

ARROGANT VAMPIRE

ARTHUR PORGES

THE VAMPIRE materialized in the girl's room. He came right through the closed window like a swirl of mist, and a moment later stood solid and massive on the floor. He was short, plump, pale, wore a traditional black cloak, and had arrogance enough for a Chicago traffic cop. He paused for only a second at the sight of the three men awaiting him. Then he smiled, showing the two enormous canines that are typical of the breed.

"Gentlemen," he said politely in perfect French, "once again I am honored by your presence, it would seem. But there is no need to group yourselves so protectively about mademoiselle's bed. As you well know from my last visit, that can do nothing to help her."

Moving with the sinuous grace of a great ferret, he came towards them, and reluctantly they let him pass. The girl slept soundly, under heavy sedation. Her physician and his two friends could do that much for her, at least: spare her the ordeal of awaking while the vampire fed. After his last attack, they had given her a transfusion of whole blood, so that she looked quite rosy and healthy lying there. The vampire's bluish tongue licked briefly at his purple lips, thick and moist.

"I prefer to dine alone," he remarked pointedly, eyeing the three men. "And it's not very good manners to stare like that. One would think you had never seen a vampire before."

"You first," Dr. Vrillac told one of his companions. "Go ahead, Dupuy, this is no time to vacillate."

Obviously apprehensive, the man stepped forward, menacing the cloaked figure with one arm outstretched. The vampire glanced at the fistful of herbs some ten inches from his breast and laughed aloud.

"So you prepared for my return!" he sputtered. "Garlic, you silly people! Before I became a vampire, my friends, I was a chef. I love all flavorful herbs; they are the secret of all good French cooking. Garlic holds no terrors for me; on the contrary, see?" He opened Dupuy's flaccid fingers, grabbed a bulb, and swallowed it in one gulp. "Delicious! What a pity I

must depend so completely on blood alone—me, who was noted for the variety of his cuisine. But nothing else will sustain a vampire, and so—" He finished with a typical Gallic shrug.

"I guess it's up to you now, Father Morin," Vrillac said to the third man, who wore a clerical collar.

The priest took the crucifix from his pocket and approached the vampire, holding the sacred relic brought all the way from Lourdes. They hoped the monster would cringe in horror, or at as the cross came within inches of his thick nose, but he merely grinned disdainfully, and pushed it away with one finger.

"Really," he objected. "You spare me nothing. Every cliché in the book. The fact is, gentlemen, that while still alive, I became a Muslim. Your crucifix doesn't mean a thing to me. I should warn you that there is a Jewish vampire near Tours who would be even more amused." His face was a study in complacency. "Accept the unpleasant truth, my friends. There's nothing you can do. I shall drink this girl dry unless you keep replenishing her by transfusions. After that, I'll come for your wife"— he pointed to the doctor—"or one of your appetizing young daughters." Here he looked squarely at Dupuy, who paled. "I would have a few sips of you three instead, except that I find females of a more delicate flavor. As a former chef, my taste in such matters is quite impeccable. And in view of your recent fiasco with the garlic, I should add that this young lady's excessive use of the stuff in salad dressing makes her very tasty, indeed."

"It is my turn now," Dr. Vrillac said sternly, drawing a pistol from his pocket. The vampire stepped back in mock dismay.

"Oh, no!" he groaned. "Not a silver bullet; I was hoping you might have overlooked at least one of the traditional solutions. I suppose it's no use to point out," he said glumly, expanding his chest for the impact, "that you're slightly confused and treating me like a werewolf."

The doctor's acquiline face showed his chagrin, but he said stoutly: "Take that, inhuman fiend!" and fired at point blank range. The bullet, painstakingly cast from pure silver, thudded into the vampire's chest, but he didn't even wince.

"That's the eleventh one I'm carrying," he said almost proudly, "You've merely wasted about five hundred francs."

Dupuy, still shaken by the threat to his daughters, became abject in his surrender.

"Can't we make a deal?" he demanded anxiously. "I could get plenty of

whole blood from the hospital. I have money. You wouldn't need to bother my daughters or this poor child here."

"Not a chance," was the scornful reply. "I can tap blood banks any time I like. Believe me, it's not up to the real stuff, warm and fragrant, right from the delicate blue veins of a girl. In the words of a recent American president, I'm a no-deal man!"

"I appeal to you then as a Frenchman," Father Morin said, "How can you be so cruel to your own people? Why not try German blood for a while? Or Russian?"

"Would you give up good French wine for Bock Beer?" the vampire snorted. "Besides, we vampires are not concerned with national boundaries."

"We could find your body by day and drive a wooden stake through the heart," Dr. Vrillac said grimly.

"Very true—*if* you could find it. That is the one fact about us you have right." The cold-lit eyes were full of ironic amusement. "But you see, I'm buried in the big cemetery North of town. There are at least fifteen hundred old graves there. Which one am I in, hein? A good question! You know, of course, that I do not disturb the surface as I come and go. Pure hydrogen gas is no more tenuous and ethereal. Can you dig up all fifteen hundred looking for that one perfectly preserved body with fresh blood on its lips? Obviously not. Besides the mere physical difficulties, the people would never stand for such desecration. And you don't even know my name— and are not likely to. So you see, gentlemen, I hold all the cards." He spread his cloak in a theatrical gesture. "And now, if you won't leave, I must feast anyhow. It is well past my usual dinner hour, thanks to your silly tricks."

HE GLIDED to the bed, pulled the coverlet down as far as the girl's throat, and bent over. It was hopeless to grapple with him; they knew his superhuman strength too well for that. On his first visit, they had tried force, only to be flung back like so many dolls. The vampire was compounded of smoke or iron as he chose, and neither could be mastered by human flesh. So rather than witness the girl's defilement, they reluctantly left the room.

"We'd better prepare for another massive transfusion," Dr. Vrillac sighed, when they had closed the door on their unhappy patient. "That's all we seem able to do for the poor child."

"But surely, Doctor," Father Morin objected, "modern science can defeat a vampire. This is 1962, not 1562."

"Yes," said Dupuy quietly. "We must find his body by day and destroy it."

"But how?" Vrillac demanded, his voice bitter. "He becomes like smoke at the grave, and passes down into his coffin without leaving the slightest trace on the surface. Science is helpless even to explain such dematerialization, much less prevent it. He was perfectly right about those fifteen hundred tombs. We have no idea which is his."

"We do know he was a chef," the priest reminded him hopefully.

"What good is that. It may not say 'Chef' on the marker. And how long has he been dead—or undead, rather? It could be ten years or two hundred, for all we know."

"You're right," Dupuy said glumly. "And the stone probably won't say anything. That cemetery was closed to further burials in 1840. Most of the graves are so old that two thirds will have quite illegible inscriptions. They use a soft stone in these parts, I happen to know."

"Still, we must try," Father Morin persisted. "There's no other way. You can't track a vampire with bloodhounds. No dog will even go near one. Besides, he goes through the air, anyhow, and often as a bat."

"Hey!" the doctor exclaimed, his eyes brightening. "There's a point, maybe. How would a dog react at the tomb itself? Would he shy away, and whine? That could tell us what we need to know."

"I doubt it," Dupuy said. "I've read everything there is on the vampire legend; and all the experts say is that dogs avoid them above ground. Once in the coffin by day, and the beast doesn't know their body from anybody else's. Besides, a dog can't smell something five or six meters underground. Even a trained truffle-hound never works that deep."

"There must be a solution," Vrillac growled. "I'll talk to some of my technical friends at the university. It is simply unbearable to have a medieval anachronism like this cow of a vampire jeering at modern science—this in the country of Pasteur!"

"We don't have much time," Father Morin reminded them. "The fiend will be back tomorrow again exactly at seven. It's easy to guess what the former chef's favorite dinner time was."

"No use to hide the poor girl again, I suppose," Dupuy said.

"You know it isn't," the doctor replied. "Didn't we move her several

times this month? And yet the vampire was never more than ten minutes late for his meal. No, we must forget about defensive measures and attack. Remember the famous words of Joffre. You know, about his front collapsing, his flank threatened—nothing to do but advance."

"He had only the Boche to fight," Dupuy said. "What a pity this monster has to be one of us! A Frenchman with no patriotism—incredible."

"Let me work on our problem after consulting with some of my colleagues at the university," Dr. Vrillac said. "And now we'd better go in to the girl and prepare for that transfusion. By now the monster will have committed his dirtiness and left."

THE NEXT evening, promptly at seven, the vampire came to dinner. The three men were there again, but made no attempt to dissuade the cloaked figure. As soon as he approached the sleeping girl, they left the room.

This particular feast was not to the taste of the former chef.

"What the devil kind of blood did they give her this time?" he muttered after the first sip. "Very inferior quality; must be from some sale anemic. If they keep this up, I may have to start on their families immediately. It doesn't pay to interfere with Nature," he added, somewhat surprisingly for a being who violated all her laws by his very existence. "If it weren't for the fun of frustrating them, I'd have stopped as soon as the original supply was gone. That transfused stuff has never been up to the girl's own blood, anyhow. Oh, well! they say it's healthier to leave the table a little hungry; and I've had enough of this third-rate swill tonight. Zut! It's enough to make a fussy eater sick." And drawing his cloak about him, the vampire stepped to the window, dislimned, and flapped away as a large bat.

Promptly at sunrise the hunt began. There were more than fifteen hundred graves to test, which meant about a hundred apiece for the fourteen men involved. Even so, it took less than two hours to find the right one. The barely legible inscription read: "Bertrand Morlaix. 1793—1835." If there had ever been any further information on the friable stone, it had weathered away.

Two burly artisans from Father Morin's parish cut through the dry, age hardened soil with heavy spades. The coffin was four meters deep, a box of dark, mouldered wood. Not so the body inside, which was perfectly

preserved, with fresh blood on the lips. For just an instant, as they drove the stake home, the cavernous eyes opened to glare hatred ; then the remains crumbled to dust.

"An admirable solution, Doctor!" Dupuy exulted, knowing his daughters to be safe. "What was that stuff again?"

"Just a radioactive tracer we added to the girl's blood before the vampire came again. Once he was full of that, it took our fourteen geiger counters only two hours to locate the grave. A vampire," he added proudly, "no matter how sly, is not really a match for modern science after all!"