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In Search of Dracula

3 May.

Left Munich at 8.35 p.m. on 1st May, arriving in Vienna early next morning. Should have arrived at 6.46, but train was an hour late. Budapest seems a wonderful place, from the glimpse I got from the train and the little I could walk through the streets. I feared to go far from the station – having arrived late, we were to re-start promptly.

Impression of leaving the West and entering the East.

The most Western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of Turkish rule.

We left in pretty good time, and came after nightfall to Klausenburgh. Stopped for the night at the Hotel Royale, and had for supper a chicken done up some way with red pepper. Very good, but makes one thirsty.

(Mem., get recipe for Mina.)

I asked the waiter, and he said it was called ‘paprika hendl’ and that, as it was a national dish, I should be able to get it anywhere along the Carpathians. My smattering of German is very useful here. Indeed, I should be lost without it.

In the British Museum I had found that Count Dracula’s district is in the extreme east of the country, just on the borders of three states – Transylvania, Moldavia, and Bukovina – in the midst of the Carpathian mountains. One of the wildest and least known portions of Europe. I was not able to light on the exact locality of Castle Dracula, as there are no maps of this country as yet to compare with our own Ordnance Survey; but I found that Bistritz, the post town named by the Count, is a fairly well known place. I shall enter here some of my notes, as they may refresh my memory when I talk over my travels with Mina.

In the population of Transylvania there are four distinct nationalities: Saxons in the south, and mixed with them the Walachs, who are the descendants of the Dacians; Magyars in the west, and Szekelys in the east and north. I am going among the latter, who claim to be descended from

Attila and the Huns. This may be so, for when the Magyars conquered the country in the eleventh century they found the Huns settled in it. I read that every known superstition in the world is gathered into the horseshoe of the Carpathians, as if it were the centre of some sort of imaginative whirlpool. If so, my stay may be very interesting.

(Mem., I must ask the Count all about them.)

I did not sleep well, though my bed was comfortable enough, for I had all sorts of queer dreams. There was a dog howling all night under my window, which may have had something to do with it. Or it may have been the paprika, for I had to drink up all the water in my carafe, and was still thirsty. Towards morning I was wakened by a continuous knocking at my door, so I must have been sleeping soundly by then. I had for breakfast more paprika, and a sort of porridge of maize flour which they said was 'mamaliga', and eggplant stuffed with forcemeat, a very excellent dish, which they call 'impletata'.

(Mem., get recipe for this also.)

Had to hurry breakfast, for the train started a little before eight, or rather it *ought* to have done so, for after rushing to the station at 7.30 I had to sit in the carriage for more than an hour before we began to move. It seems to me that the further East you go the more unpunctual are the trains. What ought they to be in China?

All day long we seemed to dawdle through a country full of beauty of every kind. Sometimes we saw little towns or castles on the tops of steep hills such as we see in old missals. Sometimes we ran by rivers and streams which seemed from their wide stony margins to be subject to great floods. It takes a lot of water, and running strong, to sweep the outside edge of a river clear.

At every station there were groups of people, sometimes crowds, and in all sorts of attire. Some were just like the peasants in and Germany, with short jackets and round hats and home-made trousers. Others were very picturesque. The women looked pretty, except when you got near them, but they were very clumsy about the waist. They had all full white sleeves of some kind or other, and most of them had big belts with a lot of strips of something fluttering from them like the dresses in a ballet, but of course petticoats under them.

The strangest figures were the Slovaks, more barbarian than the rest, with their big cowboy hats, great baggy dirty-white trousers, white linen shirts, and enormous heavy leather belts, nearly a foot wide, all studded

over with brass nails. They wear high boots, with their trousers tucked into them, and have long black hair and heavy black moustaches. They are very picturesque and on the stage would be set down at once as some old band of Oriental brigands. They are, however, I am told, very harmless and rather wanting in self-assertion.

It was past twilight when we got to Bistritz, which is a very interesting old place. Being virtually on the frontier – for the Borgo Pass leads from it into Bukovina – it has had a very stormy existence, and certainly shows marks of it. Early in the seventeenth century it underwent a siege of three weeks and lost 53,000 people, the casualties of war proper being assisted by famine and disease. And only fifty years ago a series of forest fires wrought terrible havoc on five separate occasions.

Count Dracula had directed me to the Golden Krone Hotel, which I found, to my great delight, to be thoroughly old-fashioned. I was evidently expected, for at the door a cheery-looking elderly woman in the usual peasant dress – white undergarment with long double apron, front and back, of coloured stuff fitting almost too tight for modesty – bowed to me and said:

‘The Herr English?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Herr Jonathan Harker.’

She smiled, and gave some message to an elderly man in white shirtsleeves, who had followed her to the door. He went, but immediately returned with a letter:

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the Carpathians. I am anxiously expecting you. Sleep well tonight. At three tomorrow the diligence will start for Bukovina; a place on it is kept for you. At the Borgo Pass my carriage will await you and will bring you to me. I trust that your journey from London has been a happy one, and that you will enjoy your stay in my beautiful land.

Cordially,
DRACULA.

4 May.

My landlord had a letter from the Count, directing him to secure the best place on the coach for me. Yet he seemed somewhat reticent, and pretended he could not understand my German, though up to then he had

understood it perfectly. He and his wife, the old lady who had received me, looked at each other in evident fear. He mumbled that the money had been sent in a letter, and that was all he knew.

When I asked if he knew Count Dracula, and his castle, both he and his wife crossed themselves, and, saying that they knew nothing at all, simply refused to speak further. Then, just before I left, the old lady came up to my room and said in a very hysterical way:

‘Must you go? Oh, young Herr! Must you go?’

She was so excited that she seemed to have lost her grip on German, and mixed it up with some other language which I did not know. I was just able to follow her by asking many questions. When I told her I must go at once, on important business, she asked insistently:

‘Do you know what day it is?’

I answered that it was the fourth of May.

She shook her head as she said again:

‘Yes, yes! But do you know what *day* it is?’

On my saying that I did not understand, she went on:

‘It is the eve of St George’s Day. Do you not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world will have full sway? And where you are going?’

She was in such distress that I tried to comfort her, but without effect. Finally she went down on her knees and implored me not to go. It was all very ridiculous, but I did not feel comfortable. However, there was business and I therefore raised her up, and thanked her, but said my duty was imperative.

She dried her eyes, took a crucifix from her neck and offered it to me. I did not know what to do, for, as a good English Churchman, I have been taught to regard such things as idolatrous, and yet it seemed so ungracious to refuse an old lady meaning so well and in such distress.

Seeing my doubt, she put the rosary round my neck, and said:

‘For your mother’s sake.’ Then she left the room.

I am writing this while waiting for the coach, which is of course late, and the crucifix is still round my neck. Whether it is the old lady’s fear, I do not know, but I am feeling a little uneasy. If only Mina – but here comes the coach!

5 May.

The grey of the morning has passed, and the sun is high over the

distant horizon, which seems jagged, whether with trees or hills I know not, for it is so far off that big things and little are mixed. I am not sleepy, and will write till sleep comes. There are many odd things to put down, beginning with my meal. I dined on what they call 'robber steak' – bits of bacon, onion, and beef, seasoned with red pepper, and strung on sticks and roasted over the fire, in the simple style of the London cat's-meat! The wine was Golden Mediasch, which produces a queer sting on the tongue. It is, however, not disagreeable. I drank only a couple of glasses of this, and nothing else.

When I got on the coach the driver had not taken his seat, and I saw him talking with the landlady – evidently of me, for now and then they looked at me, and some of the people who were sitting on the bench outside – which they call 'word-bearer' – came and listened, then looked at me. I could hear a lot of words often repeated – queer words, for there were many nationalities in the crowd – so I quietly got my polyglot dictionary from my bag and looked them up. I must say they were hardly cheering, for amongst them were 'Ordog' – Satan, 'pokol' – hell, 'stregoica' – witch, 'vrolok' and 'vlkoslak' – both of which mean the same thing, one being Slovak and the other Serbian for something that is either werewolf or vampire.

(Mem., I must ask the Count about these superstitions.)

When we started, the crowd round the inn door, which had by this time swelled to a considerable size, all made the sign of the cross and pointed two fingers towards me. With some difficulty I got a fellow passenger to tell me what they meant. He explained that it was a charm against the evil eye. This was not very pleasant for me, just starting for an unknown place to meet an unknown man, but everyone seemed so kind-hearted, sorrowful and sympathetic that I could not but be touched.

I shall never forget my last glimpse of the inn-yard amid its crowd of picturesque figures, all crossing themselves, as they stood round the wide archway, with its background of rich foliage of oleander and orange trees in green tubs clustered in the centre of the yard. Then our driver, whose wide linen drawers covered the whole front of the box-seat – 'gotza', they call them – cracked his big whip over his four small horses, which ran abreast, and off we set.

I soon lost sight and recollection of ghostly fears in the beauty of the scene as we drove along, although had I known the language, or rather languages, which my fellow-passengers were speaking, I might not have

been so serene. Before us lay a green sloping land full of forests and woods, with here and there steep hills crowned with clumps of trees and farmhouses, their blank gable-ends to the road. There was everywhere a bewildering mass of fruit blossom – apple, plum, pear, cherry – and the green grass under the trees was brightly spangled with the fallen petals.

Amongst these green hills of the 'Mittel Land' ran the road, weaving round grassy curves and through the straggling ends of pine woods, which licked down the hillsides like tongues of green flame. The road was rugged, but still we seemed to fly over it with a feverish haste, the driver being evidently bent on losing no time in reaching Borgo Prund.

I was told that this road is in summertime excellent, but had not yet been put in order after the winter snows. In this respect it is different from most roads in the Carpathians, for it is an old tradition that they are not to be kept too well. Of old the Hospodars would not repair them, lest the Turk should think they were preparing to bring in foreign troops, and so hasten the war which was ever at loading point.

Beyond the green swelling hills of the Mittel Land rose mighty slopes of forest up to the lofty Carpathians themselves. Right and left they towered, with the afternoon sun bringing out all the glorious colours of this beautiful range, deep blue and purple in the shadows of the peaks, green and brown where grass and rock mingle, and an endless perspective of jagged rock and pointed crags, till these were themselves lost in the distance, where the snowy peaks rose grandly. Here and there seemed mighty rifts in the mountains, through which, as the sun began to sink, gleamed a whiteness of falling water.

One of my companions touched my arm as we swept round the base of a hill and into view of a snow-peaked mountain:

'Look! *Isten szek!* – God's seat!' And he crossed himself reverently.

As we wound on our seemingly endless way, and the sun sank low behind us, the creeping shadows of evening were emphasized by the sunset still on the summit snows, which glowed a delicate cool pink. Several times we passed Czechs and Slovaks, all in picturesque attire, but I noticed that goitre was painfully prevalent. By the roadside were many crosses, which caused my companions all to cross themselves. Occasionally we saw a peasant man or woman kneeling down before a shrine. They would not look round as we approached, but seemed, in their self-surrender of devotion, to have neither eyes nor ears for the outer world.

There were many things new to me: hay ricks in the trees, and beautiful masses of weeping birch, their white stems shining like silver through the delicate green of the leaves. Now and again we passed a leiter-wagon – the ordinary peasant’s cart – with its long, snakelike vertebrae, built for the uneven roads. On this were sure to be seated quite a group of home-coming peasants; the Czechs in their white, and the Slovaks with their coloured sheepskins; the latter carrying their long staves lance-fashion, with axes at their ends.

As evening fell it got very cold, and the growing twilight seemed to merge into one dark composite mistiness the gloom of all the trees – oak, beech, and pine – though in the valleys which ran deep between the spurs of the hills, as we ascended through the Pass, the dark firs stood out against the background of late-lying snow. Sometimes, as the road cut through the pine woods that seemed in the darkness to be closing down upon us, great masses of greyness bestrewed the trees and produced a peculiarly weird and solemn effect, which revived grim fancies engendered earlier, when the falling sunset had thrown into strange relief the ghost-like clouds which amongst the Carpathians seem to wind ceaselessly through the valleys.

Sometimes the hills were so steep that, despite our driver’s haste, the horses could only go slowly. I wished then to get down and walk, as we do at home, but the driver would not hear of it.

‘No, no!’ he said. ‘The dogs here are too fierce.’ Then he added, with what he evidently meant for grim pleasantry – for he looked round to catch the approving smile of the rest:

‘And you may have enough of such matters before you go to sleep.’

The only stop he would make was a moment’s pause to light his lamps.

When it grew dark there seemed to be some excitement amongst the passengers, and they kept speaking to him, one after the other, as though urging him to further speed. He lashed the horses unmercifully with his long whip, and with wild cries of encouragement urged them on to further exertions. Then through the darkness I saw a patch of grey light ahead of us, as though there were a cleft in the hills. The excitement of the passengers grew greater, and the crazy coach rocked on its great leather springs and swayed like a boat in a storm. I had to hold on. The road grew more level, and we appeared to fly along.

Soon the mountains loomed nearer and seemed to frown down upon

us. We were entering the Borgo Pass. Several of the passengers now offered me gifts – indeed, would take no refusal. Their offerings were of an odd and varied kind, but given with a kindly word, and a blessing, and that strange mixture of fear-meaning movements which I had seen outside the Bistritz hotel – the sign of the cross and the guard against the evil eye. Presently the driver leaned forward, and on each side the passengers, craning through the coach windows, peered eagerly into the darkness.

It was evident that something very exciting was expected, but no-one would give me the slightest explanation. This excitement kept on for some time, and at last we saw before us the Pass opening out on the eastern side. There were dark, rolling clouds overhead, and in the air a heavy, oppressive sense of thunder.

I was now looking out for Count Dracula's carriage. Each moment I expected to see the glare of lamps through the blackness, but still the only light was the flickering of our lamps, in which steam from our hard-driven horses rose in a white cloud.

The other passengers drew back with a sigh of gladness, which seemed to mock my own disappointment. I was wondering what to do, when the driver, looking at his watch, muttered to the others something which I could not understand. Turning to me, he said in German worse than my own:

'There is no carriage here. The Herr is not expected, after all. He will now come on to Bukovina, and return tomorrow. Or the next day. Better the next day.'

While he was speaking the horses began to neigh and snort and plunge so wildly that the driver had to rein them cruelly hard. A chorus of screams from the peasants accompanied frantic crossing of their breasts, as a calash with four horses drew up beside our coach. I could see from the flash of our lamps that the horses – splendid-looking animals – were all coal-black. They were driven by a tall man with a long brown beard and a great black hat, which seemed to hide his face – so that only a pair of very bright eyes gleamed brightly red in the lamplight. To our driver he said:

'You are early tonight, my friend.'

The man stammered back:

'The English Herr was in a hurry.'

The stranger replied:

‘That is why, I suppose, you wished him to go on to Bukovina?’ As he spoke he smiled. The lamplight fell on a hard-looking mouth, with very red lips and sharp-looking teeth, white as ivory.

One of my companions whispered to another that line from Burger’s ‘Lenore’:

For the dead travel fast.

The strange driver evidently heard the words, for he looked up with a glinting grin. The passenger turned his face away, crossing himself yet again.

‘Give me the Herr’s luggage,’ said the stranger.

With exceeding alacrity my bags were handed out and put in the calash.

Then I descended from the coach and the calash driver helped me up with a grip of steel. Without a word he shook his reins. The black horses turned, and we swept into the darkness of the Pass. As I looked back I glimpsed in the lamplight the steam from the coach horses, and projected against it the figures of my late companions – crossing themselves. Their driver cracked his whip and called to his horses, and they rumbled away towards Bukovina.

As they disappeared into the darkness I felt a strange chill, and a lonely feeling came over me; but a cloak was thrown over my shoulders, a rug across my knees, and the driver said in excellent German:

‘The night is chill, mein Herr, and my master the Count bade me take all care of you. There is a flask of slivovitz (plum brandy) underneath the seat.’

I did not take any, but it was a comfort to know it was there. I felt a little strange, and not a little frightened. Had there been any alternative to that unknown night journey I should have taken it. The carriage went at a hard pace for some time, then took a sharp turn down another straight road. It seemed to me that we were going over the same ground again and again, so I took note of some salient points, and my suspicions were confirmed. I wanted to ask the driver what this all meant, but I feared to do so. Curious to know how the time was passing, I struck a match and looked at my watch.

It was a few minutes before midnight.

This gave me a shock which I could not explain, and I waited with a sick feeling of suspense.

Then a dog began to howl far down the road – a long, agonized

wailing, as if from fear. The howl was taken up by another dog, then another, and another, until, borne on the wind sighing through the Pass, a wild cacophony filled the air. At the first howl the horses began to strain and rear, but the driver spoke to them soothingly, and they quieted down, but shivered and sweated as though after a fearful runaway. And now, far up the mountains on each side of us, began the louder and sharper howling of wolves, which affected both the horses and myself in the same way – for I was minded to jump from the calash and run, while they reared again and plunged madly, so that the driver had to use all his great strength to keep them from bolting.

In a few minutes, however, my ears got accustomed to the sound, and the horses calmed enough for the driver to descend and soothe them. Petting them, he whispered something in their ears, as I have heard of horse-tamers doing, and with extraordinary effect, for under his caresses they became manageable again, though still they trembled.

The driver again took his seat. Shaking his reins, he started us off at a great pace. This time, after the Pass, he suddenly turned up a narrow roadway to the right.

Soon we were hemmed in by trees, which in places arched right over the roadway till we passed as through a tunnel, with great frowning rocks guarding us boldly on either side. Though we were in shelter, we could hear the rising wind moan and whistle through the rocks, and the branches of the trees crashed together as we swept along.

It grew colder still and fine, powdery snow began to fall. Soon we, and all around us, were blanketed with white. The keen wind still carried the howling of the dogs, though this grew fainter as we went on.

Meanwhile the baying of the wolves sounded ever nearer, as though they were closing round us. I grew dreadfully afraid, and the horses shared my fear.

But the driver seemed not in the least disturbed. He kept turning his head left and right, but I could not see anything through the darkness.

Suddenly, away on our left, I saw a faint blue flame.

The driver, seeing it at the same moment, at once checked the horses, jumped to the ground, and disappeared. I did not know what to do, the less as the howling of wolves grew closer; but while I wondered the driver suddenly appeared again, silently took his seat, and we resumed our journey.

I must have fallen asleep and kept dreaming of the incident, for

it seemed to repeat endlessly, and now it is like a recurrent awful nightmare:

The flame appears so near the road that even in the darkness I can follow the driver's movements. He goes rapidly towards the blue flame. It must be very faint, for it does not illumine the place around it at all. The driver gathers a few stones and forms them into some strange device. Then a curious effect: when he stands between me and the flame he does not obstruct it, I can see its ghostly flicker all the same. This startles me, but as the effect is only momentary, I take it that my straining eyes deceive me. For a time there are no blue flames, and we speed onwards through the gloom, with the howling wolves in a circle all around us.

Soon the driver descends again, and this time he goes further afield.

During his absence the horses begin to tremble worse than ever and to snort and scream with fright. I cannot see any cause for it, for the wolves have fallen silent. Suddenly the moon, sailing through the black clouds, appears behind the jagged crest of a beetling, pine-clad rock. By its light I see around us a ring of wolves, with white teeth and lolling red tongues; with long, sinewy limbs and shaggy hair. In the ghastly silence which holds them they are a hundred times more terrible than when they howled, and I feel paralysed by fear.

All at once the wolves howl together again, as though triggered by the moonlight. The horses rear about and roll helpless eyes that are painful to look upon – the ring of living terror encompassing them on every side. I shout to the coachman then beat the side of the calash, hoping by the noise to scare the wolves away – yet they slink ever closer. Suddenly – I know not how – the coachman reappears in the roadway, his voice raised harshly in imperious command.

As he waves his long arms the wolves fall back. Just then a heavy cloud obscures the moon, and again we are in darkness.

My next memory is of the driver climbing back into the calash, the wolves having disappeared. This was all so uncanny that a dreadful fear came over me, and I was afraid to move or speak. The time seemed interminable as we swept on our way, now in dreadful utter darkness, for the rolling clouds concealed the moon. We kept on, ever upward, until suddenly the driver was pulling up the horses in the courtyard of a vast ruined castle, from whose tall black windows came no ray of light, and whose broken battlements showed only as a jagged line against the sky – moonlit above the clouds.