



Terrifying Tales

Dracula

Retold By
Nicola Baxter



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? Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to? The woman asked Jonathan Harker. He was staying the night at an inn in remote Transylvania, on his way to meet the Count at Dracula Castle.



The next day, he set off on the last part of his journey.
Carried by coach through wild, mountainous
countryside, as night fell, he was still not prepared for
his sight of the feared castle.



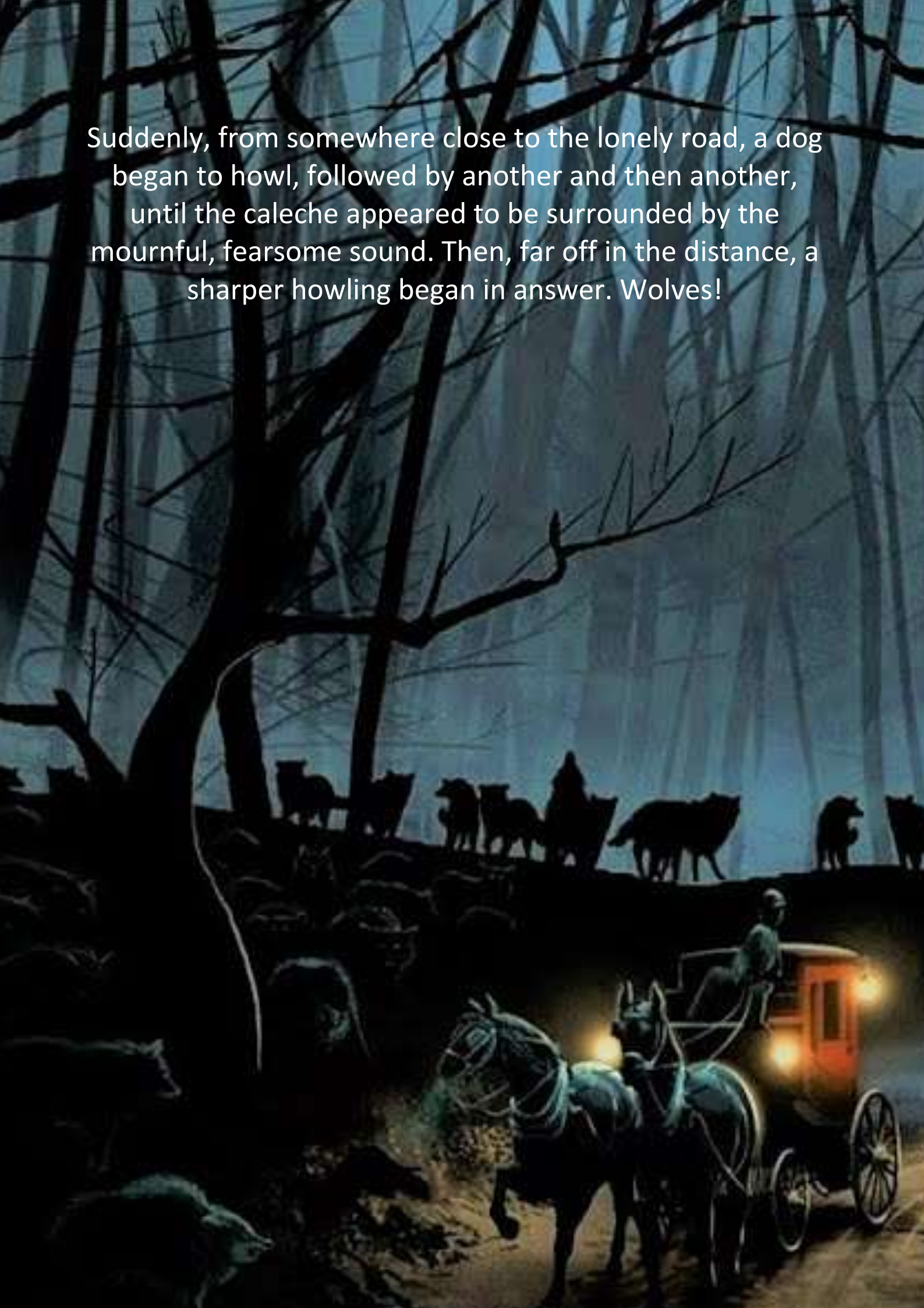
As arranged, Harker alighted at the end of a rocky mountain pass to await a coach sent from his host to take him the rest of the way. There were dark, rolling clouds overhead, and the air was heavy with an oppressive sense of thunder.



From out of the blackness, a caleche drawn by four coal-black horses arrived, driven by a tall, bearded man, his face shadowed by a great black hat. Only his eyes were visible, and they seemed to gleam red in the lamplight.



Suddenly, from somewhere close to the lonely road, a dog began to howl, followed by another and then another, until the caleche appeared to be surrounded by the mournful, fearsome sound. Then, far off in the distance, a sharper howling began in answer. Wolves!



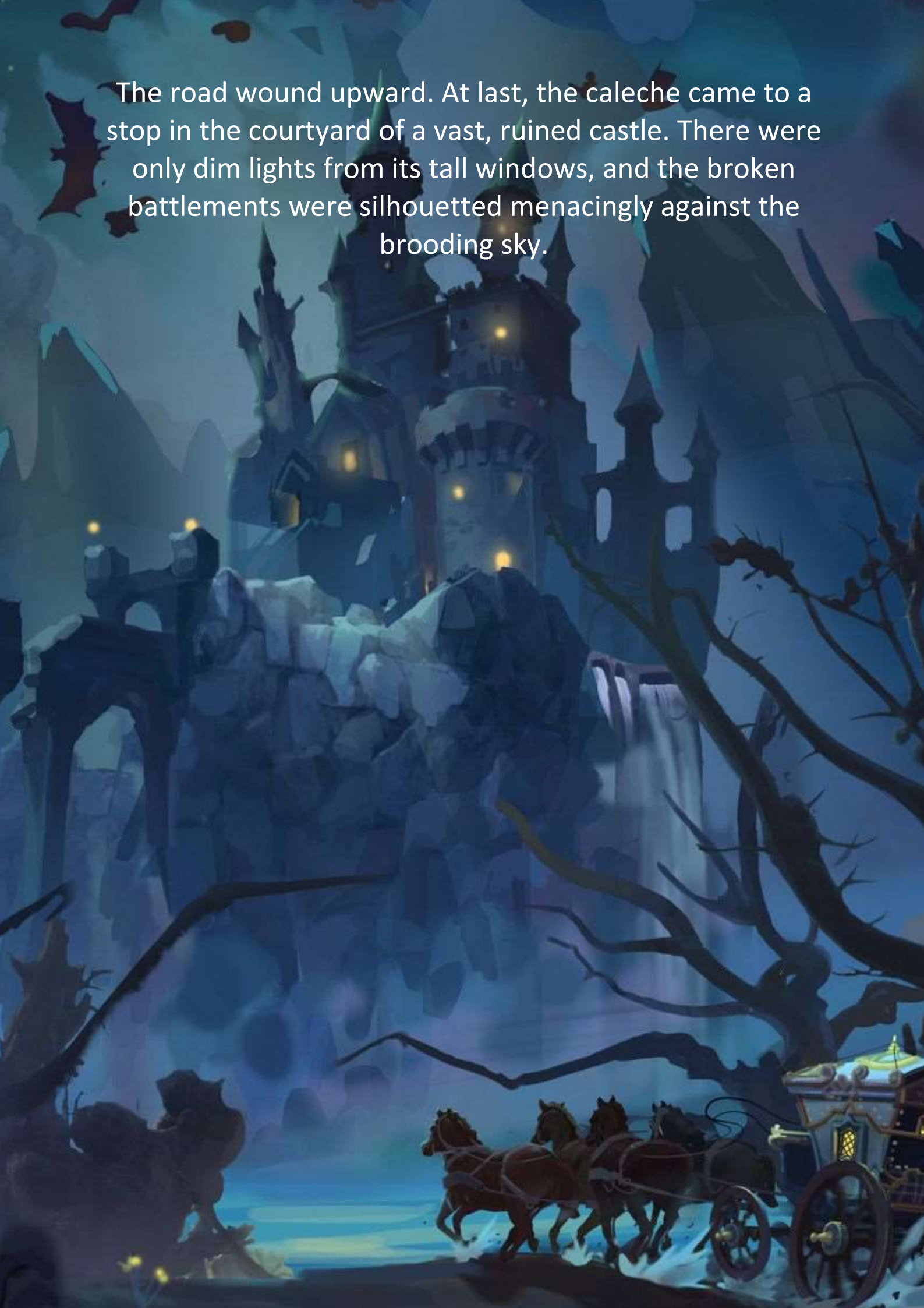
Harker became increasingly unnerved, especially as the driver stopped from time to time and disappeared into the forest and the darkness.



On one such occasion, the horses began to tremble and scream with fright. To his horror, Harker saw that the caleche was surrounded by a ring of wolves, howling in the moonlight. In his terror, Harker believed himself doomed, but the coachman returned and seemed to banish the wolves by some mysterious power.



The road wound upward. At last, the caleche came to a stop in the courtyard of a vast, ruined castle. There were only dim lights from its tall windows, and the broken battlements were silhouetted menacingly against the brooding sky.



The nervous passenger stood before the great wooden door of the castle. From within came the sound of chains being unfastened and bolts drawn back.



Slowly, the door creaked open, revealing a tall old man with a long white moustache, dressed from head to foot in black. He held a lamp in his hand, and strange shadows flickered around him as he welcomed Harker into the castle. It was the Count Himself.



Inside, Harker felt his spirits lifting. Newly qualified as a solicitor, he had come from Exeter, England, to advise the Count on the purchase of some property in London. This was his first time in so wild a part of the world, for the Carpathian Mountains in those days were known to shelter an almost medieval way of life.



But the young man found himself shown to a comfortable, warm and well-lit suite of rooms, where good food and wine were laid out. The Count himself waited on his guest. Although much cheered, Harker could not help but notice the cruel cast of the Count's face, his peculiarly sharp teeth and his pointed finger nails.

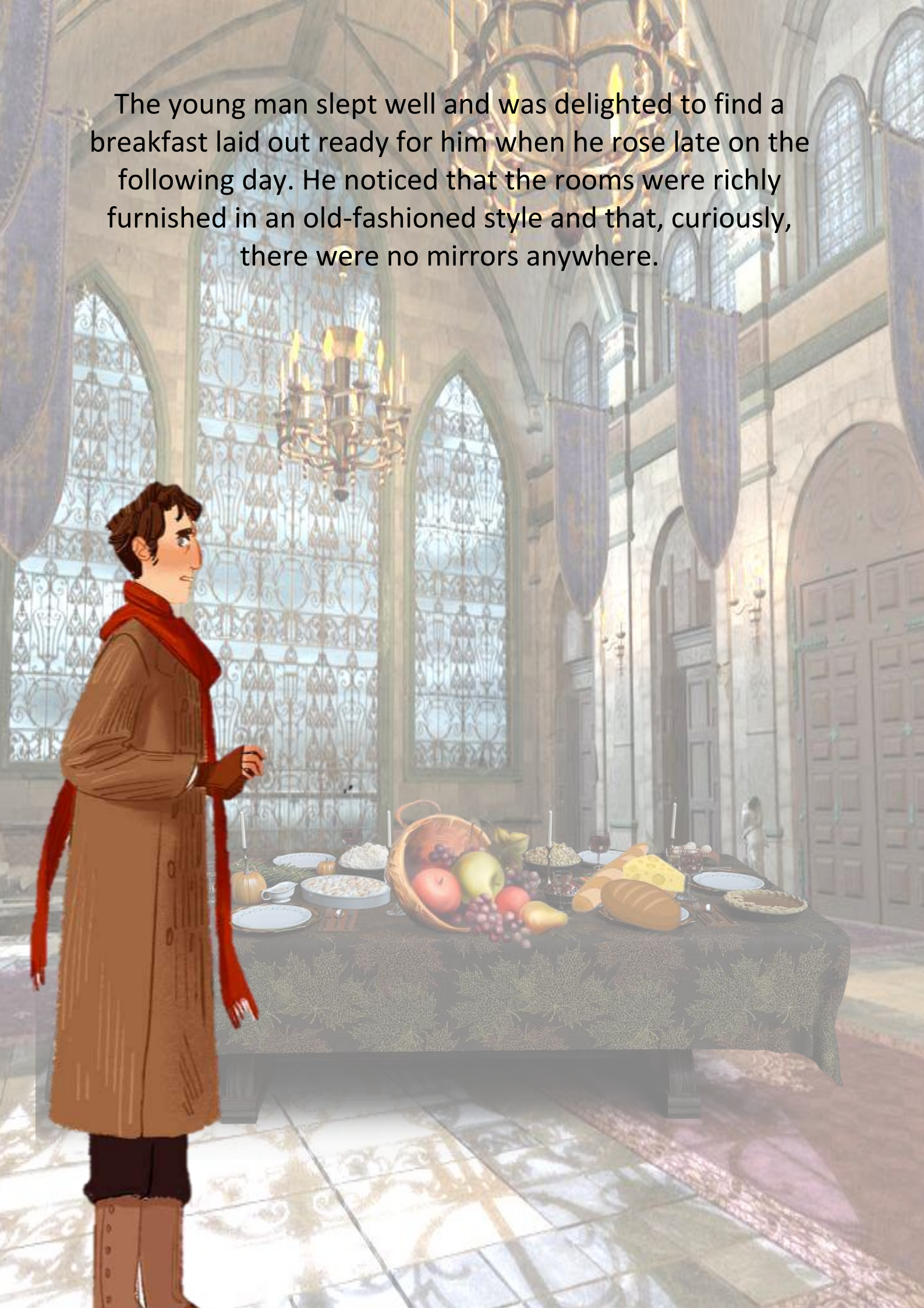


Suddenly, the sound of howling wolves again filled the air, although from far away. The Count's eyes gleamed, "Listen to them, the children of the night. What music they make!" he said.

Telling his visitor that he would be away until the afternoon of the following day, the Count left Harker to rest, bidding him sleep as late as he wished.



The young man slept well and was delighted to find a breakfast laid out ready for him when he rose late on the following day. He noticed that the rooms were richly furnished in an old-fashioned style and that, curiously, there were no mirrors anywhere.



As dusk fell, Harker was once again joined by the Count, who, although he did not join his guest in his meals, was happy to talk, telling of the proud and bloody history of his family. He wished, too, to speak of the property that Harker's firm had found for him.



The young man described it, and the Count seemed well pleased by its isolation and the fact that it was old and large. "I love the shade and the shadow," said the old man, "and would be alone with my thoughts when I may." Something about his words seemed distinctly sinister.



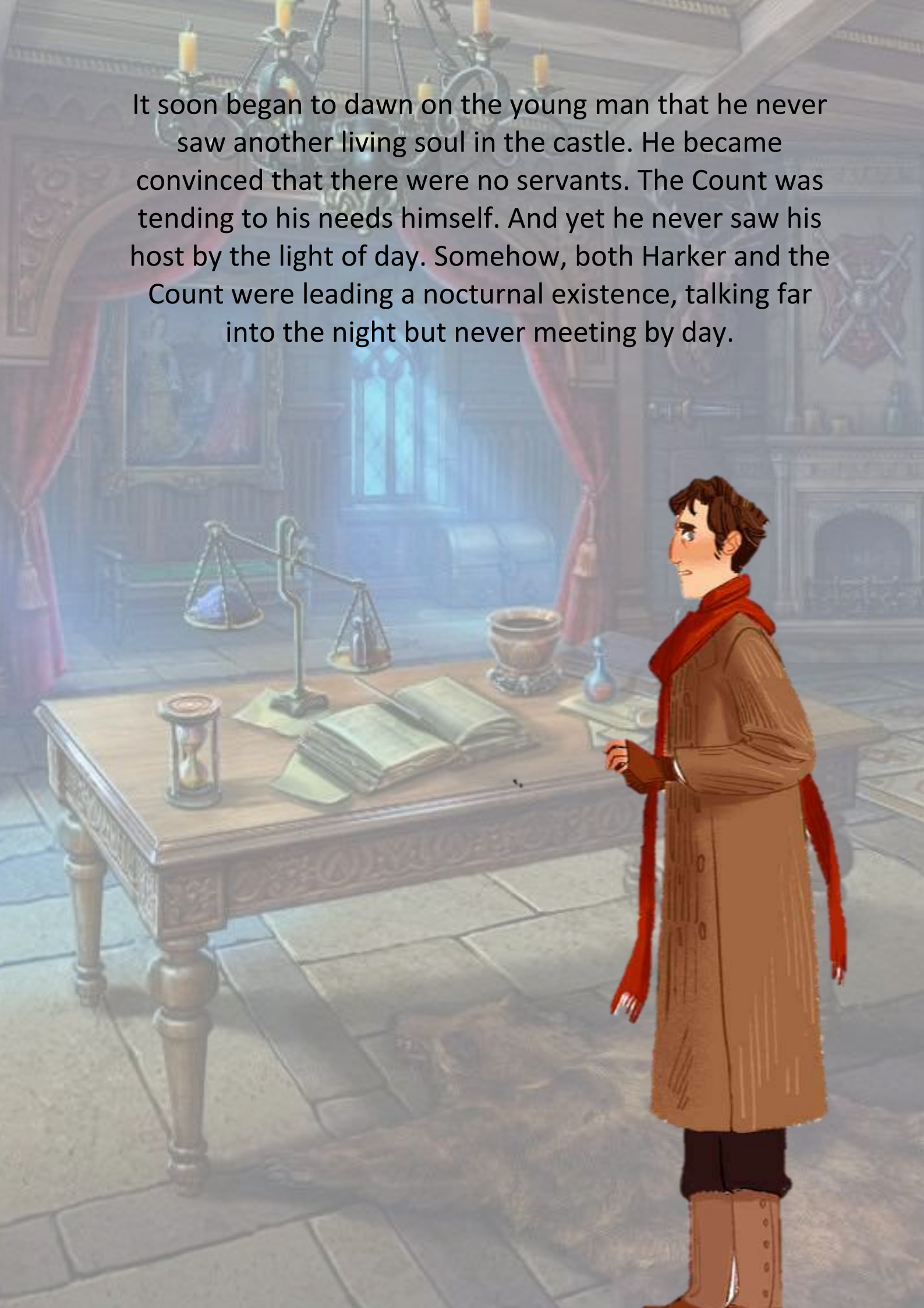
Days passed, each recorded in Harker's secret journal. On the second day, using his pocket shaving mirror, the solicitor was shocked when the Count came up behind him and surprised him. There had been no image of the Count in the mirror!



The jolt caused Harker to cut himself. Seeing the blood, the Count's eyes gleamed demonically, and his hands reached involuntarily for the young man's throat. At the touch of the crucifix given to Harker by the old woman at the inn, the Count withdrew with a shudder, however.



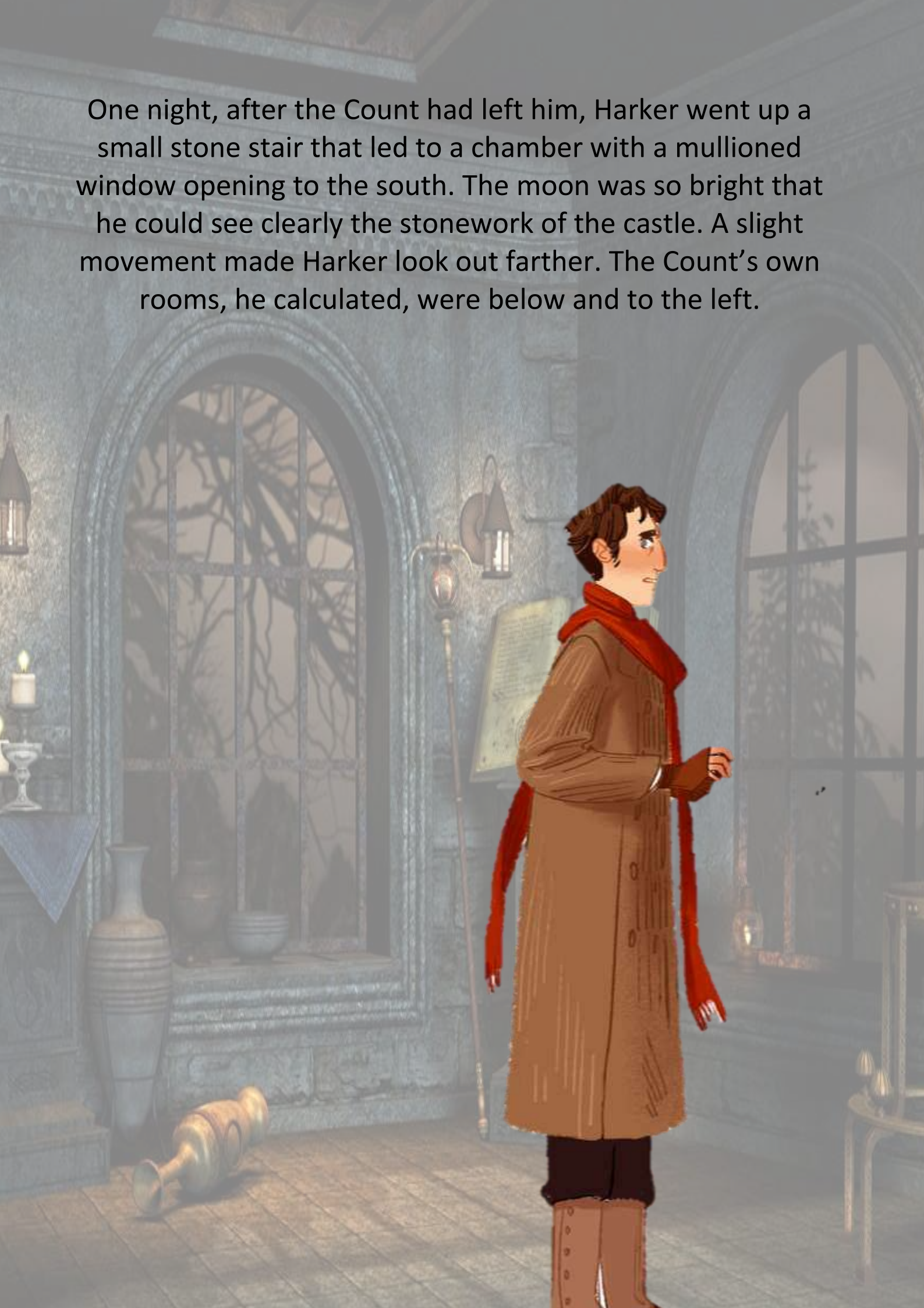
It soon began to dawn on the young man that he never saw another living soul in the castle. He became convinced that there were no servants. The Count was tending to his needs himself. And yet he never saw his host by the light of day. Somehow, both Harker and the Count were leading a nocturnal existence, talking far into the night but never meeting by day.



The strain of it began to tell on the young man. He longed for home and the company of his fiancée, Mina. His discomfort increased when he found that he was never to sleep anywhere but in his own rooms and hinted at dark consequences should he disobey.



One night, after the Count had left him, Harker went up a small stone stair that led to a chamber with a mullioned window opening to the south. The moon was so bright that he could see clearly the stonework of the castle. A slight movement made Harker look out farther. The Count's own rooms, he calculated, were below and to the left.



To the young man's horror, he saw the Count himself emerging from his window, wrapped in a great, black cape. He seemed to creep like some kind of animal down the sheer wall, disappearing into the darkness below.



Shortly after this, a further horror awaited the young man, who once more ventured out of his rooms and found an ancient chamber, decorated beautifully in the style of several centuries before.



As he stood there, three beautiful women appeared in the moonlight, their skins pale and their eyes glowing almost red in the gloom. The young man was strongly attracted to them, although a sense of terror grew in him as the dark-haired one neared him. He saw her licking her red lips, which opened over white, pointed teeth, as she leaned forward to kiss his naked throat.



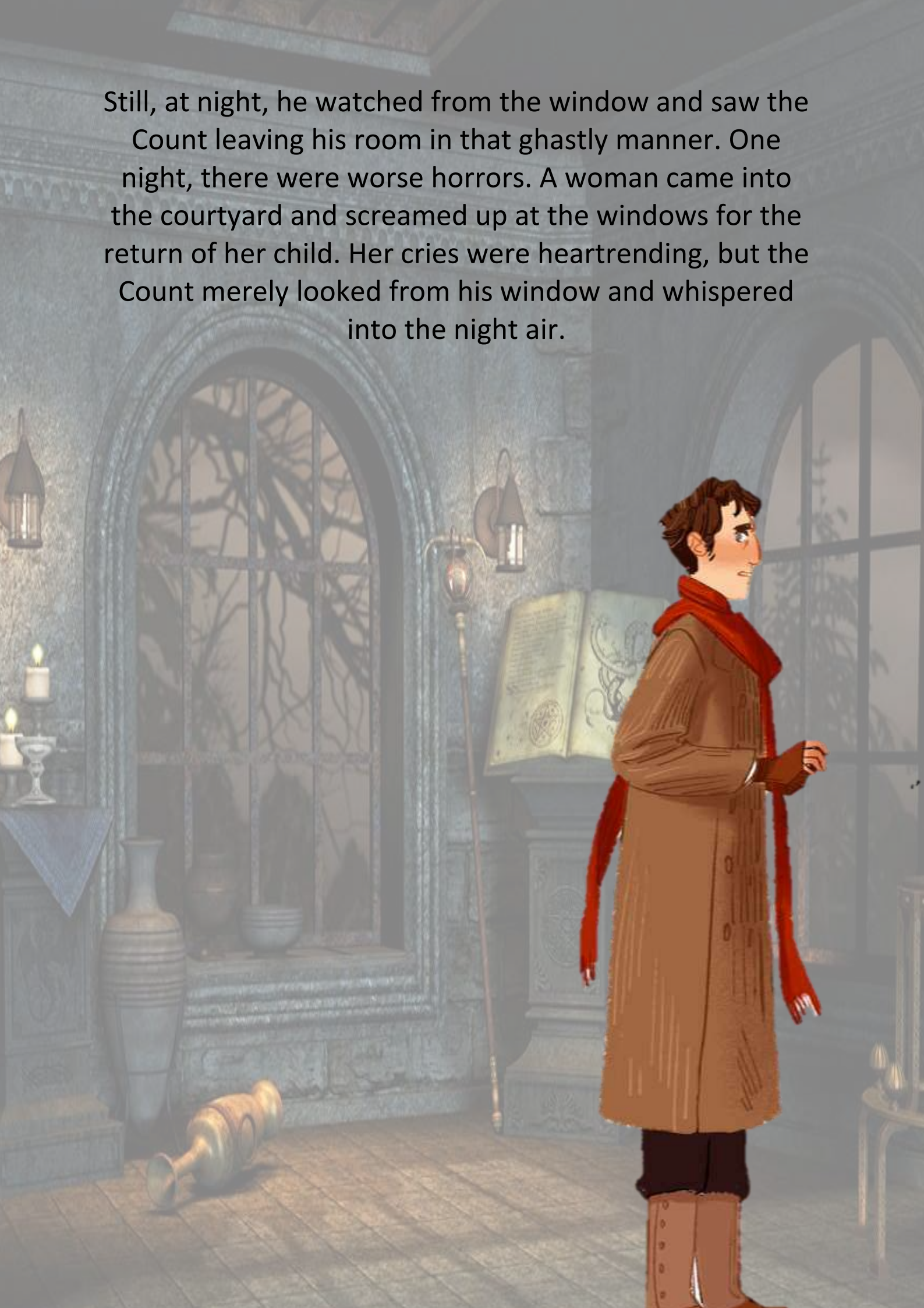
The moment was shattered by the arrival of the Count, his eyes burning with fury. He pushed the women back and told them that Harker was his own until he had finished with him. “Are we to have nothing tonight?” asked one of the women. In answer, the Count threw down a bag on the floor. Something living squirmed within it and, as the woman fell upon it, Harker almost thought he heard the terrified cry of a child.



By now, Harker believed himself to be doomed. When the Count asked him to write postdated letters, telling of his journey home, he was convinced that his last days had come.



Still, at night, he watched from the window and saw the Count leaving his room in that ghastly manner. One night, there were worse horrors. A woman came into the courtyard and screamed up at the windows for the return of her child. Her cries were heartrending, but the Count merely looked from his window and whispered into the night air.



As if in answer, a massive pack of wolves streamed into the courtyard. When they left, their fangs dripping, there was no sign of the desperate woman.



Feeling that he had nothing to lose, Harker decided on a desperate course of action. Realising that he never saw the Count in daylight, he decided to climb down the castle walls as he saw his host do.



The descent was perilous but successful. Harker climbed into the Count's room and found it deserted, furnished in the style of three hundred years before.



Following a narrow passage, he stumbled across the vaults of a ruined chapel, surrounded by the graves of the Count's ancestors. Several huge wooden boxes, filled with earth, stood open on the floor. In one of the them, the Count himself lay as if dead. Harker knew for sure now that the Count was no ordinary mortal.



When the Count finally told Harker that he would shortly be able to leave, the young man was deeply suspicious. He was determined to find his host by daylight once more and to search his body for the key to the outer door. Perhaps there was one last chance of escape.



The following day, Harker once more descended to the vaults. This time, the lid of the box was in position, but the young man wrenched it off. A horrifying sight met his eyes.



There lay the Count as before, but this time he looked as if he had dined well. Blood dripped from his red lips and the corners from his mouth. He looked younger. His white hair was now darker and his skin was smooth and gorged with blood.



With a feeling of sick horror, Harker's first instinct was to attempt to rid the world of such a monster. He grasped the nearest thing to hand – a shovel left from the filling of the boxes – and brought it down upon the vile face of the Count.



As he did so, the head turned, and the eyes of the vampire fixed themselves on his terrified assailant. Although the blow caused a gash that would have killed a mortal man, the last thing that Harker saw as the lid of the box fall, with the lips of Dracula drawn back in the hellish, never-to-be-forgotten grin of sheer evil.



The story of Dracula is told in a novel of the same name, written by Bram Stoker, and Irish author who lived between 1847 and 1912. Some say that he based his “hero” on a fifteenth century Romanian prince. The historical Dracula certainly had a reputation for appalling cruelty (he was also known as Vlad the Impaler). But there is no record linking him with vampirism.



The idea of the “undead”, who drink the blood of the living, has, however, been around for centuries. One gruesome explanation is that in the days before brain scan and heart monitors, some unfortunate people in comas were thought to be dead and were buried alive.

Occasionally these coffins would later be reopened, revealing the horror of a corpse with a bloody face and hands where it had claimed and bitten at the coffin lid in an attempt to escape.





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