockingly* predictable affair!"

Beside her, Laszlo shrugs and leans on his hand. "You don't think they're going to try and get us to do that thing where they do half our interviews again, only now they expect us to pretend we *didn't* see it all coming a mile away, do you? Because I, for one, am not the actor it would take to make it convincing."

"They'd better bloody *not*," Nadja agrees. She looks back to the camera. "In case you are wondering, we saw Ioana off at the port this evening—she's going to have the castle all to herself again, how nice!—and she took the rest of the soil back with her, so at least *that* is off our hands. Meanwhile, apparently her sister-in-marriage Francine has found some sort of long-lost family up in New England she means to reconnect with, so they are parting ways. As for the little Renfield man... he is still here, I think? We are not sure what to do with him, but at least he is cheap to feed."

'The little Renfield man' is currently dusting the mantelpiece with exaggerated care. Spotting something behind an ornament, his face lights up in joy as he plucks a live spider out from some dark corner and holds it up to the light.

"Oh, that's not a brown recluse you've got there, is it?" calls Colin Robinson, approaching.

Renfield turns to Colin, all wide-eyed curiosity. "What did you call it?" he asks, his spider still clutched carefully between his fingers.

Colin Robinson produces one of his more annoying laughs. "Yeah, most folks assume we don't get them up in New York City, but I hear those crafty little bastards will come sneaking up from the southern states on packing crates all the time... have you not heard of the brown recluse?"

Renfield listens to all this with fascination. "Do you know a lot about spiders?"

"Oh, *buddy!*" Colin Robinson claps him on the shoulder, not quite making him drop his prize, "you are gonna be *so* sorry you asked!"

"Well, the good news," says the Guide, leaning heavily on her hand in a way that suggests that 'good' is a thoroughly relative term, "is that they found Van Helsing's missing member in amongst Dracula's things after his departure. The *bad* news is that it was no longer in its jar, and..." She makes something of a face, "yeah, after what he's probably done with it, I'm not sure we even *want* it back anymore."

A close-up shot of that same preserved body part—now safely rehomed in its jar—zooms out to reveal Laszlo tightening the lid back on.

"Her loss," he says, cheerfully, "*our* gain! Relics with *this* sort of history don't fall into a man's lap every day—this will go *marvellously* in our crypt! I think I'll even get a plaque for it," Raising his other hand, he begins plotting out his intended text in front of his face, "'The genuine and *original stake* of the notorious Van Helsing, which hath been deeply thrust upon *multiple occasions* into Dracula's body—*sometimes* perhaps even into orifices which *already existed*—and *some* of those times," Laszlo waggles his eyebrows, "perhaps even consensually!'"

Guillermo, meanwhile, is packing up his stakeout.

"I guess I figured I'd just do what they do in the movies," he says, sounding sheepish. "Watch the guy, figure out his routine, find out what we were dealing with. But I got *nothing* out of him this way. I guess Van Helsing DNA is more stake *in* than stake *out*, you know?" He winces. "Ugh, I take that back—please tell me you'll cut that pun, I don't believe I said that. Anyway, I gave it some

more thought, and I realised maybe that same DNA gives me another way in, so I'm trying something new."

Outside, Professor Van Helsing is, once again, working in his front garden—but this time it's Guillermo who approaches him from the street.

"Um, hi," he says, a little awkward.

"Hello," Van Helsing offers, pleasantly. "Can I help you with something? Mr...?"

"Guillermo, please," says Guillermo. "You're, uh, Mr. Van Helsing, right?"

"*Professor*, usually, but yes."

"Uh... well, this may sound a little weird," Guillermo pushes on, "but I did this DNA test a while ago and it turns out... we may be... distantly related?"

"Oh. Really?" Van Helsing blinks at him, rising from his flowerbed. "You wouldn't be from the... oh, what was the Spanish branch of the family again—the de la Cruces?"

"Oh my god," says Guillermo, impressed to the point of being a little taken aback. "You know about us?"

"My goodness," Van Helsing hurriedly pulls off his gloves so he can shake Guillermo warmly by the hand. "What an unexpected pleasure! Please, do come inside!"

Guillermo throws a quick smile at the camera, and follows him in.

Though the crosses lining the entrance hallway have been taken down, even Dracula probably couldn't have made it far into this house without noticing something of a theme. The bookshelves are lined with titles on vampirism, the undead and the occult. There can't be many places in this house one could find oneself *without* something cross-shaped relatively close to hand, be it on an ornament, a lampshade or a bottle-opener. On the wall, beside what can only be a portrait of a former Van Helsing in action, there's a black-and-white line drawing of Dracula himself. A brief glimpse through a bedroom doorway reveals another copy on the bedside table.

"...but *after* the cauterisation, the good news," Van Helsing is saying, animatedly, waving a lit cigarette for emphasis, "if you've any holy water on you, is that the bite wound itself should just about wash away. It's quite remarkable in action."

"Oh my god," says Guillermo, looking a little queasy. "You've actually *done* that?"

Van Helsing looks at him kindly. "It's an extreme measure, I'll grant you, and I'd gladly recommend *any* means of prevention over such a cure—but desperate times, and so on. I can at least promise you it *does* work, should it come to that."

Guillermo swallows. "So... are the whole family vampire hunters?" In front of him is a very large chart mapping a very twisted family tree. Parts of it may be suspiciously cross-shaped.

"Oh, goodness no," Van Helsing tells him, good-naturedly. "If we were *all* at it, we'd run out of vampires. No, we mostly focus on keeping Dracula out of trouble. He's always back, sooner or later—will be this time too, I'm sure." His gaze travels to the mantelpiece, his fingers briefly coming to

rest upon a funeral urn carrying Dracula's name, though the year on the urn is displayed by a four-roll number dial, much like you'd find on a combination lock. "He's so reliable on that account I suppose I'd be a little disappointed if he wasn't. But he's a relatively known quantity in most other respects—we know what to expect from him, after all this time." Here he pauses, smiling at himself self-consciously. "Well, I say 'we'—it's mostly me, in one lifetime or another."

Guillermo looks down at the family tree again—a number of names on it are circled in red, their dates of birth and death never quite overlapping. "Is it not... a little *weird*, coming back as your own descendent?"

"It can be," admits the current Van Helsing. "Always best to skip at least one generation—it saves on awkwardness. Though to tell the truth, it's not as though I have much say in the matter. It just sort of happens." He shrugs, idly stubbing out the cigarette.

"And you always remember? Everything?"

"Not everything, not immediately. It varies, lifetime to lifetime. The muscle memory usually comes first, which is no bad thing—it's saved me more than once. The sight of Dracula's charming face usually brings a lot rushing back. You have to wonder if he's not in some way responsible for it all, which is certainly poetic, if true. Of course, the advantage of coming back within the same family is it's so much easier to leave notes to yourself as well." He looks pointedly into the camera. "And now I suppose the next generation will have *video footage* to refer to. And here I used to feel like keeping a diary was cheating."

Guillermo gives the camera a brief, awkward smile of his own, and looks back down at the family tree. "So, you were telling me about the rest of the family?"

"Oh, yes!" Van Helsing exclaims. "I don't want to seem as though I'm taking all the credit—not when I have so many wonderfully capable children and grandchildren to be proud of. We're so spread-out nowadays it's hard to keep track. There's even a *Chinese* branch of the family going back nearly a century—and you'd be wrong to assume they don't get vampires out in that part of the world. A lot of hopping around and chasing them with images of the Buddha, as I understand it. No, it's certainly not *all* about reincarnation—I suppose there's something in our blood after all these years." Van Helsing gives his guest a significant look. "You were saying you'd killed a vampire or two yourself?"

"Um, yeah? I mean, I didn't even really mean to, at first. It just kind of happened. I sort of fell into it, I guess." Guillermo fidgets a little. "Has anyone in the family ever, um, *become* a vampire?"

"It's happened," says Van Helsing, seriously. "Rarely, but it's something of a professional hazard, I'm afraid—though as I was telling you earlier, we have our ways of preventing it."

"Right..." says Guillermo, as if *avoiding* becoming a vampire is ever likely to feature among his personal concerns.

"But let's not dwell on such uncomfortable topics—here's what I wanted to show you." Van Helsing deposits a heavy display book full of assorted documents and print outs onto the table in front of Guillermo. "The *de la Cruzes*—you may well have closer relatives who could tell you far more about them than I could, but I know enough to tell you they've produced their own impressive history of monster hunting over the years. Mostly werewolves, I think, but there was an *Isabella* de la Cruz who made quite the name for herself as a vampire hunter. I don't suppose you've heard of her?"

Guillermo shakes his head, looking down. "Was this her?" There's a reproduction of a painting on the page in front of him, showing a young woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a silver crucifix pendant around her neck. Guillermo idly traces the shape of his own pendant under his shirt with his fingers, probably not even aware he's doing it.

"We think so," says Van Helsing. "I'm not sure she'd be your direct ancestor, but at least a distant cousin."

"And she hunted vampires?" Guillermo looks up from the page.

"Yes, though not entirely for familial reasons. The story goes that her young lover fell victim to a vampire, so off she went on his trail. But when she finally cornered him, she realised she had the wrong vampire. So off she went again—and I believe in the end she'd slain half a dozen or more before she found the right trail."

"Did she catch him in the end?" asks Guillermo, transfixed.

"They say she hunted him across half the continent," Van Helsing tells him, "and, ah, *possibly* into the sea to his demise, or possibly he boarded a ship and fled—the account is a little unclear on that point. A remarkable achievement either way—this particular vampire may have been as old as Dracula himself, and a one-time warlord of the Ottoman empire at that."

"He... what?" says Guillermo, suddenly frozen.

"He went by Nandor..." Van Helsing squints faintly at the page. "*El Implacable*... I assume that's the Spanish translation of whatever he was called in his own language, so in English we'd have..."

"The Relentless..." Guillermo supplies, a little shell-shocked.

"Really?" says Van Helsing, oblivious. "Well, I'm sure you'd know better than I would. You know, perhaps it's just me, but I'd swear I could see some family resemblance between you and Isabella..."

"You're probably just imagining it," Guillermo scoffs, but there's just a little bit of horror in his expression as he looks at the picture again.

End Notes

For still more on the various facets and lasting appeal of Christopher Lee's Dracula, I present you with [a few thoughts \(and a few more illustrative gifs\) on the subject](#).

And for a little more on just how well Guillermo fits into the Hammer-verse Van Helsing family, I'd also like to share a handy visual reference to [the Van Helsing family wardrobe](#). (See also: my [Hammer Dracula](#) and [A Few of my Favourite Van Helsing](#)s tags.)

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