

Coppola's Dracula
a novella by by Kim Newman

A treeline at dusk. Tall, straight, Carpathian pines. The red of sunset bleeds into the dark of night. Great flapping sounds. Huge, dark shapes flit languidly between the trees, sinister, dangerous. A vast batwing brushes the treetops.

Jim Morrison's voice wails in despair. 'People Are Strange'.

Fire blossoms. Blue flame, pure as candle light. Black trees are consumed

...

Fade to a face, hanging upside-down in the roiling fire.

Harker's Voice: Wallachia ... shit!

Jonathan Harker, a solicitor's clerk, lies uneasy on his bed, upstairs in

the inn at Bistritz, waiting. His eyes are empty.

With great effort, he gets up and goes to the full-length mirror. He avoids his own gaze and takes a swig from a squat bottle of plum brandy.

He wears only long drawers. Bite-marks, almost healed, scab his shoulders.

His arms and chest are sinewy, but his belly is white and soft. He staggers into a program of isometric exercises, vigorously Christian, ineptly executed.

Harker's Voice: I could only think of the forests, the mountains ... the

inn was just a waiting room. Whenever I was in the forests, I could only

think of home, of Exeter. Whenever I was home, I could only think of getting back to the mountains.

The blind crucifix above the mirror, hung with cloves of garlic, looks down on Harker. He misses his footing and falls on the bed, then gets up,

reaches, and takes down the garlic.

He bites into a clove as if it were an apple, and washes the pulp down with more brandy.

Harker's Voice: All the time I stayed here in the inn, waiting for a commission, I was growing older, losing precious life. And all the time the Count sat on top of his mountain, leeching off the land, he grew younger, thirstier.

Harker scoops a locket from a bedside table and opens it to look at a portrait of his wife, Mina. Without malice or curiosity, he dangles the cameo in a candle flame. The face browns, the silver setting blackens.

Harker's Voice: I was waiting for the call from Seward. Eventually, it came.

There is a knock on the door.

'It's all right for you, Katharine Reed,' Francis whined as he picked over

the unappetising craft services table. 'You're dead, you don't have to eat

this shit.'

Kate showed teeth, hissing a little. She knew that despite her coke-bottle

glasses and freckles, she could look unnervingly feral when she smiled.

Francis didn't shrink: deep down, the director thought of her as a special

effect, not a real vampire.

In the makeshift canteen, deep in the production bunker, the Americans wittered nostalgia about McDonald's. The Brits - the warm ones, anyway

-
rhapsodised about Pinewood breakfasts of kippers and fried bread.

Romanian

location catering was not what they were used to.

Francis finally found an apple less than half brown and took it away.

His

weight had dropped visibly since their first meeting, months ago in pre-production. Since he had come to Eastern Europe, the insurance

doctor

diagnosed him as suffering from malnutrition and put him on vitamin shots.

Dracula was running true to form, sucking him dry.

A production this size was like a swarm of vampire bats - some large, many

tiny - battening tenaciously onto the host, making insistent,

never-ending

demands. Kate had watched Francis - bespectacled, bearded and

hyperactive

- lose substance under the draining siege, as he made and justified decisions, yielded the visions to be translated to celluloid, rewrote

the

script to suit locations or new casting. How could one man throw out so many ideas, only a fraction of which would be acted on? In his

position,

Kate's mind would bleed empty in a week.

A big budget film shot in a backward country was an insane proposition, like taking a touring three-ring circus into a war zone. Who will

survive,

she thought, and what will be left of them?

The craft table for vampires was as poorly stocked as the one for the warm. Unhealthy rats in chickenwire cages. Kate watched one of the

floor

effects men, a new-born with a padded waistcoat and a toolbelt, select

a

writhing specimen and bite off its head. He spat it on the concrete

floor,

face stretched into a mask of disgust.

'Ringworm,' he snarled. 'The commie gits are trying to kill us off with diseased vermin.'

'I could murder a bacon sarnie,' the effects man's mate sighed.

'I could murder a Romanian caterer,' said the new-born.

Kate decided to go thirsty. There were enough Yanks around to make coming

by human blood in this traditionally superstitious backwater not a problem. Ninety years after Dracula spread vampirism to the Western

world,

America was still sparsely populated by the blood-drinking undead. For

a

lot of Americans, being bled by a genuine olde worlde creature of the night was something of a thrill.

That would wear off.

Outside the bunker, in a shrinking patch of natural sunlight between a stand of real pines and the skeletons of fake trees, Francis shouted at Harvey Keitel. The actor, cast as Jonathan Harker, was stoic, inexpressive, grumpy. He refused to be drawn into argument, invariably driving Francis to shrieking hysteria.

'I'm not Martin Fucking Scorsese, man,' he screamed. 'I'm not going to

slather on some lousy voice-over to compensate for what you're not giving me. Without Harker, I don't have a picture.'

Keitel made fists but his body language was casual. Francis had been riding his star hard all week. Scuttlebutt was that he had wanted Pacino or McQueen but neither wanted to spend three months behind the Iron Curtain.

Kate could understand that. This featureless WWII bunker, turned over to the production as a command centre, stood in ancient mountains, dwarfed by the tall trees. As an outpost of civilisation in a savage land, it was ugly and ineffective.

When approached to act as a technical advisor to Coppola's Dracula, she had thought it might be interesting to see where it all started: the Changes, the Terror, the Transformation. No one seriously believed vampirism began here, but it was where Dracula came from. This land had nurtured him through centuries before he decided to spread his wings and extend his bloodline around the world.

Three months had already been revised as six months. This production didn't have a schedule, it had a sentence. A few were already demanding parole.

Some vampires felt Transylvania should be the undead Israel, a new state carved out of the much-redrawn map of Central Europe, a geographical and political homeland. As soon as it grew from an inkling to a notion, Nicolae Ceausescu vigorously vetoed the proposition. Holding up in one hand a silver-edged sickle, an iron-headed hammer and a sharpened oak spar, the Premier reminded the world that 'in Romania, we know how to treat leeches - a stake through the heart and off with their filthy heads.' But the Transylvania Movement - back to the forests, back to the mountains - gathered momentum: some elders, after ninety years of the chaos of the larger world, wished to withdraw to their former legendary status. Many of Kate's generation, turned in the 1880s, Victorians stranded in this mechanistic century, were sympathetic.

'You're the Irish vampire lady,' Harrison Ford, flown in for two days to play Dr Seward as a favour, had said. 'Where's your castle?' 'I have a flat in Clerkenwell,' she admitted. 'Over an off-licence.'

In the promised Transylvania, all elders would have castles, fiefdoms, slaves, human cattle. Everyone would wear evening dress. All vampires would have treasures of ancient gold, like leprechauns. There would be a silk-lined coffin in every crypt, and every night would be a full moon. Unlife eternal and luxury without end, bottomless wells of blood and Paris label shrouds.

Kate thought the Movement lunatic. Never mind cooked breakfasts and (the other crew complaint) proper toilet paper, this was an intellectual desert, a country without conversation, without (and she recognised the irony) life.

She understood Dracula had left Transylvania in the first place not merely because he - the great dark sponge - had sucked it dry, but because even

he was bored with ruling over gypsies, wolves and mountain streams.

That
did not prevent the elders of the Transylvania Movement from claiming
the
Count as their inspiration and using his seal as their symbol. An
Arthurian whisper had it that once vampires returned to Transylvania,
Dracula would rise again to assume his rightful throne as their ruler.
Dracula meant so much to so many. She wondered if there was anything
left
inside so many meanings, anything concrete and inarguable and true. Or
was
he now just a phantom, a slave to anyone who cared to invoke his name?
So
many causes and crusades and rebellions and atrocities. One man, one
monster, could never have kept track of them all, could never have
encompassed so much mutually exclusive argument.
There was the Dracula of the histories, the Dracula of Stoker's book,
the
Dracula of this film, the Dracula of the Transylvania Movement.
Dracula,
the vampire and the idea, was vast. But not so vast that he could cast
his
cloak of protection around all who claimed to be his followers. Out
here
in the mountains where the Count had passed centuries in petty
predation,
Kate understood that he must in himself have felt tiny, a lizard
crawling
down a rock.
Nature was overwhelming. At night, the stars were laser-points in the
deep
velvet black of the sky. She could hear, taste and smell a thousand
flora
and fauna. If ever there was a call of the wild, this forest exerted
it.
But there was nothing she considered intelligent life.
She tied tight under her chin the yellow scarf, shot through with
golden
traceries, she had bought at Biba in 1969. It was a flimsy, delicate
thing, but to her it meant civilisation, a coloured moment of frivolity
in
a life too often preoccupied with monochrome momentousness.
Francis jumped up and down and threw script pages to the winds. His
arms
flapped like wings. Clouds of profanity enveloped the uncaring Keitel.
'Don't you realise I've put up my own fucking money for this fucking
picture,' he shouted, not just at Keitel but at the whole company. 'I
could lose my house, my vineyard, everything. I can't afford a fucking
honourable failure. This has abso-goddamn-lutely got to outgross Jaws
or
I'm personally impaled up the ass with a sharpened telegraph pole.'
Effects men sat slumped against the exterior wall of the bunker - there
were few chairs on location - and watched their director rail at the
heavens, demanding of God answers that were not forthcoming. Script
pages
swirled upwards in a spiral, spreading out in a cloud, whipping against
the upper trunks of the trees, soaring out over the valley.
'He was worse on Godfather,' one said.

Servants usher Harker into a well-appointed drawing room. A table is

set

with an informal feast of bread, cheese and meat. Dr Jack Seward, in a white coat with a stethoscope hung around his neck, warmly shakes

Harker's

hand and leads him to the table. Quincey P. Morris sits to one side, tossing and catching a spade-sized bowie knife.

sits

Lord Godalming, well-dressed, napkin tucked into his starched collar, at the table, forking down a double helping of paprika chicken.

Harker's

eyes meet Godalming's, the nobleman looks away.

for

Seward: Harker, help yourself to the fare, Jon. It's uncommonly decent foreign muck.

Harker: Thank you, no. I took repast at the inn.

Seward: How is the inn? Natives bothering you? Superstitious babushkas, what?

Harker: I am well in myself.

heart,

Seward: Splendid ... the vampire, Countess Marya Dolingen of Graz. In 1883, you cut off her head and drove a hawthorn stake through her

destroying her utterly.

Harker: I'm not disposed just now to discuss such affairs.

credit.

Morris: Come on, Jonny-Boy. You have a commendation from the church, a papal decoration. The frothing she-bitch is dead at last. Take the

I

Harker: I have no direct knowledge of the individual you mention. And if

did, I reiterate that I would not be disposed to discuss such affairs.

Seward and Morris exchange a look as Harker stands impassive. They know they have the right man. Godalming, obviously in command, nods.

Seward clears plates of cold meat from a strong-box that stands on the table. Godalming hands the doctor a key, with which he opens the box.

He

takes out a woodcut and hands it over to Harker.

The picture is of a knife-nosed mediaeval warrior prince.

Seward: That's Vlad Tepes, called 'the Impaler'. A good Christian, defender of the faith. Killed a million Turks. Son of the Dragon, they called him. Dracula.

Harker is impressed.

Morris: Prince Vlad had Orthodox Church decorations out the ass. Coulda made Metropolitan. But he converted, went over to Rome, turned Candle.

Harker: Candle?

Seward: Roman Catholic.

Harker looks again at the woodcut. In a certain light, it resembles the young Marlon Brando.

Seward walks to a side-table, where an antique dictaphone is set up. He fits a wax cylinder and adjusts the needle-horn.

Seward: This is Dracula's voice. It's been authenticated.

Seward cranks the dictaphone.

Dracula's Voice: Cheeldren of the naight, leesten to them. What museek they maike!

There is a strange distortion in the recording.

Harker: What's that noise in the background?

Seward: Wolves, my boy. Dire wolves, to be precise.

Dracula's Voice: To die, to be reallllly dead, that must be ... glorioussssss!

Morris: Vlad's well beyond Rome now. He's up there, in his impenetrable castle, continuing the crusade on his own. He's got this army of

Szekeley

Gypsies, fanatically loyal fucks. They follow his orders, no matter how atrocious, no matter how appalling. You know the score, Jon. Dead babies,

drained cattle, defenestrated peasants, impaled grandmothers. He's god-damned Un-Dead. A fuckin' monster, boy.

Harker is shocked. He looks again at the woodcut.

Seward: The firm would like you to proceed up into the mountains, beyond

the Borgo Pass ...

Harker: But that's Transylvania. We're not supposed to be in Transylvania.

Godalming looks to the heavens, but continues eating.

Seward: ... beyond the Borgo Pass, to Castle Dracula. There, you are to ingratiate yourself by whatever means come to hand into Dracula's coterie.

Then you are to disperse the Count's household.

Harker: Disperse?

Godalming puts down his knife and fork.

Godalming: Disperse with ultimate devotion.

'What can I say, we made a mistake,' Francis said, shrugging nervously, trying to seem confident. He had shaved off his beard, superstitiously hoping that would attract more attention than his announcement. 'I

think

this is the courageous thing to do, shut down and recast, rather than continue with a frankly unsatisfactory situation.'

Kate did not usually cover showbiz, but the specialist press - Variety, Screen International, Positif - were dumbstruck enough to convince her

it

was not standard procedure to fire one's leading man after two weeks' work, scrap the footage and get someone else. When Keitel was sent

home,

the whole carnival ground to a halt and everyone had to sit around

while

Francis flew back to the States to find a new star.

Someone asked how far over budget Dracula was, and Francis smiled and waffled about budgets being provisional.

'No one ever asked how much the Sistine Chapel cost,' he said, waving a chubby hand. Kate would have bet that while Michelangelo was on his

back

with the brushes, Pope Julius II never stopped asking how much it cost

and

when would it be finished.

During the break in shooting, money was spiralling down a drain. Fred Roos, the co-producer, had explained to her just how expensive it was

to

keep a whole company standing by. It was almost more costly than having them work.

Next to Francis at the impromptu press conference in the Bucharest Town Hall was Martin Sheen, the new Jonathan Harker. In his mid-thirties, he looked much younger, like the lost boy he played in Badlands. The actor mumbled generously about the opportunity he was grateful for. Francis beamed like a shorn Santa Claus on a forced diet and opened a bottle of his own wine to toast his new star.

The man from Variety asked who would be playing Dracula, and Francis froze

in mid-pour, sloshing red all over Sheen's wrist. Kate knew the title

role

- actually fairly small, thanks to Bram Stoker and screenwriter John Milius - was still on offer to various possibles - Klaus Kinski, Jack Nicholson, Christopher Lee.

'I can confirm Bobby Duvall will play Van Helsing,' Francis said. 'And we

have Dennis Hopper as Renfield. He's the one who eats flies.'

'But who is Dracula?'

Francis swallowed some wine, attempted a cherubic look, and wagged a finger.

'I think I'll let that be a surprise. Now, ladies and gentlemen, if you'll

excuse me, I have motion picture history to make.'

As Kate took her room-key from the desk, the night manager nagged her in

as Romanian. When she had first checked in, the door of her room fell off

she opened it. The hotel maintained she did not know her own vampire strength and should pay exorbitantly to have the door replaced. Apparently, the materials were available only at great cost and had to be

shipped from Moldavia. She assumed it was a scam they worked on foreigners, especially vampires. The door was made of paper stretched over

a straw frame, the hinges were cardboard fixed with drawing pins. She was pretending not to understand any language in which they tried to

ask her for money, but eventually they would hit on English and she'd have

thought to make a scene. Francis, light-hearted as a child at the moment,

it rather funny and had taken to teasing her about the damn door. Not tired, but glad to be off the streets after nightfall, she climbed

the winding stairs to her room, a cramped triangular space in the roof.

Though she was barely an inch over five feet, she could only stand up straight

in the dead centre of the room. A crucifix hung ostentatiously over the

bed, a looking glass was propped up on the basin. She thought about taking

them down but it was best to let insults pass. In many ways, she preferred

the camp-site conditions in the mountains. She only needed to sleep every

two weeks, and when she was out she was literally dead and didn't care

about clean sheets.

They were all in Bucharest for the moment, as Francis supervised script-readings to ease Sheen into the Harker role. His fellow coach-passengers - Fredric Forrest (Westenra), Sam Bottoms (Murray) and Albert Hall (Swales) - had all been on the project for over a year, and had been through all this before in San Francisco as Francis developed John Milius's script through improvisation and happy accident. Kate

didn't think she would have liked being a screenwriter. Nothing was ever finished.

She wondered who would end up playing Dracula. Since his marriage to Queen

Victoria made him officially if embarrassingly a satellite of the British Royal Family, he had rarely been represented in films. However, Lon Chaney had taken the role in the silent London After Midnight, which dealt with the court intrigues of the 1880s, and Anton Walbrook played Vlad opposite Anna Neagle in Victoria the Great in 1937. Kate, a lifelong theatregoer who had never quite got used to the cinema, remembered Vincent Price opposite Helen Hayes in Victoria Regina in the 1930s. Aside from a couple of cheap British pictures which didn't count, Bram Stoker's Dracula - the singular mix of documentation and wish-fulfilment that inspired a revolution by showing how Dracula could have been defeated in the early days before his rise to power - had never been made as a film. Orson Welles produced it on radio in the 1930s and announced it as his first picture, casting himself as Harker and the Count, using first-person camera throughout. RKO thought it too expensive and convinced him to make Citizen Kane instead. Nearly ten years ago, Francis had lured John Milius into writing the first pass at the script by telling him nobody, not even Orson Welles, had ever been able to lick the book. Francis was still writing and rewriting, stitching together scenes from Milius's script with new stuff of his own and pages torn straight from the book. Nobody had seen a complete script, and Kate thought one didn't exist. She wondered how many times Dracula had to die for her to be rid of him.

Her whole life had been a dance with Dracula, and he haunted her still. When Francis killed the Count at the end of the movie - if that was the ending he went with - maybe it would be for the last time. You weren't truly dead until you'd died in a motion picture. Or at the box office. The latest word was that the role was on offer to Marlon Brando. She couldn't see it: Stanley Kowalski and Vito Corleone as Count Dracula.

One of the best actors in the world, he'd been one of the worst Napoleons in the movies. Historical characters brought out the ham in him. He was terrible as Fletcher Christian too. Officially, Kate was still just a technical adviser - though she had never actually met Dracula during his time in London, she had lived through the period. She had known Stoker, Jonathan Harker, Godalming and the rest. Once, as a warm girl, she had been terrified by Van Helsing's rages. When Stoker wrote his book and smuggled it out of prison, she had helped with its underground circulation, printing copies on the presses of the Pall Mall Gazette and ensuring its distribution despite all attempts at suppression. She wrote the introduction for the 1912 edition that was the first official publication. Actually, she found herself impressed into a multitude of duties. Francis

treated a \$20,000,000 (and climbing) movie like a college play and expected everyone to pitch in, despite union rules designed to prevent the

crew being treated as slave labour. She found the odd afternoon of sewing

costumes or night of set-building welcome distraction.

At first, Francis asked her thousands of questions about points of detail;

now he was shooting, he was too wrapped up in his own vision to take advice. If she didn't find something to do, she'd sit idle. As an employee

of American Zoetrope, she couldn't even write articles about the shoot. For once, she was on the inside, knowing but not telling.

She had wanted to write about Romania for the New Statesman, but was under

orders not to do anything that might jeopardise the cooperation the production needed from the Ceausescus. So far, she had avoided all the official receptions Nicolae and Elena hosted for the production. The Premier was known to an be extreme vampire-hater, especially since the stirrings of the Transylvania Movement, and occasionally ordered not-so-discreet purges of the undead.

Kate knew she, like the few other vampires with the Dracula crew, was subject to regular checks by the Securitate. Men in black leather coats loitered in the corner of her eye.

'For God's sake,' Francis had told her, 'don't take anybody local.' Like most Americans, he didn't understand. Though he could see she was

a tiny woman with red hair and glasses, the mind of an aged aunt in the

body of an awkward cousin, Francis could not rid himself of the impression

that vampire women were ravening predators with unnatural powers of bewitchment, lusting after the pounding blood of any warm youth who happens along. She was sure he hung his door with garlic and wolfsbane, but half-hoped for a whispered solicitation.

After a few uncomfortable nights in Communist-approved beer-halls, she had

learned to stay in her hotel room while in Bucharest. People here had memories as long as her lifetime. They crossed themselves and muttered prayers as she walked by. Children threw stones.

She stood at her window and looked out at the square. A patch of devastation, where the ancient quarter of the capital had been, marked

the site of the palace Ceausescu was building for himself. A three-storey poster of the Saviour of Romania stood amid the ruins. Dressed like an orthodox priest, he held up Dracula's severed head as if he had

personally killed the Count.

when Ceausescu harped at length about the dark, terrible days of the past

he and his wife preyed on the warm of Romania to prevent his loyal subjects from considering the dark, terrible days of the present when

and his wife lorded over the country like especially corrupt Roman Emperors. Impersonating the supplicant baker in The Godfather, Francis had

abased himself to the dictator to secure official co-operation. She turned on the radio and heard tinny martial music. She turned it

off, lay on the narrow, lumpy bed - as a joke, Fred Forrest and Francis had

put
a coffin in her room one night - and listened to the city at night.

Like
the forest, Bucharest was alive with noises, and smells.
It was ground under, but there was life here. Even in this grim city,
someone was laughing, someone was in love. Somebody was allowed to be a
happy fool.
She heard winds in telephone wires, bootsteps on cobbles, a drink being
poured in another room, someone snoring, a violinist sawing scales. And
someone outside her door. Someone who didn't breathe, who had no
heartbeat, but whose clothes creaked as he moved, whose saliva rattled
in
his throat.
She sat up, confident she was elder enough to be silent, and looked at
the
door.
'Come in,' she said, 'it's not locked. But be careful. I can't afford
more
breakages.'

His name was Ion Popescu and he looked about thirteen, with big,
olive-shiny orphan eyes and thick, black, unruly hair. He wore an
adult's
clothes, much distressed and frayed, stained with long-dried blood and
earth. His teeth were too large for his skull, his cheeks stretched
tight
over his jaws, drawing his whole face to the point of his tiny chin.
Once in her room, he crouched down in a corner, away from a window. He
talked only in a whisper, in a mix of English and German she had to
strain
to follow. His mouth wouldn't open properly. He was alone in the city,
without community. Now he was tired and wanted to leave his homeland.
He
begged her to hear him out and whispered his story.
He claimed to be fifty-two, turned in 1937. He didn't know, or didn't
care
to talk about, his father- or mother-in-darkness. There were blanks
burned
in his memory, whole years missing. She had come across that before.
For
most of his vampire life, he had lived underground, under the Nazis and
then the Communists. He was the sole survivor of several resistance
movements. His warm comrades had never really trusted him, but his
capabilities were useful for a while.
She was reminded of her first days after turning. When she knew
nothing,
when her condition seemed a disease, a trap. That Ion could be a
vampire
for forty years and never pass beyond the new-born stage was
incredible.
She truly realised, at last, just how backward this country was.
'Then I hear of the American film, and of the sweet vampire lady who is
with the company. Many times, I try to get near you, but you are
watched.
Securitate. You, I think, are my saviour, my true mother-in-the-dark.'
Fifty-two, she reminded herself.
Ion was exhausted after days trying to get close to the hotel, to 'the
sweet vampire lady', and hadn't fed in weeks. His body was icy cold.
Though she knew her own strength was low, she nipped her wrist and
dribbled a little of her precious blood onto his white lips, enough to

put

a spark in his dull eyes.

There was a deep gash on his arm, which festered as it tried to heal.

She

bound it with her scarf, wrapping his thin limb tight.

He hugged her and slept like a baby. She arranged his hair away from

his

eyes and imagined his life. It was like the old days, when vampires

were

hunted down and destroyed by the few who believed. Before Dracula.

The Count had changed nothing for Ion Popescu.

Bistritz, a bustling township in the foothills of the Carpathian Alps.

Harker, carrying a Gladstone Bag, weaves through crowds towards a

waiting

coach and six. Peasants try to sell him crucifixes, garlic and other

lucky

charms. Women cross themselves and mutter prayers.

A wildly-gesticulating photographer tries to stop him slowing his pace

to

examine a complicated camera. An infernal burst of flash-powder spills

purple smoke across the square. People choke on it.

Corpses hang from a four-man gibbet, dogs leaping up to chew on their

naked feet. Children squabble over mismatched boots filched from the

executed men. Harker looks up at the twisted, mouldy faces.

He reaches the coach and tosses his bag up. Swales, the coachman,

secures

it with the other luggage and growls at the late passenger. Harker

pulls

open the door and swings himself into the velvet-lined interior of the carriage.

There are two other passengers. Westenra, heavily moustached and

cradling

a basket of food. And Murray, a young man who smiles as he looks up

from

his Bible.

Harker exchanges curt nods of greeting as the coach lurches into

motion.

Harker's Voice: I quickly formed opinions of my travelling companions.

Swales was at the reins. It was my commission but sure as shooting it

was

his coach. Westenra, the one they called 'Cook', was from Whitby. He

was

ratcheted several notches too tight for Wallachia. Probably too tight

for

Whitby, come to that. Murray, the fresh-faced youth with the Good Book,

was a rowing blue from Oxford. To look at him, you'd think the only use

he'd have for a sharpened stake would be as a stump in a knock-up

match.

Later, after dark but under a full moon, Harker sits up top with Swales.

A

wind-up phonograph crackles out a tune through a sizeable trumpet.

Mick Jagger sings 'Ta-Ra-Ra-BOOM-De-Ay'.

Westenra and Murray have jumped from the coach and ride the lead

horses,

whooping it up like a nursery Charge of the Light Brigade.

Harker, a few years past such antics, watches neutrally. Swales is

indulgent of his passengers.

The mountain roads are narrow, precipitous. The lead horses, spurred by

their riders, gallop faster. Harker looks down and sees a sheer drop of

a

thousand feet, and is more concerned by the foolhardiness of his companions.

Hooves strike the edge of the road, narrowly missing disaster.

Westenra and Murray chant along with the song, letting go of their mounts'

manes and doing hand-gestures to the lyrics. Harker gasps but Swales chuckles. He has the reins and the world is safe.

Harker's Voice: I think the dark and the pines of Romania spooked them badly, but they whistled merrily on into the night, infernal

cake-walkers

with Death as a dancing partner.

In the rehearsal hall, usually a people's ceramics collective, she introduced Ion to Francis.

him

The vampire youth was sharper now. In a pair of her jeans - which fit

like

perfectly - and a Godfather II T-shirt, he looked less the waif, more

a survivor. Her Biba scarf, now his talisman, was tied around his neck.

'I said we could find work for him with the extras. The gypsies.'

'I am no gypsy,' Ion said, vehemently.

'He speaks English, Romanian, German, Magyar and Romany. He can co-ordinate all of them.'

'He's a kid.'

'He's older than you are.'

Francis thought it over. She didn't mention Ion's problems with the authorities. Francis couldn't harbour an avowed dissident. The relationship between the production and the government was already strained. Francis thought - correctly - that he was being bled of funds

by

corrupt officials, but could afford to lodge no complaint. Without the Romanian army, he didn't have a cavalry, didn't have a horde. And

without

the location permits that still hadn't come through, he couldn't shoot

the

story beyond Borgo Pass.

'I can keep the rabble in line, maestro,' Ion said, smiling.

Somehow, he had learned how to work his jaws and lips into a smile.

With

her blood in him, he had more control. She noticed him chameleoning a little. His smile, she thought, might be a little like hers.

Francis chuckled. He liked being called 'maestro'. Ion was good at

getting

on the right side of people. After all, he had certainly got on the

right

side of her.

'Okay, but keep out of the way if you see anyone in a suit.'

Ion was effusively grateful. Again, he acted the age he looked, hugging Francis, then her, saluting like a toy soldier. Martin Sheen, noticing, raised an eyebrow.

Francis took Ion off to meet his own children - Roman, Gio and Sofia -

and

Sheen's sons Emilio and Charley. It had not sunk in that this wiry kid, obviously keen to learn baseball and chew gum, was in warm terms middle-aged.

Then again, Kate never knew whether to be twenty-five, the age at which she turned, or 116. And how was a 116-year-old supposed to behave

anyway?

Since she had let him bleed her, she was having flashes of his past:

pains scurrying through back-streets and sewers, like a rat; the stabbing of betrayal; eye-searing flashes of firelight; constant cold and red thirst and filth.

Ion had never had the time to grow up. Or even to be a proper child. He was a waif and a stray. She couldn't help but love him a little. She had

chosen not to pass on the Dark Kiss, though she had once - during the Great War - come close and regretted it.

Her bloodline, she thought, was not good for a new-born. There was too much Dracula in it, maybe too much Kate Reed.

To Ion, she was a teacher not a mother. Before she insisted on becoming a

journalist, her whole family seemed to feel she was predestined to be a governess. Now, at last, she thought she saw what they meant.

Ion was admiring six-year-old Sofia's dress, eyes bright with what Kate hoped was not hunger. The little girl laughed, plainly taken with her

new friend. The boys, heads full of the vampires of the film, were less sure

about him. He would have to earn their friendship. Later, Kate would deal with Part Two of the Ion Popescu Problem. After

the film was over, which would not be until the 1980s at the current rate

of progress, he wanted to leave the country, hidden in among the rest of

the production crew. He was tired of skulking and dodging the political

police, and didn't think he could manage it much longer. In the West, he

said, he would be free from persecution. She knew he would be disappointed. The warm didn't really like vampires

in London or Rome or Dublin any more than they did in Timisoara or Bucharest

or Cluj. It was just more difficult legally to have them destroyed.

Back in the mountains, there was the usual chaos. A sudden thunderstorm,

whipped up out of nowhere like a djinn, had torn up real and fake trees and scattered them throughout the valley, demolishing the gypsy

encampment production designer Dean Tavoularis had been building. About half a million dollars' worth of set was irrevocably lost, and the bunker

itself had been struck by lightning and split open like a pumpkin. The steady

rain poured in and streamed out of the structure, washing away props, documents, equipment and costumes. Crews foraged in the valley for

stuff that could be reclaimed and used.

Francis acted as if God were personally out to destroy him. 'Doesn't anybody else notice what a disaster this film is?' he shouted.

'I haven't got a script, I haven't got an actor, I'm running out of money, I'm all out of time. This is the goddamned Unfinished Symphony, man.'

Nobody wanted to talk to the director when he was in this mood. Francis squatted on the bare earth of the mountainside, surrounded by smashed

balsawood pine-trees, hugging his knees. He wore a stetson hat, filched from Quincey Morris's wardrobe, and drizzle was running from its brim in

a

tiny stream. Eleanor, his wife, concentrated on keeping the children
out
of the way.
'This is the worst fucking film of my career. The worst I'll ever make.
The last movie.'
The first person to tell Francis to cheer up and that things weren't so
bad would get fired and be sent home. At this point, crowded under a
leaky
lean-to with other surplus persons, Kate was tempted.
'I don't want to be Orson Welles,' Francis shouted at the slate-grey
skies, rain on his face, 'I don't want to be David Lean. I just want to
make an Irwin Allen movie, with violence, action, sex, destruction in
every frame. This isn't Art, this is atrocity.'
Just before the crew left Bucharest, as the storm was beginning, Marlon
Brando had consented to be Dracula. Francis personally wired him a
million-dollar down-payment against two weeks' work. Nobody dared
remind
Francis that if he wasn't ready to shoot Brando's scenes by the end of
the
year, he would lose the money and his star.
The six months was up, and barely a quarter of the film was in the can.
The production schedule had been extended and reworked so many times
that
all forecasts of the end of shooting were treated like forecasts of the
end of the War. Everyone said it would be over by Christmas, but knew
it
would stretch until the last trump.
'I could just stop, you know,' Francis said, deflated. 'I could just
shut
it down and go back to San Francisco and a hot bath and decent pasta
and
forget everything. I can still get work shooting commercials, nudie
movies, series TV. I could make little films, shot on video with a
four-man crew, and show them to my friends. All this D.W.
Griffith-David
O. Selznick shit just isn't fucking necessary.'
He stretched out his arms and water poured from his sleeves. Over a
hundred people, huddled in various shelters or wrapped in orange
plastic
ponchos, looked at their lord and master and didn't know what to say or
do.
'What does this cost, people? Does anybody know? Does anybody care? Is
it
worth all this? A movie? A painted ceiling? A symphony? Is anything
worth
all this shit?'
The rain stopped as if a tap were turned off. Sun shone through clouds.
Kate screwed her eyes tight shut and fumbled under her poncho for the
heavy sunglasses-clip she always carried. She might be the kind of
vampire
who could go about in all but the strongest sunlight, but her eyes
could
still be burned out by too much light.
She fixed clip-on shades to her glasses and blinked.
People emerged from their shelters, rainwater pouring from hats and
ponchos.
'We can shoot around it,' a co-associate assistant producer said.
Francis fired him on the spot.
Kate saw Ion creep out of the forests and straighten up. He had a
wooden

staff, newly-trimmed. He presented it to his maestro.

'To lean on,' he said, demonstrating. Then, he fetched it up and held

it

like a weapon, showing a whittled point. 'And to fight with.'

Francis accepted the gift, made a few passes in the air, liking the

feel

of it in his hands. Then he leaned on the staff, easing his weight onto the strong wood.

'It's good,' he said.

Ion grinned and saluted.

'All doubt is passing,' Francis announced. 'Money doesn't matter, time doesn't matter, we don't matter. This film, this Dracula, that is what matters. It's taken the smallest of you,' he laid his hand on Ion's

curls,

'to show me that. When we are gone, Dracula will remain.'

Francis kissed the top of Ion's head.

'Now,' he shouted, inspired, 'to work, to work.'

The coach trundles up the mountainside, winding between the tall trees.

A

blaze of blue light shoots up.

Westenra: Treasure!

Harker's Voice: They said the blue flames marked the sites of long-lost troves of bandit silver and gold. They also said no good ever came of finding it.

Westenra: Coachman, stop! Treasure.

Swales pulls up the reins, and the team halt. The clatter of hooves and reins dies. The night is quiet.

The blue flame still burns.

Westenra jumps out and runs to the edge of the forest, trying to see between the trees, to locate the source of the light.

Harker: I'll go with him.

Warily, Harker takes a rifle down from the coach, and breeches a

bullet.

Westenra runs ahead into the forest, excited. Harker carefully follows

up,

placing each step carefully.

Westenra: Treasure, man. Treasure.

Harker hears a noise, and signals Westenra to hold back. Both men

freeze

and listen.

The blue light flickers on their faces and fades out. Westenra is disgusted and disappointed.

Something moves in the undergrowth. Red eyes glow.

A dire wolf leaps up at Westenra, claws brushing his face, enormously furred body heavy as a felled tree. Harker fires. A red flash briefly spotlights the beast's twisted snout.

The wolf's teeth clash, just missing Westenra's face. The huge animal, startled if not wounded, turns and disappears into the forest.

Westenra and Harker run away as fast as they can, vaulting over

prominent

tree-roots, bumping low branches.

Westenra: Never get out of the coach ... never get out of the coach.

They get back to the road. Swales looks stern, not wanting to know

about

the trouble they're in.

Harker's Voice: Words of wisdom. Never get out of the coach, never go

into

the woods ... unless you're prepared to become the compleat animal, to stay forever in the forests. Like him, Dracula.

At the party celebrating the 100th Day of Shooting, the crew brought in a coffin bearing a brass plate that read simply DRACULA. Its lid creaked open and a girl in a bikini leaped out, nestling in Francis's lap. She had plastic fangs, which she spit out to kiss him. The crew cheered. Even Eleanor laughed. The fangs wound up in the punch-bowl. Kate fished them out as she got drinks for Marty Sheen and Robert Duvall. Duvall, lean and intense, asked her about Ireland. She admitted she hadn't been there in decades. Sheen, whom everyone thought was Irish, was Hispanic, born Ramon Estevez. He was drinking heavily and losing weight, travelling deep into his role. Having surrendered entirely to Francis's 'vision', Sheen was talking with Harker's accent and developing the character's hollow-eyed look and panicky glance. The real Jonathan, Kate remembered, was a decent but dull sort, perpetually 'umble around brighter people, deeply suburban. Mina, his fiancée and her friend, kept saying that at least he was real, a worker ant not a butterfly like Art or Lucy. A hundred years later, Kate could hardly remember Jonathan's face. From now on, she would always think of Sheen when anyone mentioned Jonathan Harker. The original was eclipsed. Or erased. Bram Stoker had intended to write about Kate in his book, but left her out. Her few poor braveries during the Terror tended to be ascribed to Mina in most histories. That was probably a blessing. 'What it must have been like for Jonathan,' Sheen said. 'Not even knowing there were such things as vampires. Imagine, confronted with Dracula himself. His whole world was shredded, torn away. All he had was himself, and it wasn't enough.' 'He had family, friends,' Kate said. Sheen's eyes glowed. 'Not in Transylvania. Nobody has family and friends in Transylvania.' Kate shivered and looked around. Francis was showing off martial arts moves with Ion's staff. Fred Forrest was rolling a cigar-sized joint. Vittorio Storaro, the cinematographer, doled out his special spaghetti, smuggled into the country inside film cans, to appreciative patrons. A Romanian official in an ill-fitting shiny suit, liaison with the state studios, staunchly resisted offers of drinks he either assumed were laced with LSD or didn't want other Romanians to see him sampling. She wondered which of the native hangers-on was the Securitate spy, and giggled at the thought that they all might be spies and still not know the others were watching them. Punch, which she was sipping for politeness's sake, squirted out of her nose as she laughed. Duvall patted her back and she recovered. She was not used to social drinking. Ion, in a baseball cap given him by one of Francis's kids, was joking with the girl in the bikini, a dancer who played one of the gypsies, his eyes reddening with thirst. Kate decided to leave them be. Ion would control

himself with the crew. Besides, the girl might like a nip from the handsome lad.

With a handkerchief, she wiped her face. Her specs had gone crooked with

her spluttering and she rearranged them.

'You're not what I expected of a vampire lady,' Duvall said.

Kate slipped the plastic fangs into her mouth and snarled like a kitten.

Duvall and Sheen laughed.

For two weeks, Francis had been shooting the 'Brides of Dracula' sequence.

The mountainside was crowded as Oxford Street, extras borrowed from the Romanian army salted with English faces recruited from youth hostels and

student exchanges. Storaro was up on a dinosaur-necked camera crane, swooping through the skies, getting shots of rapt faces.

The three girls, two warm and one real vampire, had only showed up tonight, guaranteeing genuine crowd excitement in long-shot or blurry background rather than the flatly faked enthusiasm radiated for their own

close-ups.

Kate was supposed to be available for the Brides, but they didn't need advice. It struck her as absurd that she should be asked to tell the actresses how to be alluring. The vampire Marlene, cast as the blonde bride, had been an actress since the silent days and wandered about

nearly

naked, exposing herself to the winds. Her warm sisters needed to be swathed in furs between shots.

In a shack-like temporary dressing room, the brides were transformed.

Bunty, a sensible Englishwoman, was in charge of their make-up. The living

girls, twins from Malta who had appeared in a Playboy layout, submitted to

all-over pancake that gave their flesh an unhealthy shimmer and opened their mouths like dental patients as fangs - a hundred times more expensive if hardly more convincing than the joke shop set Kate had

kept

after the party - were fitted.

Francis, with Ion in his wake carrying a script, dropped by to cast an eye

over the brides. He asked Marlene to open her mouth and examined her dainty pointy teeth.

'We thought we'd leave them as they were,' said Bunty.

Francis shook his head.

'They need to be bigger, more obvious.'

Bunty took a set of dagger-like eye-teeth from her kit and approached Marlene, who waved them away.

'I'm sorry, dear,' the make-up woman apologised.

Marlene laughed musically and hissed, making Francis jump. Her mouth opened wide like a cobra's, and her fangs extended a full two inches.

Francis grinned.

'Perfect.'

The vampire lady took a little curtsy.

Kate mingled with the crew, keeping out of camera-shot. She was used to the tedious pace of film-making now. Everything took forever and there

was

rarely anything to see. Only Francis, almost thin now, was constantly

on

the move, popping up everywhere - with Ion, nick-named 'Son of Dracula'

by the crew, at his heels - to solve or be frustrated by any one of a thousand problems.

The stands erected for the extras, made by local labour in the months before shooting, kept collapsing. It seemed the construction people, whom she assumed also had the door contract at the Bucharest hotel, had substituted inferior wood, presumably pocketing the difference in leis, and the whole set was close to useless. Francis had taken to having his people work at night, after the Romanians contractually obliged to do the job had gone home, to shore up the shoddy work. It was, of course, ruinously expensive and amazingly inefficient.

The permits to film at Borgo Pass had still not come through. An associate producer was spending all her time at the Bucharest equivalent of the Circumlocution Office, trying to get the tri-lingual documentation out of the Ministry of Film. Francis would have to hire an entire local film crew and pay them to stand idle while his Hollywood people did the work.

That was the expected harassment.

The official in the shiny suit, who had come to represent for everyone the forces hindering the production, stood on one side, eagerly watching the actresses. He didn't permit himself a smile.

Kate assumed the man dutifully hated the whole idea of Dracula. He certainly did all he could to get in the way. He could only speak English when the time came to announce a fresh snag, conveniently forgetting the language if he was standing on the spot where Francis wanted camera track laid and he was being told politely to get out of the way.

'Give me more teeth,' Francis shouted through a bull-horn. The actresses responded.

'All of you,' the director addressed the extras, 'look horny as hell.'

Ion repeated the instruction in three languages. In each one, the sentence expanded to a paragraph. Different segments of the crowd were enthused as each announcement clued them in.

Arcs, brighter and whiter than the sun, cast merciless, bleaching patches of light on the crowd, making faces look like skulls. Kate was blinking, her eyes watering. She took off and cleaned her glasses.

Like everybody, she could do with a shower and a rest. And, in her case, a decent feed.

Rumours were circulating of other reasons they were being kept away from Borgo Pass. The twins, flying in a few days ago, had brought along copies of the Guardian and Time Magazine. They were passed around the whole company, offering precious news from home. She was surprised how little

seemed to have happened while she was out of touch. However, there was a tiny story in the Guardian about the Transylvania Movement. Apparently, Baron Meinster, some obscure disciple of Dracula, was being sought by the Romanian authorities for terrorist outrages.

The

newspaper reported that he had picked up a band of vampire followers

and

was out in the forests somewhere, fighting bloody engagements with Ceausescu's men. The Baron favoured young get; he would find lost children, and turn them. The average age of his army was fourteen. Kate knew the type: red-eyed, lithe brats with sharp teeth and no

compunctions

about anything. Rumour had it that Meinster's Kids would descend on villages and murder entire populations, gorging themselves on blood, killing whole families, whole communities, down to the animals.

That explained the nervousness of some of the extras borrowed from the army. They expected to be sent into the woods to fight the devils. Few

of

them would come near Kate or any other vampire, so any gossip that filtered through was third-hand and had been translated into and out of several languages.

There were quite a few civilian observers around, keeping an eye on everything, waving incomprehensible but official documentation at

anyone

who queried their presence. Shiny Suit knew all about them and was

their

unofficial boss. Ion kept well away from them. She must ask the lad if

he

knew anything of Meinster. It was a wonder he had not become one of Meinster's Child Warriors. Maybe he had, and was trying to get away

from

that. Growing up.

The crowd rioted on cue but the camera-crane jammed, dumping the operator

out of his perch. Francis yelled at the grips to protect the equipment, and Ion translated but not swiftly enough to get them into action.

The camera came loose and fell thirty feet, crunching onto rough stone, spilling film and fragments.

Francis looked at the mess, uncomprehending, a child so shocked by the breaking of a favourite toy that he can't even throw a fit. Then, red

fury

exploded.

Kate wouldn't want to be the one who told Francis that there might be fighting at Borgo Pass.

In the coach, late afternoon, Harker goes through the documents he has been given. He examines letters sealed with a red wax 'D', old scrolls gone to parchment, annotated maps, a writ of excommunication. There are pictures of Vlad, woodcuts of the Christian Prince in a forest of

impaled

infidels, portraits of a dead-looking old man with a white moustache, a blurry photograph of a murk-faced youth in an unsuitable straw hat.

Harker's Voice: Vlad was one of the Chosen, favoured of God. But

somewhere

in those acres of slaughtered foemen, he found something that changed

his

mind, that changed his soul. He wrote letters to the Pope, recommending the rededication of the Vatican to the Devil. He had two cardinals,

sent

by Rome to reason with him, hot-collared - red-hot poker slid through

their back passages into their innards. He died, was buried, and came back

...

Harker looks out of the coach at the violent sunset. Rainbows dance around

the tree-tops.

Westenra cringes but Murray is fascinated.

Murray: It's beautiful, the light ...

Up ahead is a clearing. Coaches are gathered. A natural stone amphitheatre

has been kitted out with limelights which fizz and flare.

Crowds of Englishmen take seats.

Harker is confused, but the others are excited.

Murray: A musical evening. Here, so far from Piccadilly ...

The coach slows and stops. Westenra and Murray leap out to join the crowds.

Warily, Harker follows. He sits with Westenra and Murray. They pass a hip-flask between them.

Harker takes a cautious pull, stings his throat.

Into the amphitheatre trundles a magnificent carriage, pulled by a single,

black stallion. The beast is twelve hands high. The carriage is black as

the night, with an embossed gold and scarlet crest on the door. A red-eyed

dragon entwines around a letter 'D'.

The driver is a tall man, draped entirely in black, only his red eyes showing.

There is mild applause.

The driver leaps down from his seat, crouches like a big cat and stands taller than ever. His cloak swells with the night breeze.

Loud music comes from a small orchestra.

'Take a Pair of Crimson Eyes', by Gilbert and Sullivan.

The driver opens the carriage door.

A slim white limb, clad only in a transparent veil, snakes around the door. Tiny bells tinkle on a delicate ankle. The toe-nails are scarlet and

curl like claws.

The audience whoops appreciation. Murray burbles babyish delight.

Harker

is wary.

The foot touches the carpet of pine needles and a woman swings out of the

carriage, shroud-like dress fluttering around her slender form. She has a

cloud of black hair and eyes that glow like hot coals.

She hisses, tasting the night, exposing needle-sharp eye-teeth.

Writhing,

she presses her snake-supple body to the air, as if sucking in the essences of all the men present.

Murray: The bloofer lady ...

The other carriage door is kicked open and the first woman's twin leaps out. She is less languid, more sinuous, more animal-like. She claws and rends the ground and climbs up the carriage wheel like a lizard, long

red

tongue darting. Her hair is wild, a tangle of twigs and leaves.

The audience, on their feet, applaud and whistle vigorously. Some of the

men rip away their ties and burst their collar-studs, exposing their throats.

First Woman: Kisses, sister, kisses for us all ...

The hood of the carriage opens, folding back like an oyster to disclose

a

third woman, as fair as they are dark, as voluptuous as they are slender.

She is sprawled in abandon on a plush mountain of red cushions. She writhes, crawling through pillows, her scent stinging the nostrils of

the

rapt audience.

The driver stands to one side as the three women dance. Some of the men are shirtless now, clawing at their own necks until the blood trickles.

The women are contorted with expectant pleasure, licking their ruby

lips,

fangs already moist, shrouds in casual disarray, exposing lovely limbs, swan-white pale skin, velvet-sheathed muscle.

Men crawl at their feet, piling atop each other, reaching out just to touch the ankles of these women, these monstrous, desirable creatures.

Murray is out of his seat, hypnotised, pulled towards the vampires,

eyes

mad. Harker tries to hold him back, but is wrenched forward in his

wake,

dragged like an anchor.

Murray steps over his fallen fellows, but trips and goes down under

them.

Harker scrambles to his feet and finds himself among the women. Six

hands

entwine around his face. Lips brush his cheek, razor-edged teeth

drawing

scarlet lines on his face and neck.

He tries to resist but is bedazzled.

A million points of light shine in the women's eyes, on their teeth, on their earrings, necklaces, nose-stones, bracelets, veils, navel-jewels, lacquered nails. The lights close around Harker.

Teeth touch his throat.

A strong hand, sparsely bristled, reaches out and hauls one of the

women

away.

The driver steps in and tosses another vampire bodily into the

carriage.

She lands face-down and seems to be drowning in cushions, bare legs kicking.

Only the blonde remains, caressing Harker, eight inches of tongue

scraping

the underside of his chin. Fire burns in her eyes as the driver pulls

her

away.

Blonde Woman: You never love, you have never loved ...

The driver slaps her, dislocating her face. She scrambles away from Harker, who lies sprawled on the ground.

The women are back in the carriage, which does a circuit of the amphitheatre and slips into the forests. There is a massed howl of frustration, and the audience falls upon each other.

Harker, slowly recovering, sits up. Swales is there. He hauls Harker

out

of the melée and back to the coach. Harker, unsteady, is pulled into

the

coach.

Westenra and Murray are dejected, gloomy. Harker is still groggy.

Harker's Voice: A vampire's idea of a half-holiday is a third share in

a

juicy peasant baby. It has no other needs, no other desires, no other yearnings. It is mere appetite, unencumbered by morality, philosophy, religion, convention, emotion. There's a dangerous strength in that. A strength we can hardly hope to equal.

Shooting in a studio should have given more control, but Francis was constantly frustrated by Romanians. The inn set, perhaps the simplest element of the film, was still not right, though the carpenters and dressers had had almost a year to get it together. First, they took an office at the studio and turned it into Harker's bedroom. It was too small

to fit in a camera as well as an actor and the scenery. Then, they reconstructed the whole thing in the middle of a sound stage, but still bolted together the walls so they couldn't be moved. The only shot

Storaro

could take was from the ceiling looking down. Now the walls were fly-away

enough to allow camera movement, but Francis wasn't happy with the set dressing.

Prominent over the bed, where Francis wanted a crucifix, was an idealised

portrait of Ceausescu. Through Ion, Francis tried to explain to Shiny Suit, the studio manager, that his film took place before the President-for-Life came to power and that, therefore, it was highly unlikely that a picture of him would be decorating a wall anywhere. Shiny Suit seemed unwilling to admit there had ever been a time when Ceausescu didn't rule the country. He kept looking around nervously, as if

expecting to be caught in treason and hustled out to summary execution. 'Get me a crucifix,' Francis yelled.

Kate sat meekly in a director's chair - a rare luxury - while the argument

continued. Marty Sheen, in character as Harker, sat cross-legged on his bed, taking pulls at a hip-flask of potent brandy. She could smell the liquor across the studio. The actor's face was florid and his movements slow. He had been more and more Harker and less and less Marty the last few days, and Francis was driving him hard, directing with an emotional scalpel that peeled his star like an onion.

Francis told Ion to bring the offending item over so he could show

Shiny

Suit what was wrong. Grinning cheerfully, Ion squeezed past Marty and reached for the picture, dextrously dropping it onto a bed-post which shattered the glass and speared through the middle of the frame,

punching

a hole in the Premier's face.

Ion shrugged in fake apology.

Francis looked almost happy. Shiny Suit, stricken in the heart, scurried

away in defeat, afraid that his part in the vandalism of the sacred

image

would be noticed.

A crucifix was found from stock and put up on the wall.

'Marty,' Francis said, 'open yourself up, show us your beating heart,

then

tear it from your chest, squeeze it in your fist and drop it on the floor.'

Kate wondered if he meant it literally.

Marty Sheen tried to focus his eyes, and saluted in slow motion.

'Quiet on set, everybody,' Francis shouted.

Kate was crying, silently, uncontrollably. Everyone on set, except Francis and perhaps Ion, was also in tears. She felt as if she was watching the torture of a political prisoner, and just wanted it to stop. There was no script for this scene. Francis was pushing Marty into a corner, breaking him down, trying to get to Jonathan Harker. This would come at the beginning of the picture. The idea was to show the real Jonathan, to get the audience involved with him. Without this scene, the hero would seem just an observer, wandering between other people's set-pieces. 'You, Reed,' Francis said, 'you're a writer. Scribble me a voice-over. Internal monologue. Stream-of-consciousness. Give me the real Harker.' Through tear-blurred spectacles, she looked at the pad she was scrawling on. Her first attempt had been at the Jonathan she remembered, who would have been embarrassed to have been thought capable of stream-of-consciousness. Francis had torn that into confetti and poured it over Marty's head, making the actor cross his eyes and fall backwards, completely drunk, onto the bed. Marty was hugging his pillow and bawling for Mina. All for Hecuba, Kate thought. Mina wasn't even in this movie except as a locket. God knows what Mrs Harker would think when and if she saw Dracula.

Francis told the crew to ignore Marty's complaints. He was an actor, and just whining. Ion translated. She remembered what Francis had said after the storm, 'what does this cost, people?' Was anything worth what this seemed to cost? 'I don't just have to make Dracula,' Francis had told an interviewer, 'I have to be Dracula.'

Kate tried to write the Harker that was emerging between Marty and Francis. She went into the worst places of her own past and realised they still burned in her memory like smouldering coals. Her pad was spotted with red. There was blood in her tears. That didn't happen often. The camera was close to Marty's face. Francis was intent, bent close over the bed, teeth bared, hands claws. Marty mumbled, trying to wave the lens away.

'Don't look at the camera, Jonathan,' Francis said. Marty buried his face in the bed and was sick, choking. Kate wanted to protest but couldn't bring herself to. She was worried Martin Sheen would never forgive her for interrupting his Academy Award scene. He was an actor. He'd go on to other roles, casting off poor Jon like an old coat. He rolled off his vomit and looked up, where the ceiling should have been

but wasn't.
The camera ran on. And on.
Marty lay still.
Finally, the camera operator reported 'I think he's stopped breathing.'
For an eternal second, Francis let the scene run.
In the end, rather than stop filming, the director elbowed the camera
aside and threw himself on his star, putting an ear close to Marty's
sunken bare chest.
Kate dropped her pad and rushed into the set. A wall swayed and fell
with
a crash.
'His heart's still beating,' Francis said.
She could hear it, thumping irregularly.
Marty spluttered, fluid leaking from his mouth. His face was almost
scarlet.
His heart slowed.
'I think he's having a heart attack,' she said.
'He's only thirty-five,' Francis said. 'No, thirty-six. It's his
birthday
today.'
A doctor was called for. Kate thumped Marty's chest, wishing she knew
more
first aid.
The camera rolled on, forgotten.
'If this gets out,' Francis said, 'I'm finished. The film is over.'
Francis grabbed Marty's hand tight, and prayed.
'Don't die, man.'
Martin Sheen's heart wasn't listening. The beat stopped. Seconds
passed.
Another beat. Nothing.
Ion was at Francis's side. His fang-teeth were fully extended and his
eyes
were red. It was the closeness of death, triggering his instincts.
Kate, hating herself, felt it too.
The blood of the dead was spoiled, undrinkable. But the blood of the
dying
was sweet, as if invested with the life that was being spilled.
She felt her own teeth sharp against her lower lip.
Drops of her blood fell from her eyes and mouth, splattering Marty's
chin.
She pounded his chest again. Another beat. Nothing.
Ion crawled on the bed, reaching for Marty.
'I can make him live,' he whispered, mouth agape, nearing a pulseless
neck.
'My God,' said Francis, madness in his eyes. 'You can bring him back.
Even
if he dies, he can finish the picture.'
'Yesssss,' hissed the old child.
Marty's eyes sprang open. He was still conscious in his stalling body.
There was a flood of fear and panic. Kate felt his death grasp her own
heart.
Ion's teeth touched the actor's throat.
A cold clarity struck her. This undead youth of unknown bloodline must
not
pass on the Dark Kiss. He was not yet ready to be a father-in-darkness.
She took him by the scruff of his neck and tore him away. He fought
her,
but she was older, stronger.
With love, she punctured Marty's throat, feeling the death ecstasy
convulse through her. She swooned as the blood, laced heavily with

brandy,

welled into her mouth, but fought to stay in control. The lizard part of

her brain would have sucked him dry.

But Katharine Reed was not a monster.

She broke the contact, smearing blood across her chin and his chest hair.

She ripped open her blouse, scattering tiny buttons, and sliced herself with a sharpening thumbnail, drawing an incision across her ribs.

She raised Marty's head and pressed his mouth to the wound.

As the dying man suckled, she looked through fogged glasses at Francis, at

Ion, at the camera operator, at twenty studio staff. A doctor was arriving, too late.

She looked at the blank round eye of the camera.

'Turn that bloody thing off,' she said.

The principles were assembled in an office at the studio. Kate, still drained, had to be there. Marty was in a clinic with a drip-feed, awaiting

more transfusions. His entire bloodstream would have to be flushed out several times over. With luck, he wouldn't even turn. He would just have

some of her life in him, some of her in him, forever. This had happened before and Kate wasn't exactly happy about it. But she had no other choice. Ion would have killed the actor and brought him back to life as

a

new-born vampire.

'There have been stories in the trades,' Francis said, holding up a copy

of Daily Variety. It was the only newspaper that regularly got through to

the company. 'About Marty. We have to sit tight on this, to keep a lid on

panic. I can't afford even the rumour that we're in trouble. Don't you understand, we're in the twilight zone here. Anything approaching a shooting schedule or a budget was left behind a long time ago. We can

film

round Marty until he's ready to do close-ups. His brother is coming over

from the States to double him from the back. We can weather this on the ground, but maybe not in the press. The vultures from the trades want

us

and dead. Ever since Finian's Rainbow, they've hated me. I'm a smart kid

nobody likes smart kids. From now on, if anybody dies they aren't dead until I say so. Nobody is to tell anyone anything until it's gone

through

me. People, we're in trouble here and we may have to lie our way out of it. I know you think the Ceausescu regime is fascist but it's nothing compared to the Coppola regime. You don't know anything until I confirm it. You don't do anything until I say so. This is a war, people, and

we're

losing.'

Marty's family was with him. His wife didn't quite know whether to be grateful to Kate or despise her.

He would live. Really live.

She was getting snatches of his past life, mostly from films he had been

in. He would be having the same thing, coping with scrambled

impressions

of her. That must be a nightmare all of its own.
They let her into the room. It was sunny, filled with flowers.
The actor was sitting up, neatly groomed, eyes bright.
'Now I know,' he told her. 'Now I really know. I can use that in the

part.

Thank you.'
'I'm sorry,' she said, not knowing what for.

At a way-station, Swales is picking up fresh horses. The old ones,
lathered with foamy sweat, are watered and rested.
Westenra barter with a peasant for a basket of apples. Murray smiles

and

looks up at the tops of the trees. The moon shines down on his face,
making him look like a child.
Harker quietly smokes a pipe.
Harker's Voice: This was where we were to join forces with Van Helsing.
This stone-crazy double Dutchman had spent his whole life fighting

evil.

Van Helsing strides out of the mountain mists. He wears a scarlet army
tunic and a curly-brimmed top hat, and carries a cavalry sabre. His

face

is covered with old scars. Crosses of all kinds are pinned to his
clothes.

Harker's Voice: Van Helsing put the fear of God into the Devil. And he
terrified me.

in

Van Helsing is accompanied by a band of rough-riders. Of all races and
wildly different uniforms, they are his personal army of the righteous.

In

addition to mounted troops, Van Helsing has command of a couple of
man-lifting kites and a supply wagon.

Van Helsing: You are Harker?

Harker: Dr Van Helsing of Amsterdam?

Van Helsing: The same. You wish to go to Borgo Pass, Young Jonathan?

Harker: That's the plan.

Van Helsing: Better you should wish to go to Hades itself, foolish
Englishman.

crew.

Van Helsing's Aide: I say, Prof, did you know Murray was in Harker's

The stroke of '84.

Van Helsing: Hah! Beat Cambridge by three lengths. Masterful.

Van Helsing's Aide: They say the river's at its most level around Borgo
Pass. You know these mountain streams, Prof. Tricky for the oarsman.

Van Helsing: Why didn't you say that before, damfool? Harker, we go at
once, to take Borgo Pass. Such a stretch of river should be held for

the

Lord. The Un-Dead, they appreciate it not. Nosferatu don't scull.

Van Helsing rallies his men into mounting up. Harker dashes back to the
coach and climbs in. Westenra looks appalled as Van Helsing waves his
sabre, coming close to fetching off his own Aide's head.

Westenra: That man's completely mad.

to

Harker: In Wallachia, that just makes him normal. To fight what we have

face, one has to be a little mad.

Van Helsing's sabre shines with moonfire.

Van Helsing: To Borgo Pass, my angels ... charge!

in

Van Helsing leads his troop at a fast gallop. The coach is swept along

the wake of the uphill cavalry advance. Man-lifting box-kites carry observers into the night air.
Wolves howl in the distance.
Between the kites is slung a phonograph horn.
Music pours forth. The overture to Swan Lake.
Van Helsing: Music. Tchaikowsky. It upsets the devils. Stirs in them memories of things that they have lost. Makes them feel dead. Then we
kill them good. Kill them forever.
As he charges, Van Helsing waves his sword from side to side. Dark, low shapes dash out of the trees and slip among the horses' ankles. Van Helsing slashes downwards, decapitating a wolf. The head bounces against
a tree, becoming that of a gypsy boy, and rolls down the mountainside.
Van Helsing's cavalry weave expertly through the pines. They carry flaming torches. The music soars. Fire and smoke whip between the trees.
In the coach, Westenra puts his fingers in his ears. Murray smiles as if on a pleasure ride across Brighton Beach. Harker sorts through crucifixes.
At Borgo Pass, a small gypsy encampment is quiet. Elders gather around the fire. A girl hears the Tchaikowsky whining among the winds and alerts the tribe.
The gypsies bustle. Some begin to transform into wolves.
The man-lifting kites hang against the moon, casting vast bat-shadows on the mountainside.
The pounding of hooves, amplified a thousandfold by the trees, thunders.
The ground shakes. The forests tremble.
Van Helsing's cavalry explode out of the woods and fall upon the camp, riding around and through the place, knocking over wagons, dragging through fires. A dozen flaming torches are thrown. Shrieking werewolves, pelts aflame, leap up at the riders.
Silver swords flash, red with blood.
Van Helsing dismounts and strides through the carnage, making head shots with his pistol. Silver balls explode in wolf-skulls.
A young girl approaches Van Helsing's aide, smiling in welcome. She opens her mouth, hissing, and sinks fangs into the man's throat.
Three cavalymen pull the girl off and stretch her out face-down on the ground, rending her bodice to bare her back. Van Helsing drives a five-foot lance through her ribs from behind, skewering her to the bloodied earth.
Van Helsing: Vampire bitch!
The cavalymen congratulate each other and cringe as a barrel of gunpowder explodes nearby. Van Helsing does not flinch.
Harker's Voice: Van Helsing was protected by God. Whatever he did, he would survive. He was blessed.
Van Helsing kneels by his wounded Aide and pours holy water onto the man's ravaged neck. The wound hisses and steams, and the Aide shrieks.
Van Helsing: Too late, we are too late. I'm sorry, my son.

With a kukri knife, Van Helsing slices off his aide's head. Blood gushes over his trousers. The overture concludes and the battle is over. The gypsy encampment is a ruin. Fires still burn. Everyone is dead or dying, impaled or decapitated or silver-shot. Van Helsing distributes consecrated wafers, dropping crumbs on all the corpses, muttering prayers for saved souls. Harker sits, exhausted, bloody earth on his boots. Harker's Voice: If this was how Van Helsing served God, I was beginning to wonder what the firm had against Dracula. The sun pinks the skies over the mountains. Pale light falls on the encampment. Van Helsing stands tall in the early morning mists. Several badly-wounded vampires begin to shrivel and scream as the sunlight burns them to man-shaped cinders. Van Helsing: I love that smell ... spontaneous combustion at daybreak. It smells like ... salvation.

Like a small boy whose toys have been taken away, Francis stood on the rock, orange cagoul vivid against the mist-shrouded pines, and watched the cavalry ride away in the wrong direction. Gypsy extras, puzzled at this reversal, milled around their camp set. Storaro found something technical to check and absorbed himself in lenses. No one wanted to tell Francis what was going on. They had spent two hours setting up the attack, laying camera track, planting charges, rigging decapitation effects, mixing kensington gore in plastic buckets. Van Helsing's troop of ferocious cavalry were uniformed and readied. Then Shiny Suit whispered in the ear of the captain who was in command of the army-provided horsemen. The cavalry stopped being actors and became soldiers again, getting into formation and riding out. Kate had never seen anything like it. Ion nagged Shiny Suit for an explanation. Reluctantly, the official told the little vampire what was going on. 'There is fighting in the next valley,' Ion said. 'Baron Meinster has come out of the forests and taken a keep that stands over a strategic pass. Many are dead or dying. Ceausescu is laying siege to the Transylvanians.'

'We have an agreement,' Francis said, weakly. 'These are my men.'

'Only as long as they aren't needed for fighting, this man says,' reported Ion, standing aside to let the director get a good look at the Romanian official. Shiny Suit almost smiled, a certain smug attitude suggesting that this would even the score for that dropped picture of the Premier. 'I'm trying to make a fucking movie here. If people don't keep their word, maybe they deserve to be overthrown.'

The few bilingual Romanians in the crew cringed at such sacrilege. Kate

could think of dozens of stronger reasons for pulling down the Ceausescu regime.

'There might be danger,' Ion said. 'If the fighting spreads.'

'This Meinster, Ion. Can he get us the cavalry? Can we do a deal with him?'

'An arrogant elder, maestro. And doubtless preoccupied with his own projects.'

'You're probably right, fuck it.'

'We're losing the light,' Storaro announced.

Shiny Suit smiled blithely and, through Ion, ventured that the battle should be over in two to three days. It was fortunate for him that

Francis only had prop weapons within reach.

In the gypsy camp, one of the charges went off by itself. A pathetic phut sent out a choking cloud of violently green smoke. Trickles of flame ran across fresh-painted flats.

A grip threw a bucket of water, dousing the fire.

Robert Duvall and Martin Sheen, in costume and make-up, stood about uselessly. The entire camera crew, effects gang, support team were gathered, as if waiting for a cancelled train.

There was a long pause. The cavalry did not come riding triumphantly back, ready for the shot.

'Bastards,' Francis shouted, angrily waving his staff like a spear.

The next day was no better. News filtered back that Meinster was thrown out of the keep and withdrawing into the forests, but that Ceausescu ordered his retreat be harried. The cavalry were not detailed to return to their film-making duties. Kate wondered how many of them were still alive.

The retaking of the keep must have been a bloody, costly battle. A cavalry charge against a fortress position would be almost a suicide mission. Disconsolately, Francis and Storaro sorted out some pick-up shots that could be managed.

A search was mounted for Shiny Suit, so that a definite time could be established for rescheduling of the attack scene. He had vanished into the mists, presumably to escape the American's wrath.

Kate huddled under a tree and tried to puzzle out a local newspaper. She was brushing up her Romanian, simultaneously coping with the euphemisms and lacunae of a non-free press. According to the paper, Meinster had been crushed weeks ago and was hiding in a ditch somewhere, certain to be beheaded within the hour.

She couldn't help feeling the real story was in the next valley. As a newspaperwoman, she should be there, not waiting around for this stalled juggernaut to get back on track. Meinster's Kids frightened and fascinated her. She should know about them, try to understand. But American Zoetrope had first call on her, and she didn't have the heart to be another defector.

Marty Sheen joined her.

He was mostly recovered and understood what she had done for him, though he was still exploring the implications of their blood link. Just now, he was more anxious about working with Brando - who was due in next week - than his health. There was still no scripted ending.

The day that the cavalry - well, some of them - came back, faces drawn and downcast, uniforms muddied, eyes haunted, Shiny Suit was discovered with his neck broken, flopped half-in a stream. He must have fallen in the dark, tumbling down the precipitous mountainside. His face and neck were ripped, torn by the sharp thorns of the mountain bushes. He had bled dry into the water, and his staring face was white. 'It is good that Georghiou is dead,' Ion pronounced. 'He upset the maestro.' Kate hadn't known the bureaucrat's name. Francis was frustrated at this fresh delay, but graciously let the corpse be removed and the proper authorities be notified before proceeding with the shoot.

A police inspector was escorted around by Ion, poking at a few broken bushes and examining Georghiou's effects. Ion somehow persuaded the man to conclude the business speedily. The boy was a miracle, everyone agreed. 'Miss Reed,' Ion interrupted. She laid down her newspaper. Dressed as an American boy, with his hair cut by the make-up department,

a light-meter hung around his neck, Ion was unrecognisable as the bedraggled orphan who had come to her hotel room in Bucharest. Kate laid aside her journal and pen. 'John Popp,' Ion pronounced, tapping his chest. His J-sound was perfect.

'John Popp, the American.' She thought about it. Ion - no, John - had sloughed off his nationality and all national characteristics like a snake shedding a skin. New-born as an American, pink-skinned and glowing, he would never be challenged. 'Do you want to go to America?' 'Oh yes, Miss Reed. America is a young country, full of life. Fresh blood.

There, one can be anything one chooses. It is the only country for a vampire.' Kate wasn't sure whether to feel sorry for the vampire youth or for the American continent. One of them was sure to be disappointed. 'John Popp,' he repeated, pleased. Was this how Dracula had been when he first thought of moving to Great Britain, then the liveliest country in the world just as America was

now? The Count had practised his English pronunciation in conversations with Jonathan, and memorised railway time-tables, relishing the exotic names of St Pancras, King's Cross and Euston. Had he rolled his anglicised name - Count DeVille - around his mouth, pleased with himself?

Of course, Dracula saw himself as a conqueror, the rightful ruler of all lands he rode over. Ion-John was more like the Irish and Italian emigrants

who poured through Ellis Island at the beginning of the century, certain

America was the land of opportunity and that each potato-picker or barber could become a self-made plutocrat.

Envious of his conviction, affection stabbing her heart, wishing she could

protect him always, Kate kissed him. He struggled awkwardly, a child hugged by an embarrassingly aged auntie.

Mists pool around Borgo Pass. Black crags project from the white sea. The coach proceeds slowly. Everyone looks around, wary.

Murray: Remember that last phial of laudanum ... I just downed it.

Westenra: Good show, man.

Murray: It's like the Crystal Palace.

Harker sits by Swales, looking up at the ancient castle that dominates the

view. Broken battlements are jagged against the boiling sky.

Harker's Voice: Castle Dracula. The trail snaked through the forest, leading me directly to him. The Count. The countryside was Dracula. He had

become one with the mountains, the trees, the stinking earth.

The coach halts. Murray pokes his head out of the window, and sighs in amazement.

Swales: Borgo Pass, Harker. I'll go no further.

Harker looks at Swales. There is no fear in the coachman's face, but his

eyes are slitted.

A sliver of dark bursts like a torpedo from the sea of mist. A sharpened

stake impales Swales, bloody point projecting a foot or more from his chest.

Swales sputters hatred and takes a grip on Harker, trying to hug him, to

pull him onto the sharp point sticking out of his sternum.

Harker struggles in silence, setting the heel of his hand against Swales's

head. He pushes and the dead man's grip relaxes. Swales tumbles from

his seat and rolls off the precipice, falling silently into the mists. Murray: Good grief, man. That was extreme.

Rising over Borgo Pass was Castle Dracula. Half mossy black stone, half fresh orange timber.

Kate was impressed.

Though the permits had still not come through, Francis had ordered the crew to erect and dress the castle set. This was a long way from

Bucharest

and without Georghiou, the hand of Ceausescu could not fall.

From some angles, the castle was an ancient fastness, a fit lair for the

vampire King. But a few steps off the path and it was a shell, propped

up

by timbers. Painted board mingled with stone.

If Meinster's Kids were in the forests, they could look up at the mountain

and take heart. This sham castle might be their rallying-point. She hummed

'Paper Moon', imagining vampires summoned back to these mountains to a castle that was not a castle and a king who was just an actor in greasepaint.

A grip, silhouetted in the gateway, used a gun-like device to wisp thick

cobweb on the portcullis. Cages of imported vermin were stacked up, ready

to be unloosed. Stakes, rigged up with bicycle seats that would support the impaled extras, stood on the mountainside.

It was a magnificent fake.

Francis, leaning on his stake, stood and admired the edifice thrown up on

his orders. Ion-John was at his side, a faithful Renfield for once.

'Orson Welles said it was the best train set a boy could have,' Francis said. Ion probably didn't know who Welles was. 'But it broke him in the end.'

In her cardigan pocket, she found the joke shop fangs from the 100th Day

of Shooting Party. Soon, there would be a 200th Day Party.

She snapped the teeth together like castanets, feeling almost giddy up here in the mists where the air was thin and the nights cold.

In her pleasant contralto, far more Irish-inflected than her speaking voice, she crooned 'it's a Barnum and Bailey world, just as phoney as

it can be, but it wouldn't be make-believe if you believed in me.'

On foot, Harker arrives at the gates of the castle. Westenra and Murray hang back a little way.

A silent crowd of gypsies parts to let the Englishmen through. Harker notices human and wolf teeth strung in necklaces, red eyes and feral fangs, withered bat-membranes curtaining under arms, furry bare feet hooked into the rock. These are the Szekeley, the children of Dracula.

In the courtyard, an armadillo noses among freshly-severed human heads. Harker is smitten by the stench of decay but tries to hide his distaste.

Murray and Westenra groan and complain. They both hold out large crucifixes.

A rat-like figure scuttles out of the crowds.

Renfield: Are you English? I'm an Englishman. R.M. Renfield, at your service.

He shakes Harker's hand, then hugs him. His eyes are jittery, mad.

Renfield: The Master has been waiting for you. I'm a lunatic, you know. Zoophagous. I eat flies. Spiders. Birds, when I can get them. It's the blood. The blood is the life, as the book says. The Master understands. Dracula. He knows you're coming. He knows everything. He's a

poet-warrior

in the classical sense. He has the vision. You'll see, you'll learn.

He's

lived through the centuries. His wisdom is beyond ours, beyond anything

we

can imagine. How can I make you understand? He's promised me lives.

Many

lives. Some nights, he'll creep up on you, while you're shaving, and

break

your mirror. A foul bauble of man's vanity. The blood of Attila flows

in

his veins. He is the Master.

Renfield plucks a crawling insect from Westenra's coat and gobbles it

down.

Renfield: I know what bothers you. The heads. The severed heads. It's his way. It's the only language they understand. He doesn't love these things, but he knows he must do them. He knows the truth. Rats! He knows where the rats come from. Sometimes, he'll say 'they fought the dogs and killed the cats and bit the babies in the cradles, and ate the cheeses out of the vats and licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles'. Harker ignores the prattle and walks across the courtyard. Scrap of mist waft under his boots. A huge figure fills a doorway. Moonlight shines on his great, bald head. Heavy jowls glisten as a humourless smile discloses yellow eye-teeth the size of thumbs. Harker halts. A bass voice rumbles. Dracula: I ... am ... Dracula.

Francis had first envisioned Dracula as a stick-insect skeleton, dried up, hollow-eyed, brittle. When Brando arrived on set, weighing in at 250 pounds, he had to rethink the character as a blood-bloated leech, full to bursting with stolen life, overflowing his coffin. For two days, Francis had been trying to get a usable reading of the line 'I am Dracula'. Kate, initially as thrilled as anyone else to see Brando at work, was bored rigid by numberless mumbled retakes. The line was written in three-foot tall black letters on a large piece of cardboard held up by two grips. The actor experimented with emphases, accents, pronunciations from 'Dorragulya' to 'Jacoolier'. He read the line looking away from the camera and peering straight at the lens. He tried it with false fangs inside his mouth, sticking out of his mouth, shoved up his nostrils or thrown away altogether. Once he came out with a bat tattooed on his bald head in black lipstick. After considering it for a while, Francis ordered the decal wiped off. You couldn't say that the star wasn't bringing ideas to the production. For two hours now, Brando had been hanging upside-down in the archway, secured by a team of very tired technicians at the end of two guy-ropes. He thought it might be interesting if the Count were discovered like a sleeping bat. Literally, he read his line upside-down. Marty Sheen, over whose shoulder the shot was taken, had fallen asleep. 'I am Dracula. I am Dracula. I am Dracula. I am Dracula. 'I am Dracula! I am Dracula? 'Dracula am I. Am I Dracula? Dracula I am. I Dracula am. Am Dracula I? 'I'm Dracula. 'The name's Dracula. Count Dracula.

'Hey, I'm Dracula.
'Me ... Dracula. You ... liquid lunch.'
He read the line as Stanley Kowalski, as Don Corleone, as Charlie Chan,
as
Jerry Lewis, as Laurence Olivier, as Robert Newton.
Francis patiently shot take after take.
Dennis Hopper hung around, awed, smoking grass. All the actors wanted
to
watch.
Brando's face went scarlet. Upside-down, he had problems with the
teeth.
Relieved, the grips eased up on the ropes and the star dropped towards
the
ground. They slowed before his head cracked like an egg on the ground.
Assistants helped him rearrange himself.
Francis thought about the scene.
'Marlon, it seems to me that we could do worse than go back to the
book.'
'The book?' Brando asked.
'Remember, when we first discussed the role. We talked about how Stoker
describes the Count.'
'I don't quite ...'
'You told me you knew the book.'
'I never read it.'
'You said ...'
'I lied.'

Harker, in chains, is confined in a dungeon. Rats crawl around his
feet.
Water flows all around.
A shadow passes.
Harker looks up. A gray bat-face hovers above, nostrils elaborately
frilled, enormous teeth locked. Dracula seems to fill the room, black
cape
stretched over his enormous belly and trunk-like limbs.
Dracula drops something into Harker's lap. It is Westenra's head, eyes
white.
Harker screams.
Dracula is gone.

An insectile clacking emerged from the Script Crypt, the walled-off
space
on the set where Francis had hidden himself away with his typewriter.
Millions of dollars poured away daily as the director tried to come up
with an ending. In drafts Kate had seen - only a fraction of the
attempts
Francis had made - Harker killed Dracula, Dracula killed Harker,
Dracula
and Harker became allies, Dracula and Harker were both killed by Van
Helsing (unworkable, because Robert Duvall was making another film on
another continent), lightning destroyed the whole castle.
It was generally agreed that Dracula should die.
The Count perished through decapitation, purifying fire, running water,
a
stake through the heart, a hawthorn bush, a giant crucifix, silver
bullets, the hand of God, the claws of the Devil, armed insurrection,
suicide, a swarm of infernal bats, bubonic plague, dismemberment by
axe,
permanent transformation into a dog.
Brando suggested that he play Dracula as a Green Suitcase.

Francis was on medication.

'Reed, what does he mean to you?'

She thought Francis meant Ion-John.

'He's just a kid, but he's getting older fast. There's something ...'

'Not John. Dracula.'

'Oh, him.'

'Yes, him. Dracula. Count Dracula. King of the Vampires.'

'I never acknowledged that title.'

'In the 1880s, you were against him?'

'You could say that.'

'But he gave you so much, eternal life?'

'He wasn't my father. Not directly.'

'But he brought vampirism out of the darkness.'

'He was a monster.'

'Just a monster? In the end, just that?'

She thought hard.

'No, there was more. He was more. He was ... he is, you know ... big.

Huge, enormous. Like the elephant described by blind men. He had many

aspects. But all were monstrous. He didn't bring us out of the

darkness.

He was the darkness.'

'John says he was a national hero.'

'John wasn't born then. Or turned.'

'Guide me, Reed.'

'I can't write your ending for you.'

At the worst possible time, the policeman was back. There were questions

about Shiny Suit. Irregularities revealed by the autopsy.

For some reason, Kate was questioned.

Through an interpreter, the policemen kept asking her about the dead official, what had their dealings been, whether Georghiou's prejudice against her kind had affected her.

Then he asked her when she had last fed, and upon whom?

'That's private,' she said.

She didn't want to admit that she had been snacking on rats for months.

She had had no time to cultivate anyone warm. Her powers of fascination were thinning.

A scrap of cloth was produced and handed to her.

'Do you recognise this?' she was asked.

It was filthy, but she realised that she did.

'Why, it's my scarf. From Biba. I ...'

It was snatched away from her. The policeman wrote down a note.

She tried to say something about Ion, but thought better of it. The

translator told the policeman Kate had almost admitted to something.

She felt distinctly chilled.

She was asked to open her mouth, like a horse up for sale. The policeman

peered at her sharp little teeth and tutted.

That was all for now.

'How are monsters made?'

Kate was weary of questions. Francis, Marty, the police. Always questions.

Still, she was on the payroll as an advisor.

'I've known too many monsters, Francis. Some were born, some were made all

at once, some were eroded, some shaped themselves, some twisted by history.'

'What about Dracula?'

'He was the monster of monsters. All of the above.'

Francis laughed.

'You're thinking of Brando.'

'After your movie, so will everybody else.'

He was pleased by the thought.

'I guess they will.'

'You're bringing him back. Is that a good idea?'

'It's a bit late to raise that.'

'Seriously, Francis. He'll never be gone, never be forgotten. But your Dracula will be powerful. In the next valley, people are fighting over

the

tatters of the old, faded Dracula. What will your Technicolor, 70 mm, Dolby stereo Dracula mean?'

'Meanings are for the critics.'

Two Szekeleys throw Harker into the great hall of the castle. He sprawls

on the straw-covered flagstones, emaciated and wild-eyed, close to madness.

Dracula sits on a throne which stretches wooden wings out behind him.

Renfield worships at his feet, tongue applied to the Count's black leather

boot. Murray, a blissful smile on his face and scabs on his neck, stands

to one side, with Dracula's three vampire brides.

Dracula: I bid you welcome. Come safely, go freely and leave some of the

happiness you bring.

Harker looks up.

Harker: You ... were a Prince.

Dracula: I am a Prince still. Of Darkness.

The brides titter and clap. A look from their Master silences them.

Dracula: Harker, what do you think we are doing here, at the edge of Christendom? What dark mirror is held up to our unreflecting faces?

By the throne is an occasional table piled high with books and periodicals. Bradshaw's Guide to Railway Timetables in England,

Scotland

and Wales, George and Weedon Grossmith's Diary of a Nobody, Sabine

Baring-Gould's The Book of Were-Wolves, Oscar Wilde's Salomé.

Dracula picks up a volume of the poetry of Robert Browning.

Dracula: 'I must not omit to say that in Transylvania there's a tribe of

alien people that ascribe the outlandish ways and dress on which their neighbours lay such stress, to their fathers and mothers having risen

out

of some subterranean prison into which they were trepanned long time

ago

in a mighty band out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land, but how or why, they don't understand.'

Renfield claps.

Renfield: Rats, Master. Rats.

Dracula reaches down with both hands and turns the madman's head right around. The brides fall upon the madman's twitching body, nipping at

him

greedily before he dies and the blood spoils.

Harker looks away.

At the airport, she was detained by officials. There was some question about her passport.

Francis was worried about the crates of exposed film. The negative was precious, volatile, irreplaceable. He personally, through John, argued with the customs people and handed over disproportionate bribes. He still carried his staff, which he used to point the way and rap punishment. He looked a bit like Friar Tuck. The film, the raw material of Dracula, was to be treated as if it were valuable as gold and dangerous as plutonium. It was stowed on the aeroplane by soldiers. A blank-faced woman sat across the desk from Kate. The stirrings of panic ticked inside her. The scheduled time of departure neared. The rest of the crew were lined up with their luggage, joking despite tiredness. After over a year, they were glad to be gone for good from this backward country. They talked about what they would do when they got home. Marty Sheen was looking healthier, years younger. Francis was bubbling again, excited to be on to the next stage. Kate looked from the Romanian woman to the portraits of Nicolae and Elena on the wall behind her. All eyes were cold, hateful. The woman wore a discreet crucifix and a Party badge clipped to her uniform lapel. A rope barrier was removed and the eager crowd of the Dracula company stormed towards the aeroplane, mounting the steps, squeezing into the cabin. The flight was for London, then New York, then Los Angeles. Half a world away. Kate wanted to stand up, to join the plane, to add her own jokes and fantasies to the rowdy chatter, to fly away from here. Her luggage, she realised, was in the hold. A man in a black trenchcoat - Securitate? - and two uniformed policemen arrived and exchanged terse phrases with the woman. Kate gathered they were talking about Shiny Suit. And her. They used old, cruel words: leech, nosferatu, parasite. The Securitate man looked at her passport. 'It is impossible that you be allowed to leave.' Across the tarmac, the last of the crew - Ion-John among them, baseball cap turned backwards, bulky kit-bag on his shoulder - disappeared into the sleek tube of the aeroplane. The door was pulled shut. She was forgotten, left behind. How long would it be before anyone noticed? With different sets of people debarking in three cities, probably forever. It was easy to miss one mousy advisor in the excitement, the anticipation, the triumph of going home with the movie shot. Months of post-production, dialogue looping, editing, rough cutting, previews, publicity and release lay ahead, with box office takings to be crowed over and prizes to be competed for in Cannes and on Oscar night. Maybe when they came to put her credit on the film, someone would think

to

ask what had become of the funny little old girl with the thick glasses and the red hair.

'You are a sympathiser with the Transylvania Movement.'

'Good God,' she blurted, 'why would anybody want to live here.'

That did not go down well.

The engines were whining. The plane taxied towards the runway.

'This is an old country, Miss Katharine Reed,' the Securitate man sneered.

'We know the ways of your kind, and we understand how they should be dealt

with.'

All the eyes were pitiless.

The giant black horse is lead into the courtyard by the gypsies. Swords are drawn in salute to the animal. It whinnies slightly, coat glossy ebony, nostrils scarlet.

Inside the castle, Harker descends a circular stairway carefully, wiping

aside cobwebs. He has a wooden stake in his hands.

The gypsies close on the horse.

Harker's Voice: Even the castle wanted him dead, and that's what he served

at the end. The ancient, blood-caked stones of his Transylvanian fastness.

Harker stands over Dracula's coffin. The Count lies, bloated with blood,

face puffy and violet.

Gypsy knives stroke the horse's flanks. Blood erupts from the coat.

Harker raises the stake with both hands over his head.

Dracula's eyes open, red marbles in his fat, flat face. Harker is given pause.

The horse neighs in sudden pain. Axes chop at its neck and legs. The mighty beast is felled.

Harker plunges the stake into the Count's vast chest.

The horse jerks spastically as the gypsies hack at it. Its hooves scrape

painfully on the cobbles.

A gout of violently red blood gushes upwards, splashing directly into Harker's face, reddening him from head to waist. The flow continues, exploding everywhere, filling the coffin, the room, driving Harker back.

Dracula's great hands grip the sides of the coffin and he tries to sit. Around him is a cloud of blood droplets, hanging in the air like slo-mo fog.

The horse kicks its last, clearing a circle. The gypsies look with respect

at the creature they have slain.

Harker takes a shovel and pounds at the stake, driving it deeper into Dracula's barrel chest, forcing him back into his filthy sarcophagus.

At last, the Count gives up. Whispered words escape from him with his last

breath.

Dracula: The horror ... the horror ...

She supposed there were worse places than a Romanian jail. But not many.

They kept her isolated from the warm prisoners. Rapists and murderers and

dissidents were afraid of her. She found herself penned with uncommunicative Transylvanians, haughty elders reduced to grime and resentful new-borns.

She had seen a couple of Meinster's Kids, and their calm, purposeful, blank-eyed viciousness disturbed her. Their definition of enemy was terrifyingly broad, and they believed in killing. No negotiation, no surrender, no accommodation. Just death, on an industrial scale. The bars were silver. She fed on insects and rats. She was weak. Every day, she was interrogated.

They were convinced she had murdered Georghiou. His throat had been gnawed

and he was completely exsanguinated.

Why her? Why not some Transylvanian terrorist?

Because of the bloodied once-yellow scrap in his dead fist. A length of thin silk, which she had identified as her Biba scarf. The scarf she had

thought of as civilisation. The bandage she had used to bind Ion's wound.

She said nothing about that.

Ion-John was on the other side of the world, making his way. She was left

behind in his stead, an offering to placate those who would pursue him. She could not pretend even to herself that it was not deliberate. She understood all too well how he had survived so many years underground.

He had learned the predator's trick: to be loved, but never to love. For that, she pitied him even as she could cheerfully have torn his head off.

There were ways out of jails. Even jails with silver bars and garlic hung from every window. The Romanian jailers prided themselves on knowing vampires, but they still treated her as if she were feeble-minded and fragile.

Her strength was sapping, and each night without proper feeding made her weaker.

Walls could be broken through. And there were passes out of the country.

She would have to fall back on skills she had thought never to exercise again.

But she was a survivor of the night.

As, quietly, she planned her escape from the prison and from the country,

he she tried to imagine where the 'Son of Dracula' was, to conceive of the life he was living in America, to count the used-up husks left in his wake. Was he still at his maestro's side, making himself useful? Or had

passed beyond that, found a new patron or become a maestro himself? Eventually, he would build his castle in Beverly Hills and enslave a harem. What might he become: a studio head, a cocaine baron, a rock promoter, a media mogul, a star? Truly, Ion-John was what Francis had wanted of Brando, Dracula reborn. An old monster, remade for the new

world and the next century, meaning all things, tainting everything he touched.

She would leave him be, this new monster of hers, this creature born of Hollywood fantasy and her own thoughtless charity. With Dracula gone or transformed, the world needed a fresh monster. And John Popp would do

as well as anyone else. The world had made him and it could cope with him.

Kate extruded a fingernail into a hard, sharp spar, and scraped the wall.

The stones were solid, but between them was old mortar, which crumbled easily.

Harker, face still red with Dracula's blood, is back in his room at the inn in Bistritz. He stands in front of the mirror.

Harker's Voice: They were going to make me a saint for this, and I wasn't

even in their fucking church any more.

Harker looks deep into the mirror.

He has no reflection.

Harker's mouth forms the words, but the voice is Dracula's.

The horror ... the horror ...