

When Count Dracula gives up his evil ways forever and joins a Goth rock band on a tour of America, his donation of blood ensures that one dying New Orleans lawyer will miraculously survive and never be the same again.

Vampyre Blood: Eight Pints of Trouble

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VAMPYRE BLOOD

EIGHT PINTS OF TROUBLE

BY

GEORGE EARL PARKER

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THE LORD OF THE DARK

Transylvania – Present Day

He lingered in the darkest shadows staring at a shimmering pool of white light as the roar of a thousand dragons filled his ears. Like a tragic lover in a mystery play seeking the most ardent of his heart's desires, he had often stood in such fashion, lusting after one sweet caress, while restraining himself from leaping into the soft warm glow.

"She lives to enchant," he murmured. "She is a temptress, sometimes cold and sometimes hot, but always alluring."

Her radiance had beguiled him for centuries: what would it be like if he fell under her spell? What dreams awaited him? What nightmares? What adventures?

The wind whispered through the trees urging him on, while a stab of doubt struck him in the chest with such force he couldn't move. What if his miraculous cure was a lie? Stepping into a beam of full sunlight was instant death to a vampyre. It vexed him mightily to hesitate, for hesitation was not his strongest suit.

"There shall be one death here today," he told the breeze. "One way or another, I shall be reduced to dust, or I shall die to myself and be reborn."

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Mere steps away, rays of sunlight spilled through the leafy canopy, and danced seductively on the forest floor.

It's now or never, he thought. For if there was one thing he'd gleaned from centuries of nocturnal meditation, it was that a step in any new direction required trust. Trust was the key to all metamorphosis.

His constitution steeled, he flexed his muscles to move, and a spine-chilling roar screamed out of nowhere, followed by blinding flashes of light.

He was perplexed. Was this some evil necromancy designed to staunch his flow into the future? Or was it a warning, that hideous beasts would tear him limb from limb if he dared try?

It was a conundrum of epic proportions. But in the vast complexity of it all he was reminded of his lineage: he was a nobleman, a lord. His bloodline would not allow him to vacillate; he made decisions and adhered to them for good or bad.

As the sands ran out for hesitation he gathered up his fear, turned its power to courage, and stepped into the light.

It had been forever since he'd stood inside a sunbeam, and this wasn't just one, this was a thousand of them crisscrossed in every direction over his path. The wind breathed a sigh of relief, and the leaves shook and chattered wildly, as rays of sunlight jiggled, danced, splashed and played all around him.

He had been absolutely incapable of emotion for as long as he could remember, but instantly he found himself surfing the tunnel of a tidal wave that emanated from deep in his beleaguered soul. He shook like an erupting volcano, shed tears like a raging waterfall, and his ears ached from the pure unmitigated joy that pounded out of his heart.

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It had worked! Nothing could stop him now; he was free, free to do as he pleased

The maddening roar of beasts had grown to a stampede, and their growling and snarling was drowning his thoughts. Leaving the pool of light, he moved toward the source of the sound. He gazed one way and the other along a living green wall, as if a huge pair of clippers had trimmed the forest like a massive hedge, as far as the eye could see.

He reached out, parted some leaves, and gazed at a gooey, oozy, gray mess of motion that confounded him beyond belief. Is this more spell binding? He wondered, then it dawned on him, the tears of joy he had shed so abundantly were obscuring his vision. Blinking them away, he gazed curiously upon a scene he had no words in his mind to describe.

Huge metal beasts of all shapes and sizes roared by on round rubber legs. *No, no, no*, he told himself, they're not legs, they're wheels! It was true, they were wheels, but they moved ten times faster than those on any horse-drawn carriage.

What on earth had happened? Overnight he had changed, and inexplicably the world around him had also changed. It was a profound mystery, but one he would have to solve later, because just yesterday evening he had made a promise to Igor that he would start afresh in a land called America, and a gentleman never breaks a promise.

Transylvania – 150 Years Earlier

He was dead but it didn't matter, he awoke on the stroke of sunset every single night, and had done so for what seemed like an absolute eternity. He had a memory, an excellent memory, and he'd had a privileged education in the days when an

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education of any sort was hard to come by. He was used to the finer things in life like powdered wigs and Chinese silk underwear, crystal champagne flutes and string quartets, absolute power and unquestioning loyalty.

In those brief and fleeting moments, an eyelid flutter away from consciousness, he seemed to recall scenes from a happier existence, a time to which he wished to return. But that was before the hunger set in. A ravenous hunger that emanated from mystical depths, haunted his heart like a petulant ghost, and transmuted itself into a lust for blood.

He was the father of millions, millions who lay like him in rat-infested basements. He was their king, the king of the undead, the High Lord Count Dracula, and he was really bored with this ridiculous existence.

What king ever had to put up with this night in and night out? He asked himself. There wasn't one example he could recall, and always during this momentary suspension of time he would realize one very tiny but significant fact. The difference between good and evil was only one's point of view.

It was an infinitesimal moment that swept past him on his long highway of darkness. It was a seed, and it is the nature of seeds to take root, no matter where they sprout. Flinging back the coffin lid, he roared out a blood-curdling cry, a cry that pierced the day like a dagger, and plunged it into night.

For hundreds of years his experience of time had been disjointed. It seemed like he was everywhere and nowhere, both present and missing. He was an enigma to himself, and he knew in his heart of hearts there had to be something better.

He was enslaved by blood. Virgin blood was his elixir; it sang to him like a siren, and he chased its sweet mystery from dusk until dawn. During this night he had found and entranced a beautiful young maiden who knew nothing about the union of male and female. She was pure and unsullied, and he was just

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about to sink his super sharp canines into her neck when a cursed crowd rushed out of the darkness brandishing crosses, garlands of garlic, wooden stakes, and torches of fire.

It was getting more and more difficult to dine like the aristocrat he was; these mortals were all over his ass like a bad case of hemorrhoids, and the outcome was always the same: run like the wind before he could even imbibe one drop of the precious sweet elixir.

He had plenty of money. The Swiss bank in which he had deposited his vast family fortune had increased his wealth tenfold. His nocturnal gypsy-like existence had forced him to invest in numerous real estate holdings, because the cursed peasants were continually burning his house down, and he always needed another to run to.

After each debacle, of course, he would quietly order his bankers to sell the land, which invariably netted a very tidy profit, and in this way he had steadily doubled his fortune again. It was the strange irony of evil, and the more he stared at his monthly bank statements the more he craved release from hatred and derision.

As he ran through the forest, wet branches and leaves slapped against his face and hands. Behind him he could hear wolfhounds howling amid voices shouting curses intended to strike him dead, and as he got closer to the quaint little glade where his farmhouse stood, he realized that once again the damned peasants had torched his lair.

The raging fire threw sparks, flames, and billowing smoke into the air as he burst through the edge of the forest, ran up the path, and disappeared into the blazing doorway. He thought not of himself but of the one faithful mortal who had stuck with him through thick and thin: his trusted Igor. Holding the damp sleeve of his coat to his mouth, and dodging burning debris, he made his way to the study. There his eye met the cruel vision of

his manservant trapped beneath a burning beam, and a wave of sadness washed over him.

Igor's shaven head poked out through shards of charred wood and the tattoos that adorned every inch of his skin seemed to glow in the firelight.

"Igor, my poor Igor, dead too soon," cried the Count, kneeling beside the lifeless form. He swept debris from the short stocky body, remembering how simple the man was, how compassionate, and loyal.

"I'm not quite dead, sir," said a voice through a cloud of smoke, "I'm just stuck under this bloody beam." The Count stared down at the startled wild eyes that shone from the tattooed face.

"Trusted friend, faithful servant, what can I do for you?" he asked helplessly, extending his hand.

"Save yourself, sir," Igor said bravely.

"No, Igor, this is the end. I shall perish with you, and extinguish my evil ways forever in this purifying fire."

"I appreciate the gesture, sir, but you can't do that, you've got an eternity ahead of you. Just think of all the things you'd miss!"

"No, this curse I bear is a wretched existence. I can't enjoy my money, and I certainly can't go anywhere, it must end."

"You could do something about it, sir," Igor wheezed, "if you're sincere about giving up your evil ways."

"I am, I am," the Count lamented. "It's very depressing, every time I stop somewhere for a light snack people go crazy, and they're always so vicious."

"I've heard of a place, sir, a land of the free where you can hold your head up high in dignity."

The Count was intrigued. "But Igor, where is this place? Tell me, and we shall be away."

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"No, it's not for me, sir," he coughed, "and anyway, the villagers will save me, they always do."

"It's true," replied the Count. "They appreciate your simple honesty, as do I. So, tell me the name of this place."

"Oh no, sir, first you have to promise to give up your evil ways."

"But how can I do that?" The Count asked. "I'm an addict, I sleep all day and run around craving blood all night."

"Now, now, sir," Igor said, shaking his head, "all you have to do is seek out the old wizard at the heart of the forest and cross his palm with silver. He'll lift your curse; those wizards will do anything for silver."

"That's true!" The Count declared, astounded. "I just need a powerful wizard to lift my curse! Brilliant! Why didn't I think of that before?"

"Because you are enslaved by your cravings," Igor answered. "Anything you do night in and night out eventually becomes boring, and you've only just seen the error of your ways."

"What a selfless man you are!" the Count declared. "Unlike me, all ego and vanity. You truly are my compass, steering me back into the world of light."

"So, do you promise?"

"I do, I do, I do," the Count repeated fervently. "It's what I want more than anything in the world."

"It makes me so happy to hear you say that." Igor beamed. "And once you get off the blood, you'll be happy again, you'll see."

"So tell me about this place. Where is it? What's it like?"

"It's far away across the sea," Igor gushed, "and when you get there, engage a lawyer to protect you from all this persecution."

"A lawyer!" The Count grinned. "What a brilliant idea."

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Although his exuberance was swiftly thwarted, as howls of dogs, and cries of the mob stole in from outside.

"Okay, you'd better be off," said Igor. "That'll be the villagers."

"But, Igor, you haven't told me the name of this sanctuary, this paradise!"

"Oh, dear me, no, sir," he chuckled, "I didn't, did I? It's a new place, hasn't been going long; it's called America."

The Count jumped to his feet and stroked his chin. "America," he repeated. "I'll begin a new life there, and make you proud of me, Igor."

"Goodbye, sir."

"Goodbye, old friend," cried the Count, as the angry crowd rushed in through one door, and he left by the other.

* * *

As the moon crept through the sky, the Count waded deeper and deeper into the dense heart of the forest. For hours he trudged along, knowing it was imperative to find the wizard before dawn. He no longer concerned himself with the villagers, for they wouldn't follow him this far into the woods; they were afraid of the enchantments that lurked there.

He normally had an impeccable sense of direction, and therefore it was some time before he realized he was completely and utterly lost. He had no idea whether it was night or day, the forest canopy was so thick. But he did feel uncommonly tired. The thought never occurred to him that he needed to find his coffin, and neither did it seem strange that he lay down exactly where he was and fell into a deep, deep, sleep.

"Who are you and why have you come here?" an authoritative voice breathed into his dream.

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"I am the High Lord Count Dracula, and I seek the aid and comfort of the esteemed necromancer who dwells hereabout."

"Ah, yes," said the voice with a hint of resignation, "it was prophesied you would come one day."

"To whom am I addressing myself?" the Count asked.

"I am the wizard Relphig," the voice intoned, "and this is the only way I can appear to you until all your wishes are granted."

"But you haven't appeared," the Count stated.

"Exactly," replied the wizard. "Now what's the problem?"

"I sleep all day, and I run around all night craving blood. But I'm bored; I need a challenge. Something in the world of light."

"It sounds like you want to become a saint," Relphig said questioningly.

"Goodness no," the Count laughed, "I want to be right in the middle, between good and evil."

"You've thought this through then, you know all of the challenges it encompasses."

"Yes, my mind's made up."

"Your body has to be altered, it will take some time."

"Take as much time as you need."

"Then it's settled, your wish is granted."

He was on wizard time, and he slept on in the forest for one hundred and fifty years. Upon awakening his first act was to plunge himself into a pool of sunlight, after which, with tears of joy streaming from his eyes, he found himself gazing through some foliage at a very mystifying scene.

"What are you doing, mister?" The voice startled him, and he glanced over his shoulder to see a youth standing behind him. A dark gothic countenance stared out from beneath a shock

of tangled black hair. He was tall, as skinny as a beanpole and he was holding drumsticks in his hands with which he played his body. His black clothes were covered with metallic studs and clasps, and he exuded self-confidence, almost to the point of arrogance.

"Who are you?" the Count asked, letting the leaves fall back and turning around to face his inquisitor.

"I'm Waldo!" the lad announced petulantly. "What are you doing?"

The Count smiled and bowed deeply, holding one hand across his stomach, throwing the other out level with his shoulder and twirling it like a propeller. "I am Count Dracula," he said with a flourish, his cape rippling in the breeze.

The kid regarded him stonily, tapping one drumstick against his leg, and the other on his shoulder. "I wouldn't use that name if I were you, not in these parts."

The Count was perplexed. "What name should I use then?"

Waldo sneered and shrugged his shoulders. "Any, just not that one, and I still want to know what you're doing."

"I was watching the metal beasts stampeding there, beyond the edge of the forest."

Waldo smiled indulgently. "Now tell me truly. Have you escaped from the crazy house?"

The Count was baffled. "What's a crazy house? I don't think I've ever heard such a term."

"Well you've got this whole gothic, Dracula thing going on, but your clothes are lame. They're a couple of hundred years out of date. You look like you've just come from a nineteenth-century fancy dress party," he declared.

"Well, yes, it is the nineteenth century, but I have most certainly not come from a fancy dress party."

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"It's not the nineteenth century, you idiot," Waldo shot back. "It's the twenty-first. Are you on some kind of medication? You're not dangerous are you?"

The Count grasped at the straws waving in his mind, and kept his composure. "So I'm in the future, and these strange metal beasts. . ."

Waldo interrupted him with a laugh, "They're cars, automobiles! They're what people travel around in."

"What you tell me is monstrous strange," the Count mused gravely, "and quite obviously true." Recalling recent events, he surmised there was a time differential between this world, and the wizard's world, and he had been thrown into the future. "I shall need to procure one of these car-automobiles," he continued, "for I myself am journeying to a land called America."

Waldo had heard some funny things in his short life, but this insane statement grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, doubled him up, and threw him to the ground where he thrashed around amid explosive howls and guffaws. The Count took a step back, and regarded him suspiciously.

"Now, you are acting like a crazy lunatic!" he charged, and with that Waldo erupted into a body-shaking belly laugh that flipped him over onto his back like a deranged beetle.

"Oh wow," Waldo said breathlessly. "Has nothing ever struck you as being so funny you just couldn't stop laughing?"

"No," the Count replied, "not in a lifetime I fear."

Waldo dragged himself up from the forest floor covered in dead leaves. "You've never laughed? Are you serious?"

"It was never a requirement," the Count stated.

"Laughter's not a requirement, it just happens spontaneously when something's funny."

The Count stared back at him blankly.

"You really don't understand do you?"

"I think maybe I used to a long time ago, but I've forgotten."

Waldo stared back at him, at the gaunt features, the long hair, the pale complexion. He had to admit, this guy really did look like the Count Dracula of legend, but he was a mess, and he stank. Then he imagined him cleaned up, and he put him on a stage with the biggest Goth band in the world, his band. He imagined the publicity that would ensue would be priceless. It could take them to the top and beyond.

"I'll teach you how to laugh," Waldo said, "but first we're gonna change your name to Drac. It's okay to think you're Count Dracula, you can play that up as much as you want, it'll be good for business."

"But I am Count Dracula."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course you are," Waldo pandered, "but you have to listen to me. You're the one who's lost in this forest in the wrong century, and I have the solution to get you out of here, alive."

The Count had to admit to himself the lad had a point.

"So here's what we're gonna do. I'm gonna take you back to the squat and find you some new clothes, those rags are awful, and you stink, you need a shower."

The Count was flabbergasted at this overly courteous behavior. "I'm speechless," he added humbly.

"Yeah, well you haven't heard the best part yet."

"I haven't?" muttered the Count.

"Not by a long shot, you see right now the world belongs to the Techno Zombies."

"The Techno Zombies," the Count repeated. "That sounds awful."

"No, no," Waldo cautioned. "It's great. We're a Goth band." The Count stared at him, utterly and completely mystified by the terminology. "What the Techno Zombies want,

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the Techno Zombies get, and right now the Techno Zombies want you."

"Me! Why?"

"Because you epitomize everything we are. You totally look like a vampyre dude, and all you have to do is walk out on stage a few times while we play. The crowd's gonna go wild."

"I don't know," the Count hesitated, "I have a whole plan, and this Techno thing seems like a distraction."

"You'd get paid," Waldo added.

"I really don't need the money."

"You'd be famous."

"I've been infamous my whole life, there's no attraction there."

"Well, there is one other thing," Waldo said, twirling both drumsticks around his fingers nonchalantly.

"What's that?"

"We're going to America," he said. It was the icing on the cake, and he knew it.

"I'm in," said the Count.

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