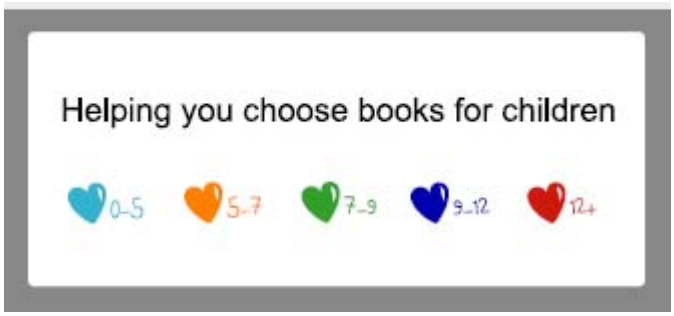
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opening extract from

Dracula

written by

Bram Stoker

– retold by Chaz Brenchley

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THE CHARACTERS



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Mina Harker

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DRACULA

FROM JONATHAN HARKER'S JOURNAL

6th May: Castle Dracula

The count's carriage met me, by arrangement, at the Borgo Pass. I had come this far on the public coach, after long weary days by boat and train through lands that were ever less familiar. My companions on the coach seemed almost like medieval peasants, as though I had travelled in time as well as in space. They were superstitious brutes; when I mentioned my destination they crossed themselves, and one hung a crucifix round my neck.

It was already dark when we came to the pass. There was no immediate sign of another carriage. I thought we were early, but our driver cried, 'He is not here! He will not come tonight!'

Before he could whip his horses on, they began to kick and plunge wildly, so that he had to rein them in again. There were hoofbeats on the road, startled screams from the peasants. A carriage drawn by four magnificent coal-black horses drew up beside us. The driver was a tall man with a large hat hiding his face. I could see only his eyes, which glowed red in the lamplight.

He took my luggage, and helped me into the carriage with a steely grip. A moment later we swept away, into the darkness of the pass.

Howling followed us, like a chorus on the wind. Then it was all around us. Our horses shivered and reared in the traces; the driver needed all his strength to control them.

We took a bend – and there sat a wolf, stock-still in the road. Nothing could have forced those horses past him. They stood and trembled; one screamed with fright. As if that were a summons, a ring of wolves suddenly



encircled us with white teeth and lolling tongues, terrible in their grim silence.

The driver rose in his seat and spoke a word of imperious command. At the same time he swung his arms, as though to brush the pack aside. A cloud passed across the moon; when I could see again, the roadway was clear.

On and on we drove, higher and higher into the mountains, until we came into the courtyard of a ruined castle. No light shone in the tall windows, and the broken battlements made a jagged line against the stars.

The driver helped me alight, and handed down my bags. Then he shook the reins and left me standing before a great door studded with ancient nails.

There was no bell or knocker, and no point in shouting through thick stone walls. I waited, wondering – not for the first time – quite how I, a young English solicitor, had found myself caught up in such a grim adventure.



At last I heard footsteps beyond the door, and the clank of massive bolts drawn back. A key grated in the lock, and the door swung open.

Within stood a tall old man with a long white moustache, clad from head to foot in black.

'Welcome to my house. Enter freely and of your own will.'

He shook my hand; his was as cold as ice, and as strong as the driver's. I wondered briefly if they were the same person.

'Count Dracula?'

He bowed, and lifted my luggage himself. I protested – surely he had servants? – but he insisted, leading me up a broad staircase. We came to a warm and well-lit suite of rooms, where supper was laid out ready for me. He himself would not eat, but he kept me company until I was satisfied. It was now so late that the first streaks of dawn were showing through the window. Wolves howled again on the slopes below, and the count's eyes gleamed.

'Listen to them – the children of the night. What music they make!'

When he smiled, I saw with a shudder that his teeth were peculiarly sharp.

