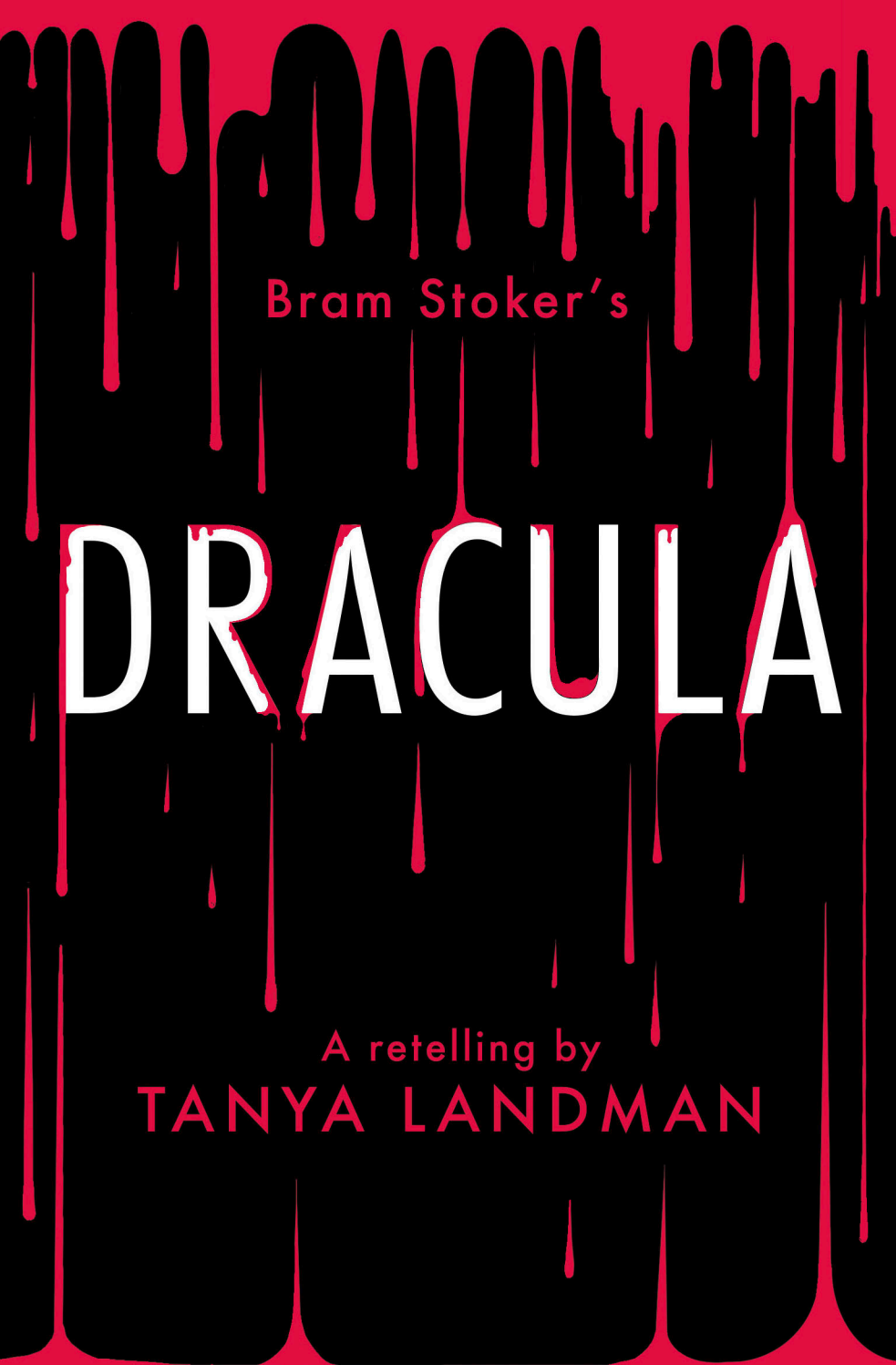

Bram Stoker's
DRACULA
A retelling by
TANYA LANDMAN

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Barrington Stoke

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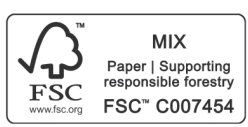
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To Isaac and Jack, for holding my hand
through the scary bits

PART 1
DRACULA RISING

Jonathan Harker's Journal

3 May, Bistritz

I have sent a postcard to darling Mina to tell her all is well. I am keeping a full account of my trip to Transylvania in this journal. That way, I can share every detail with her on my return. I wish we were already married! It would be wonderful to see all these new people and places with Mina at my side.

For the last few days, travelling has been pleasant and easy. I have seen charming countryside and lovely towns and cities. But I find myself growing uneasy as I move closer to my destination.

I slept badly last night. My bed was comfortable, but I had all sorts of odd dreams.

Somewhere a dog kept howling as if afraid. Yet today, on I travel, sleep or no sleep. For there is work to be done, and I am the young solicitor my employer has sent to do it! A very rich man named Count Dracula wishes to buy land and property near London. I am to deal with the legal matters and ensure the purchase happens smoothly.

I knew nothing of Transylvania so visited the library before I left England. I read books and looked at maps and discovered that the region is wild and mountainous. Its history is drenched in the blood of centuries of war and conflict. It also seems that every folk tale and superstition in the world has its origins in the Transylvanian mountains. I must ask Count Dracula about it all. My stay will be very interesting, I think. I am looking forward to meeting him.

A note was waiting for me at the hotel when I arrived in Bistritz this evening.

Welcome.

Sleep well tonight, my friend.

At three tomorrow, the coach will start on the road for Bukovina. A seat on it has been reserved for you. I will send my own

carriage to meet you at the Borgo Pass and bring you home to me.

Your friend,
Dracula

4 May, Bistritz

As I checked out of the hotel this morning, the old lady who runs it asked where I was travelling next. I mentioned that I was bound for Count Dracula's castle, and her eyes widened. She took a sharp breath, then she clutched my arm.

"Must you go?" the lady asked. "Do you know what day it is?"

"It is the 4th of May," I said, a little surprised.

"I know that!" she said crossly, and then asked again, "Do you know what day it is?"

"I don't understand ..." I replied.

"It is the eve of St George's Day," the lady said. "Tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things of the world will be at their most powerful. Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to?"

I told her as gently as I could that I was going on important business and that I could not possibly

change my plans. She went down on her knees and begged me not to go. I assured her once more that I couldn't abandon nor postpone my journey.

The lady took off the string of beads that held a crucifix from around her neck and insisted on hanging it about mine. I have always believed such things were silly superstition, but the poor lady was so upset that I accepted her gift.

5 May, Castle Dracula

When I left Bistritz yesterday, a small crowd was gathered outside in the street. As I boarded the coach, I heard them muttering to each other. There were all sorts of languages, so I understood very little but picked up the words "Satan", "Hell", "werewolf" and "vampire". Everyone in the crowd looked at me with pity in their eyes and made the sign of the cross as the coach drove away.

I shared no common language with my fellow passengers, but they all seemed very kind. They insisted on pressing odd gifts into my hands – a bunch of white garlic flowers, a sprig of mountain ash, the blossom of a wild rose. I seem to remember reading that the local tradition is that

these things are meant to ward off evil. But surely that is just peasant superstition?

We drove along a winding road past mountains and pine forests. The landscape was spectacular, but there was little time to enjoy it. As the sun sank lower, the coachman drove his horses on and on until we were speeding along so fast it was as if we were in a race with an invisible opponent. My fellow passengers urged the driver to go even faster until at last we stopped at the Borgo Pass, where I was to be collected.

We had arrived early, so there was no one there to meet me. The coach driver began insisting he take me on to the next town. But before I could respond, a huge black carriage drawn by four black horses came speeding towards us.

It was driven by a very tall man. He wore a great black hat that hid most of his face. For a moment, I thought I saw a pair of red glowing eyes and sharp white teeth. But I was very tired: I must have been mistaken. The man lifted my luggage from the coach and loaded it onto the carriage. And then he took my arm. He really was incredibly strong, and his grip was so tight I dropped all the gifts I had been given. He assisted me up the steps into the carriage and slammed the

door. Without another word, we were off, sweeping into the darkness.

It was a very long journey, and I must have fallen asleep. I must have dreamed that the carriage was surrounded by ravenous wolves and that the horses screamed and plunged in terror. I must have dreamed that the driver simply raised his hand as if in command and that the wolves melted away, whimpering. And yet those dreams were so real!

I woke from my nightmare when the carriage pulled up in the courtyard of a vast, half-ruined castle. Its tall black windows cast no rays of light, and its broken battlements were a jagged line against the moonlit sky.

5 May, continued

The driver assisted me down from the carriage, and I felt again the dreadful strength of his grip. Once he had unloaded my luggage, he drove off. I was left alone in the moonlight outside a huge oak door studded with iron nails. There was no knocker, no bell, no sign of any life within. What was I to do?

Panic tightened my chest. What sort of place had I come to? What kind of people lived here? What sort of grim adventure had I set out on?