



Dracula

**Adapted for the stage
from the novel
by Bram Stoker
by
Robert Bethune and Philip Hilden**

Note

The following excerpt from the play portrays what happened on the Demeter, the ship Dracula used to go from his native Transylvania to England. Bram Stoker portrayed these events by giving us excerpts from the Captain's log. We chose to dramatize the scene, beginning with the ship's departure and concluding with the death of the Captain.

This excerpt is a good example of how the play in general operates in a fluid, dramatic fashion, and it also presents a scene rarely included in adaptations of Stoker's novel. It also provides a good example of the importance of physical action, up to and including stage combat, that forms a very important part of the play.

(Lights go down on the Captain and the Shipping Agent as they move off. At the same time lights come up on the First Seaman at the helm. The Cabin Boy appears; he sits and busies himself with some scrimshaw. The First Mate appears and paces slowly up and down the platform, which now represents the quarterdeck. The Second Seaman appears and goes to the helm.)

Second Seaman
(fear in his voice)

Relieving you.

First Seaman
(turns the wheel over to him)

Sea calm, wind 15 knots, course west-south-west. Captain or mate to be called if the weather changes.

Second Seaman
(under his breath)

Did you see--anything?

First Seaman
(also under his breath)

Maybe. I'm not sure.

First Mate
(suddenly turns on them)

What's that whispering there?

Second Seaman
(staring straight ahead)

Relieving the helm, sir.



First Mate
Well, do it without whispering!
You there, get below.

First Seaman
Aye, sir.

(The First Seaman moves toward where the Second Seaman appeared, but stops, not daring to look at the First Mate, but not going below either. The Cabin Boy nervously goes to the First Seaman. Two more Seamen appear from below. The four of them jostle each other, each trying to make someone else take the lead.)

First Mate
(turns on them)

Who called the watch below?

Second Seaman

No one, sir.

First Mate
Then what the hell are ye all doin'?

First Seaman
(gathers his courage)

Permission to address you, sir.

First Mate
Permission den--oh, hell, permission granted. What's matter with you all?
(More jostling; the First Seaman is unceremoniously shoved to the front.)

First Seaman
It's ... it's ... we're not sure, sir.

First Mate
(imitating him sarcastically)

It's ... it's ... we're not sure, sir.

Third Seaman
(with angry courage and fear)

Well, we ain't, sir. We don't know, like. But we seen things, sir. And things has happened.

First Mate
You've seen things, and things have happened. What the hell kind of drivel is this?

First Seaman
Petrofsky, sir. He's missing.

First Mate
Of course he's missing! Damn fool fell overboard!

Third Seaman
(getting really mad)

Then how come nobody seen it, sir? Watch on deck, men below, calm sea, no cry, no splash, no nothing--just a man gone, and nobody knows nothin'!
(General rumble of agreement.)

First Mate
Of all the damn fool talk I ever

First Seaman
And there's more, sir.

First Mate
Who the hell are you to interrupt me, sailor?

First Seaman
Nobody, sir. I don't mean to, sir. But sir

First Mate
Then speak when you're spoken to!
(Sullen, angry silence from the crew. First Seaman gathers his courage.)

First Seaman
There is more, sir.
(Captain appears. First Mate doesn't see him.)

First Mate
(picking up a handspike)

More drivel, more nonsense, more God-damn rot! Any man thinks he can slack off on my ship gets a taste of this!

Fourth Seaman

There's somethin' on board, sir!

(Something in the men's manner makes the First Mate think twice about laying into them with the handspike.)

First Mate

All right.

(sullen pause)

Well, speak up, damn you!

First Seaman

There's somethin' on board, sir. We don't know what it is.

Third Seaman

It looks like a man, sir. I seen him. When Petrofsky went. There was a rain squall, so's I squeezed in behind the deckhouse to keep dry. That's when I saw him, or it, or ... anyway. Tall like, thin, all in black, pale like a damn corpse.

Fourth Seaman

He's not any one of us.! We're sure!

Third Seaman

He came up the companionway and went forward toward where Petrofsky was. After a minute, I follows him. There's nothing there. Hatchways all closed. Nowhere anything could go! Nobody there, and Petrofsky gone!

First Mate

Is that it? What the hell kind of fairy tale is this? A mysterious man on board. I suppose he had horns and a tail?

Second Seaman

(turns, almost hysterical)

It got Petrofsky, sir, and it's going to get the rest of us! We'll all die!

First Mate

You mind your helm!

(raises the handspike)

The rest of you, get below! I'll have no more of this crap on my ship!

Captain

Belay, Mate! I'll have the crew beaten on my orders, and not before!

(First Mate splutters in rage, but brings the handspike down. Men all start to speak at once.)

Captain

That's enough, men.

(crew subsides)

All right. We've lost a man, and some of you think you've seen something. Very well. Maybe we've got a stowaway. Maybe we've got fog and moonlight playing tricks on your eyes. But if there's somethin' real here, we can find it.

First Mate

Sir, it's all a bunch of

(The Captain silences him with a look.)

Captain

(points to First Seaman)

You're in charge. Take these men and go below. Search the hold, the decks, the lazarette, the chain locker, anywhere you want to. Report here with whatever you find. Now, move!

(Seamen react, bustling and jostling as the First Seaman leads them below, keeping the Cabin Boy close to him. First Mate watches them go and then turns angrily to the Captain.)

First Mate

Sir, how the hell am I supposed to give them orders now? They'll come running to you now for every damn thing they can dream up.

Captain

Listen, mate, you've got a problem here you can't solve with a handspike. Let them search. If they convince themselves, they'll stay convinced a lot longer than if you try to beat sense into them with that. Don't worry. If they try any monkey business I'll send 'em back to you with their tails between their legs!

First Mate

Listen to 'em. What a load of cow crap. Giant men in black creeping around the deck throwing people overboard. Drunken lubber cow crap.

Captain

(very, very seriously)

Maybe that's what's in those boxes. Cow crap. D'ye'suppose they've sprung leaks, and the cow crap's got into the grog? Might explain the whole thing, right, mate?

(First mate looks at him, dumbfounded, then realizes he's having his leg pulled. Second Seaman at the helm snorts, trying to suppress his laughter, then looks straight ahead deadpan as the First Mate turns on him. First Mate straightens up and takes a deep breath.)

First Mate

(quietly to the Captain)

You're right, sir. It's just a bunch of nonsense. Sailors are all damn superstitious bastards, and I'm making too damn much of it.

Captain

(claps him on the shoulder)

Good man, mate.

(Crew comes back up, led by First Seaman. They form up roughly, looking sheepish and chagrined. The Cabin Boy looks scared. Captain looks at the First Mate.)

First Mate

Well?

First Seaman

Nothin, sir.

First Mate

You sure now?

First Seaman

Yes, sir.

First Mate

Checked everywhere, did you?

Yes, sir. First Seaman

Hold? First Mate

Yes, sir. First Seaman

Lazarette? First Mate

Yes, sir. First Seaman

Chain locker? First Mate

Yes, sir. First Seaman

Cook's locker? First Mate

Yes, sir. First Seaman

Was there any pie left? Did you save any for us? First Mate

Yes, sir. I mean, no sir. I mean First Seaman

(The other seamen chuckle at his discomfort in spite of themselves.)

First Mate
All right. Splice the broken tackle and tar it all down, the whole length of it. I want to see the best damn looking piece of spare halyard in the whole damn Merchant Marine by eight bells. Dismissed!

(Seamen remain on deck. Second Seaman continues to steer. Captain and Mate go below. First and Third Seamen get marlinespikes, rope and a tar pot and start work. Second Seaman continues to steer. Cabin Boy returns to his scrimshaw.)

Second Seaman
Couldn't find nothin'?

First Seaman
Not a God-damn thing.

Second Seaman
Where the hell did it go, then?

Third Seaman
I don't know. I wish to hell I did.

Fourth Seaman
Cap'n and mate don't believe a word of it now.

First Seaman
Not sure I believe it myself any more.

Second Seaman
Petrofsky. What about that, huh? What about Petrofsky?

Third Seaman

Yeah, what about Petrofsky?

First Seaman

Well, damn it, how the hell do I know? You made me make a damn fool of myself in front of Cap and the mate, and now what chance have I got of ever sailing on this line again? So shut up and do your own damn talking next time.

(Dracula appears in the shadows, very still, looking at the men.)

Third Seaman

What was that?

First Seaman

Damn fog. Damn rope. Damn ship. Damn mate. Damn everything, everything damn to hell anyhow!

(Dracula disappears.)

Third Seaman

What was that?

First Seaman

What was what? Damn you too.

Third Seaman

I saw somethin'.

First Seaman

Damn your eyes.

Third Seaman

No, I did! I saw somethin'!

First Seaman

(contemptuous)

Tall and black and pale and not like any of us. Right.

Third Seaman

Yes, damn it, I did! Right over there!

(First Seaman suddenly turns. Dracula is gone; First Seaman sees nothing.)

First Seaman

There's nothing there, you God-forsaken fool! Just look! With your eyes open this time!

Third Seaman

You shut up. I saw it. I tell you, I saw it! It was there, damn it, and I'm not crazy, and I'm not drunk, and I'm not dreaming!

First Seaman

Yeah. Right. And which way did it go, up the mast?

Third Seaman

I think it went aft. I couldn't really tell.

First Seaman

Damn straight you couldn't tell, since it wasn't there to begin with. And I'm going to damn well prove it.

Third Seaman

Huh?

First Seaman

You say it went aft. Well, fine. I'm going after it. If I find it, I'm going to beat the living hell out of it. If I don't, I'm going to come back here and beat the living hell out of you and anybody else who so much as thinks about it in front of me!

(He gets up and stomps out where Dracula vanished. The Cabin Boy follows him eagerly.)

Second Seaman

Don't let him go alone!

Fourth Seaman

Ah, fuck him, him and his mother and his maiden aunt. I hope he goes wherever Petrofsky went.

Second Seaman

He probably will! Go after him! Don't let him go alone!

Third Seaman

You want to be left alone here?

(Silence. Second Seaman doesn't want to be left alone--very definitely not.)

Second Seaman

One of you go. One stay here.

Fourth Seaman

Fat fucking Chinese chance, Jack.

(Silence, all three seamen listening intently. Third Seaman starts to speak; Second Seaman gestures urgently for silence. They listen some more. Second Seaman shakes his head.)

Second Seaman

I thought I heard

Fourth Seaman

What? What??

Second Seaman

Nothin'. I don't know. Nothin'.

Third Seaman

We gotta go look.

Second Seaman

You better not leave me here!

Third Seaman

We gotta go look! He could be dead!

Second Seaman

You wanna die with him?

Fourth Seaman

You tie that wheel and we all go.

Third Seaman

You can't do that.

Fourth Seaman

Why not?

Third Seaman

Mate'll give us hell if he finds out.

Fourth Seaman

Then he won't find out. We all go or none of us goes. How long you wanna wait here wonderin'?

Second Seaman

Ok. Ok.

(quickly lashes wheel)

Let's go.

Third Seaman

Yeah. Let's get it over with.

(They slowly move toward where Dracula and the First Seaman disappeared. Third Seaman draws his knife; the others see him do it and follow suit.)

(They disappear offstage. A moment of silence.)

(Bloodcurdling yelling, screams, sounds of fighting from offstage. The Cabin Boy appears, running frantically to escape Dracula, who moves after him with calm, dreadful purpose. The Cabin Boy picks up a piece of lumber and tries to hit Dracula with it. Dracula easily grabs him, picks him up and bites into his neck. The Cabin Boy goes limp. Dracula casually dumps him over the rail.)

(Second Seaman appears, knife at the ready. Moans and screams continue from offstage.)

Second Seaman

(at the top of his lungs)

Captain! Captain! Mate! Anybody! Help! It's here! Help me! Help!

(Dracula laughs. Second Seaman in desperation rushes at him. Dracula takes his wrist in one hand, his elbow in the other, and slowly and cruelly bends the arm until it snaps. The man sags in pain and shock. Dracula drops him, laughing at his pain. The Second Seaman tries to crawl away, manages to get to his feet. Dracula approaches him, ready to feast on him. Second Seaman backs wildly away, his useless arm flailing. He hits the rail and goes overboard. Dracula's attention turns toward the moans and groans from the men on the foredeck. He goes off toward them, ready for a feast.)

(The Captain appears from below, speaking before we see him.)

Captain

What the hell is going on up here! What's all this stomping and screaming about!

(He looks around, notices the empty helm. He goes to it and unlashes it angrily.)

Captain

Who lashed the wheel? Helmsman! Where are you! Where the hell is anybody! Mate! Mate on deck! Mate!

(The Mate appears. He staggers on, barely able to stand.)



Mate

Here, Captain. Right ... here. Here. It's here, Captain. Right here! I saw it. Like a man. But not a man. It drinks It drinks Why can't I say what it drinks, Captain?

Captain

Talk sense, man, talk sense!

Mate

I crept behind it and gave it my knife--but the knife went through it, empty as the air, Captain, empty as the air!

Captain

Stop it, man, stop it. I need your help.

Mate

You need me. You're right. Below. It's below! I'll find it. Maybe in one of those boxes, yes, in one of the boxes, I'm sure of it. I'll unscrew them. One by one, until I find him. I'll see. I'll go and see. You work the helm, Captain. I'll go and see.

(The First Mate turns to go below. The Captain, afraid to leave the helm, shouts after him.)

Captain

Stop! Mate! Talk to me! What's going on!

(The Mate turns with a solemn look, then grins suddenly, gestures with his finger to his lips for silence, and goes out.)

Captain

Go ahead, you damn fool! Go push boxes around! You can't hurt them, all they've got in them is clay! So haul 'em around! Get it out of your system!

(Silence. The moans from the foredeck have stopped. Wind and sea sounds. The Captain keeps steering. Sounds of hammering and shifting heavy objects from below.)

(Suddenly, there is an inhuman scream from below. Still screaming, the Mate bolts onto the deck, eyes rolling and face convulsed with fear. He carries a rosary and crucifix in one hand.)

Mate

Save me! Save me!

(He runs to the rail and looks overboard, then runs to the Captain and pulls at him. The Captain has to hang onto the helm to keep the Mate from pulling him toward the rail.)

Mate

You'd better come too, Captain. Before it's too late! He is there! The sea will save me from him, and that is all there is left!

(He lets go of the Captain and runs to the rail.)

Mate

Come, Captain! Save your soul! Follow me!

(He runs back to the Captain, presses the rosary and crucifix into the Captain's hands, and then takes a running leap over the rail into the sea.)

(The Captain stares after him, the wheel loose in his hands. Suddenly Dracula appears, moving slowly and implacably toward the Captain.)

Captain

Who are you? ... What are you? ... What do you want?



(As Dracula comes closer to him, the Captain suddenly throws up his hands to ward him off. Without realizing it, he still is holding the crucifix. The power of the crucifix drives Dracula back. The Captain doesn't understand what happened. Dracula gestures. The sounds of wind and sea increase and become the sounds of a storm. The wheel spins; sounds of sea and the ship get louder. The Captain wrestles with the wheel, trying to bring the ship under control while keeping watch on Dracula. Dracula gestures; the ship heaves, the wheel spins; the force of it makes the Captain lose his balance and his grip on the wheel; the crucifix flies out of the Captain's hands and overboard.)

(The Captain jumps for the wheel again. Dracula closes in on him. Not knowing what else to do, the Captain clings to the wheel as Dracula seizes him. Dracula throws his head back and roars in anticipation; the Captain screams in utter terror. His scream is choked off as Dracula rips into his neck. Lights go suddenly to black.)