

Dracula

Libretto: Paweł Chynowski, based on the novel by Bram Stoker

PROLOGUE

Scene 1. Dracula's despair

In the fifteenth Century, Count Vlad Dracula set off to war against the Turks, to defend his native Transylvania. Rumours of his death soon spread, and his beautiful grief-stricken wife Elizabeth threw herself from the castle tower. But the courageous count hadn't perished after all. He returned to his castle and became sick with despair over the loss of his beloved wife. When the clergy refused burial to the suicide victim, Dracula renounced God and humankind, transforming into a cruel vampire.

Scene 2. Jonathan's farewell

London, 1897. Jonathan Harker, a young solicitor, is going to Transylvania to finalise the mysterious Count Dracula's purchase of an estate in England. Before he leaves, he and his fiancée Mina visit the hospitable home of Mrs Westenra to say goodbye to their friends. The hostess, who has a heart condition, is being courted by the eccentric Professor Van Helsing. Her vivacious daughter Lucy is being wooed by two friends: aristocrat Arthur Holmwood and psychiatrist Doctor Jack Seward. Lucy is more favourably inclined towards Arthur. Meanwhile, her friend Mina is filled with serious misgivings about Jonathan's departure for a distant country. Bidding him farewell, she offers her beloved a decorative likeness of herself, and then confesses her sadness to Lucy.

ACT I. TRANSYLVANIA

Scene 1. In front of Dracula's castle

A coach carrying Jonathan arrives at the Count's castle. The passengers include a Mother with her baby and child. When Jonathan leaves his companions outside the castle, he sees they become inexplicably anxious.

Scene 2. The party at the Count's

There is a party in progress at Dracula's. Jonathan has no suspicion yet that this is a meeting of vampires. He feels uncomfortable when some of the women harass him. Finally the old count dismisses the whole company so the solicitor can conclude the property transaction. His host, however, doesn't seem very interested in the deal. When the inebriated Jonathan cuts his finger, Dracula becomes excited and tries to suck the blood from his guest's hand. He then notices that Jonathan is holding Mina's portrait. He is fascinated by her likeness, as she reminds him of his beloved wife Elizabeth.

Jonathan is finally alone and, being tired from his journey, nods off. In his half-dreaming state he is accosted by the obtrusive women he met earlier, but Dracula unexpectedly rescues him by offering the female vampires the body of a baby. At that moment Jonathan regains consciousness, but Dracula leaves again. Intrigued by his strange dreams and his host's behaviour, Jonathan follows.

Meanwhile, the mother Jonathan met on his journey is in front of the Count's castle, distraught and seeking her lost children. Nuns have found just one of her children, and she realises her infant has been lost forever.

Scene 3. The vampires' lair

Vampires gather in the gloomy vault of the Count's castle, where they do their ghastly dance. Dracula also arrives. He performs the ritual of shutting his semiconscious companions in boxes and then takes his own place. Creeping in after him, Jonathan only sees the lid of the box closing. He is terrified. When he raises the lid of Dracula's bed, the count tries to pull him inside. Suddenly, the grief-stricken mother appears in the vault, holding a cross. Dracula slams the lid shut and the brave woman leads the shocked Jonathan away.

ACT II. LONDON

Scene 1. Renfield

The inmates at Doctor Seward's mental asylum include the exceptionally peculiar Renfield. He is obsessed with insects and birds, which he maniacally devours when he catches them. His growing frenzy gives the doctor concern and scares the other inmates. He gets especially tense when those familiar boxes from the vault of the Transylvanian castle are carried past the asylum windows by porters. When the concerned doctor leads the other inmates out of the room they share with Renfield, Dracula appears at the hospital window. Renfield humbly invites him inside and, believing that Dracula may offer the gift of eternal life, he declares his complete submission.

Scene 2. Lucy's engagement

Mrs Westenra is having an engagement party for her daughter Lucy and Arthur. The partygoers have no idea they are being observed. When the guests move to the garden, Lucy – weary from dancing – falls asleep. Suddenly Dracula appears next to her, displaying supernatural powers. A dose of fresh blood restores him to the form of young Count Vlad Dracula, who blends in unnoticed with the company returning indoors.

Seeing how weak Lucy is, Mrs Westenra seeks the help of Doctor Seward and Professor Van Helsing, who is considered an expert on supernatural phenomena. He discovers a bite mark on the neck of the fainting Lucy and leads her from the room with Arthur's help. As the blissfully unaware guests continue having fun, Mina notices the handsome stranger, and the Count recognises her as the girl from Jonathan's portrait of his fiancé. Their relationship grows into fascination. Mrs Westenra is worried about her daughter's health and bids the guests goodbye. Only Mina stays, still shocked by her uncontrolled weakness for a strange man. The next moment, however, she notices Lucy sleepwalking into the sinister arms of Count Dracula. Disconcerted by Mina's presence, the vampire leaves Lucy alone in her fainted state. Mina rouses her friend from sleep and realises that the seducer was the same handsome man who had also charmed her that evening.

Mrs Westenra approaches with Doctor Seward and Van Helsing. The professor suspects a vampire is involved, so he tries to safeguard Lucy from future danger. Garlic and crosses placed around the girl are meant to protect her from another attack of the evil force. Mrs Westenra stays to watch over her daughter, but soon falls asleep from fatigue. When Dracula reappears, the woman awakens and is so terrified that she suffers a heart attack. Unfortunately, as she dies, she destroys all of

Professor Van Helsing's safeguards. Now there is nothing to stop the vampire, who sucks out the rest of helpless Lucy's blood. When the friends rush in, it is already too late; both women are dead.

Scene 3. Renfield's transformation

Mina meets Jonathan as he returns from his journey, but her joy is overshadowed by the death of her friends and her meeting with the mysterious stranger. Mina and Jonathan go to Doctor Seward's asylum, where they encounter Arthur and Professor Van Helsing. The doctor wants to consult the professor about Renfield's case. They notice that the patient gets excited by the sight of Mina, but his behaviour is more suggestive of concern. He seems to want to warn and protect her. As the professor pacifies Renfield, they are watched through the window by a furious Dracula and a bloodthirsty vampire, Lucy.

Scene 4. Lucy the vampire

In the cemetery, vampires hunt for fresh blood with Lucy among them. Trying to protect her from a vampire's fate, Lucy's friends arrive at the cemetery and open her grave, but her body is missing. Meanwhile, she circles around them, desperately trying to get close to her beloved Arthur and give him a sinister kiss. The vigilant Professor Van Helsing saves him and Doctor Seward drives an aspen stake through her heart. The devastated Arthur cuts off her head and frees his beloved Lucy from eternal damnation.

Scene 5. Dracula's death

Mina wants to protect Renfield from the vampire's vengeance, but she arrives too late and witnesses his death. Her confrontation with Dracula is dramatic and the intensity of their connection can no longer be denied. He shows her the portrait of his beloved wife Elizabeth, and Mina finally understands the Count's heart, and his pain. She surrenders to his power.

Jonathan and her friends return from the cemetery and are shocked by the disturbing scene. Taken by surprise, the Count tries to hide. When everyone rushes after him, Jonathan stays to guard Mina.

Now returned to his ancient form, Dracula reappears and is drawn towards Mina. A struggle ensues and he is wounded but Mina defends him from further harm. Filled with emotion for the Count, she kisses the aged vampire. Moved by her gesture and wanting to protect her from his own fate, he convinces Mina to drive a stake through his heart, freeing him from his eternal suffering.

Dying, he is the young Count Dracula once more.