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opening extract from

Vampire of Croglin Grange

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Chapter 1
The Stranger

Let me tell you about Croglin. Let me tell you about the horrors that happened at the Hall back in 1780. Autumn 1780 till Summer 1781. Eight months of mystery, when I was a boy. My name is Tom Taylor and Croglin is where I live.

Croglin is a village so sleepy even the dogs don't bark. Not even at strangers.

The cats sleep in the summer sun, bees buzz and sheep munch. Birds sing in the trees and in the skies. But they never sing in the churchyard. That's odd isn't it?

"That's odd," a cart driver said to me.

"What's odd?"

"The silence in the churchyard," the man said.

"Well, the dead don't make a lot of noise," I said with a shrug.

"No ... but all those trees. Why aren't there birds singing?" he asked. It was a warm day. He mopped his brow with a dirty scarf. "It's quiet as a grave," he said.

"Is that meant to be a joke?" I asked. The grey gravestones leaned like drunken men in the long grass. When the winter winds came they shook the earth and made the

gravestones as loose as Parson Perkins' rotten teeth. It wasn't always summer in Croglin.

Croglin is just a cluster of twenty cottages. Small, low, stone cottages with straw roofs to keep out the storms.

Twenty cottages, the church, the tavern, Parson Perkins' house ... and Croglin Hall.

"Croglin Hall, I'm headed for," the cart driver said. "Where is that then?"

I pointed to the low house that stood behind the low graveyard wall. The carter shivered. "Nice view from there! Who wants to look at a graveyard?"

"I do," said a harsh man's voice.

We swung round and saw the man standing in the middle of the path. The road was so dusty we hadn't heard his horse. He



was young and his face was wind-burned brown. He jumped to the ground and walked towards us. “Leave our furniture at Croglin Hall and stop asking questions,” he snapped.

The carter jumped onto his cart and cracked his whip. The cart rumbled and creaked away. There was a cry as it turned the corner too fast. It had almost knocked over Parson Perkins.

The parson trotted and sweated along the road towards the man. I sat on our garden wall and watched. The parson twisted his hands and bowed his head. “You must be the new tenant of Croglin Hall.”

“I am Michael Ransome,” the man said. “We have rented the Hall for seven years.”

“We?” The parson grinned and showed the rotten stumps of teeth.

“I’ll be living here with my brother, Edward, and my sister, Amelia,” the man said. “We’ve come from Australia so Amelia can have the peace and rest she needs.” The young man began to lead his horse down the road.

“When will your sister be …?” Parson Perkins began.

“They are following in a carriage. Amelia is not strong. We could not expect her to ride. They will be here tomorrow,” Michael Ransome said, and strode off in clouds of dust.

“You are welcome in the church every Sunday,” the parson called after him.

“We’ll be there,” the man replied without looking back.

“I hope you will be happy and safe in Croglin Hall,” Parson Perkins cried.

The young man stopped suddenly. “Safe? What do you mean?” he barked.

“Oh … nothing,” the parson whined and twisted his bony hands till they were red as a sunset.

The parson gave me a warning look with his watery, grey eyes. The look said, “Say nothing.”

I said nothing.