Vampirella

Synopsis

It is 1914, and Europe is on the verge of change. The beautiful young Countess, the last queen of the vampires, sits in her dark high house in a desolate region of the Carpathian Mountains. Below her, the village is empty, save for presences, shadows that have no source in anything visible. The local peasantry is plagued by irrational belief. Terror is the *genius loci* of the place.

Her father, the Count, was staked at a Carpathian Crossroad in 1905 by a priest of the Orthodox faith. They tracked him down by means of a ritual: they chose a young boy who had not yet known any woman, and set him bareback on a stallion that had not mounted its first mare. A virgin boy, riding on a virgin horse, led the holy man to the Count’s resting place. Now, he posthumously watches over his daughter with a sweet paternal love, undimmed by death. Mrs Beane, the Scottish woman he recruited as her governess, provides practical care. Mrs Beane, the unwitting spouse of a cannibal, has her own reasons to seclude herself in this dark corner of the world.

Hero, a young English soldier on furlough, is on a tour of the Carpathians. He enters the haunted region on his bicycle, knowing no fear. The only thoughts in his head are rational ones. Suffering an accident with his bicycle, the peasants bring him to the castle, where he is treated to some food, some vodka. They have a nice clean set of clothes, all ready for him.

Ushered into the presence of the Countess in a darkened room, her cat and her bird for company, he is immediately struck by her beauty. But she has curiously pointed teeth and provokes in Hero a trembling in his hands. He pets the cat, which scratches him. The sight of red blood provokes a startling reaction in the Countess; she swoops on the wound for a brief drink. The cat has let the cat out of the bag.

Hero is sent to his room…

The Count looks on, his lovely daughter acting out her destiny. But he worries that Hero might be dangerous. What if he is a virgin boy, and thus may have the power to disarm her with a kiss? Hero is at home with the modern ideas of psychoanalysis and understands how loneliness and isolation might cause a breakdown in a girl’s psyche; how a lady might develop a pathological thirst for blood. But somewhere in the mix he feels the erotic pull of masochism.

Hero settles down to wait. She will come to him at midnight, trailing a millennia of beastliness. He is armed with only his innocence and rationalism. Perhaps she will eat him alive? But that is clearly not the worst fate that could befall him. History has many different plans for the young European men of the early 20th Century. And some of them are truly monstrous.