

Utor De Lacy

Adapted from the Ghost Story

by Joseph Sheridan LeFanu

Dublin, Ireland

(1814-1873)

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CHARACTERS:

UNA ARDAGH, age 17

ALICE ARDAGH, her sister, age 19

COLONEL ROBERT ARDAGH, their father, age 50

MAURA MULL RYAN, a middle-aged housekeeper

TOBY CROOKE, an elderly hunchbacked peddler

DOCTOR MARTIN HESSELIUS, an elderly Swedish physician

CAPTAIN ULTOR DE LACY, a dashing suitor, age 30

Note: The roles of Toby Crooke and Doctor Martin Hesselius are intended to be played by the same actor. Doctor Hesselius speaks with a German accent; the rest speak with Irish accents.

TIME:

1750

PLACE:

The Ardagh estate at the “Glen of Capperkullen” where the Irish counties of Tipperary, Limerick, and Claire converge. There is a garden, a parlor, and Una Ardagh’s bedroom with an accessible door and window.

SCENE 1

(In a moonlit garden ALICE ARDAGH, age 19, sits on a bench reading. TOBY CROOKE, an unkempt hunch-backed peddler enters with a large sack on his shoulders.)

ALICE

Good heavens! You startled me!

TOBY

Please it yer ladyship t' waste a wee moment wi' old tad Toby? He's got wares t' show and charms t' keep the old claws off ye. Will it please yer eyes t' study the hump? It ain't pretty, but it's as Mother Nature would have it.

ALICE

You poor man.

TOBY

Nay, milady, I ain't poor. See here, I profess the art o' healin' if yer ladyship be pleased t' buy a charm against the sins o' nature.

(As TOBY displays his collection of charms and necklaces, a funeral dirge is heard.)

TOBY

Death's a sharp tone, ain't it, milady? It runs like a wild wolf through these woods. Two o' the swineherd's lovelies died last week wi' the same signs -- seized by the throat whilst lyin' in bed, then pierced by a needle-sharp tooth.

(COLONEL ROBERT ARDAGH enters.)

COLONEL ARDAGH

Toby! What the devil are you doing here?

TOBY

Sellin' amulets, sir. (*dangling a charm*) Here's one that ne'er fails. Only pin it t' yer bolster and you may spit in the villain's face.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Please pack up your nonsense and leave! I've instructed the grounds keeper not to let anyone on the premises. There's illness and contagion everywhere.

TOBY

Aye! (*to Alice*) And methinks you'll have need of this, milady.

COLONEL ARDAGH

She certainly does not! Alice is very well taken care of without your heathen trinkets.

TOBY

Alice maybe so, sir, but Una ain't.

COLONEL ARDAGH

What the devil is that supposed to mean?

TOBY

It don't mean nothin' t' offend ye, sir.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Ha! You're a damnable nuisance. Now go peddle your mischief elsewhere!

(TOBY leaves, whistling as the funeral dirge fades.)

COLONEL ARDAGH

Now that's the sort of mentality that spreads superstitious gossip, and infects the imagination. Exactly what we don't need!

ALICE

What a plaintive melody.

COLONEL ARDAGH

We shouldn't be thinking of death on such a magnificent night. Now tell me, Alice, what's your opinion of our Captain?

ALICE

I think he's entirely handsome and charming, despite being named Ultor. Whatever does it mean?

COLONEL ARDAGH

I've no idea, but I do know the De Lacys are of high blood and rich as the devil. They were originally French, but have lived in Ireland since the reign of Henry the Eighth. They still have French relations, and Ultor claims his grandfather was quite popular in the Court of Saint Germain. Well, I hope Una's made a favorable impression. Although their marriage won't continue the Ardagh name, at least our blood and lineage will survive.

ALICE

What a pity we can't tell her of her own engagement.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Absolutely not, she too irritable lately. The mere knowledge that her hand is pledged might excite a volatile opposition that neither of us would like to see.

ALICE

Brave, proud Una. I thought nothing could quell her gaiety of heart. What is it, father? What's changed her so?

COLONEL ARDAGH

Young girls are often capricious: all fun and frolic one day and melancholy the next. You're a rare exception, my dear Alice, and you mustn't worry.

ALICE

Look, father, the moon is out early and you can see Ultor's estate on the horizon.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Just think how proud your mother would have been, God rest her soul. Our own Una mistress of that magnificent fortress. Well, my dear, it will be a cold night; let's go in before we catch our deaths.

ALICE

Thank you, father, but I prefer to remain.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Please yourself; I'll send Una out with a shawl.

(COLONEL ARDAGH exits and soon UNA enter, placing a shawl on Alice's shoulders.)

ALICE

Thank you, Una. Did you hear that mournful dirge? They say the girl died horribly.

UNA

I don't concern myself with stranger's deaths and funerals. What a fuss! Why you must die, I must die, everyone must die, and all are happier when they do.

ALICE

Una! What are you saying?

UNA

Nothing...

ALICE

There, there, you're shivering. Let's go inside. Perhaps father and Captain De Lacy will join us in a game of cards.

UNA

No! No, please!

ALICE

Good heavens, Una! Have I said something wrong?

UNA

I...I'm sorry, the strangest things set me off. Please, let's remain here a few moments longer.

ALICE

Of course, my dear. The moon is bright tonight, isn't it? (*pause*) What's troubling you, Una? You seem so melancholy.

UNA

Sometimes a strange lethargy steals over me, but I don't know why.

ALICE

You haven't come down for morning prayers in over a week. Are you trying to avoid our guest?

UNA

What do you mean?

ALICE

Aren't you pleased that Captain De Lacy is here?

UNA

Well, yes, of course, I'm delighted. He's so...romantic. I'm sure if he ever tells us the story of his life, it will be like a great adventure novel. But he's so...strange. Whenever I ask him anything about his past -- his childhood or education -- he says he is under vows that would tax a monk. Imagine! Then he says that the time is very near when I shall know everything. Know what I wonder? Furthermore, he says I will think him cruel and selfish because love is always selfish, the more ardent, the more selfish.

ALICE

But love is also generous and kind.

UNA

I said so, but he replied: "Never believe it. Love is more possessive than you can conceive." Oh, Alice, he's so full of whims and fancies, and why should he speak to me of love?

ALICE

I'm certain he'll explain in good time.

UNA

Oh, Alice, do you think we shall ever fall in love?

ALICE

You know I'm destined for the sisterhood. There are many eligible convents in Dublin where some of the noblest ladies of Ireland reside.

UNA

But what if you should meet someone, someone as wonderful as father?

ALICE

No earthly allurements have the power to draw me away from my vocation.

UNA

I hope you won't leave us for a very long time.

ALICE

All I know for certain is that I love our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and always shall.

UNA

And I love no one and never shall.

ALICE

Oh, darling Una! You offend father and me. Don't you love us?

UNA

Yes, of course, but that's not what I meant.

ALICE

What is it, Una? Where is my sweet sister with her songs and laughter?

UNA

Perhaps she's growing old before her time.

ALICE

Nonsense, I won't allow it! But you do look pale.

UNA

Please, don't stare. Turn away!

ALICE

And your eyes seem to have lost their sparkle.

UNA

(starting to leave) Good night, Alice!

ALICE

(grasping Una's arm) Una, darling, as you hope for peace, tell me what's wrong!

(The GIRLS turn, embarrassed, as ULTOR DE LACY, a dashing man of thrity, enters.)

ULTOR

Forgive my intrusion, ladies.

ALICE

Good evening, Captain. I...I was just leaving.

UNA

No! I mean, please, dear Alice, stay with us.

ALICE

Of course, if you wish. *(pause, awkwardly)* It's a bit chilly this evening, isn't it?

ULTOR

Yes, but your hospitality has a warming effect. You've all been so kind to me. I've seldom been so happy as in your beautiful chateau and in the society of your father. What a fortunate man -- keeping company with such beautiful girls in the middle of nowhere.

UNA

Alice will be leaving for the convent.

ULTOR

And you, Una?

UNA

I shall remain here, though we might move closer to the city. Father thinks I need suitors. He's been the only man in my life, but I feel no need of another.

(ALICE and ULTOR exchange a knowing glance.)

ULTOR

But surely you wish to broaden your social spectrum, to visit London and Paris.

UNA

No, I'm content to remain here.

ULTOR

Well, perhaps you're not ready to consider traveling abroad -- or a husband for that matter. My own father convinced me not to marry before the age of thirty on the grounds that earlier marriages destroy one's power of enterprise. He thought marriage kept a man from accomplishing his destiny. Now, however, I'm prepared to enter that holy state.

UNA

Destiny... I wonder if I have a destiny?

ULTOR

Of course you do; everyone does.

UNA

Well, if I do, I certainly don't wish to know it. I feel it must be something terrible.

ALICE

Una! What are you saying?

UNA

I'm sorry. I haven't been feeling quite myself lately; if you'll please excuse me.

ULTOR

Of course, Una.

(UNA leaves.)

ULTOR

Your sister is a delicate creature.

ALICE

She used to be quite gay. I wonder if she's become susceptible to the idle chatter one hears about the epidemic. The servants' gossip may have affected her imagination.

ULTOR

So you feel it's nothing but imagination?

ALICE

Father thinks the victims infect one another with their superstitions, and thereby manifest the same symptoms.

ULTOR

All the more reason for getting Una away from here.

ALICE

We must pray for her, Captain.

ULTOR

Pray...?

ALICE

Yes, we are in God's hands; nothing can happen without his permission.

ULTOR

Tell me, do you believe that God and nature are one and the same?

ALICE

Yes, in a way, since God is our creator and since all things proceed from nature, then God is nature.

ULTOR

Then all things in heaven and on earth act and live as nature ordains. Is that what you believe?

ALICE

Yes.

ULTOR

Then I entirely agree with you.

ALICE

Well, on that happy note, I shall retire. Good night, Captain.

ULTOR

Good night, Alice.

(As ALICE departs, MAURA MULL RYAN, a house-keeper, enters, dressed in black.)

ULTOR

Ah, Maura, isn't it? Tell me, did you attend the funeral service?

(MAURA nods.)

ULTOR

I hope you conveyed the family's condolences.

(MAURA nods, and turns to leave.)

ULTOR

Please, don't leave. Your mistress has left her book here, why don't you take it to her? What are you afraid of? Don't we have a tongue in that little prune head?

(MAURA hesitates, then walks towards ULTOR who thrusts the book into her hand.)

MAURA

Thank you.

ULTOR

Ah, so we speak after all? We speak and we have eyes, but we will continue to be silent, won't we?

(MAURA nods.)

ULTOR

A pity the Ardaghs are so refined. They don't understand our country ways, do they? Forgive me if I frighten you, Maura. I usually don't bother with servants, so you needn't be afraid. Good night.

(ULTOR exits as MAURA crosses herself.)

MAURA

Our Father, who art in heaven, deliver us from evil.

(The moonlight dims to black.)

SCENE 2

(One week later in a parlor where tea is being served. COLONEL ARDAGH and ALICE are seated with MARTIN HESSELIUS, an elderly Swedish physician with a German accent.)

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

I could enlighten you with pleasure, but you would not believe me.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Why should I not?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Because you believe in nothing but what accords with your own prejudices. I remember when I was like you, but I have learned better.

ALICE

Try us, Doctor. Perhaps we're not such dogmatists as you suppose. Besides, father and I know that you generally require proof for what you believe, so we're strongly predisposed to respect your conclusions.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

You are right in supposing that I have not been led lightly into my beliefs. I have been forced by extraordinary evidence to credit that which runs counter to all scientific theories. In fact, I have even learned to respect certain local legends that you dismiss as delusions. But life and death are mysterious states and we know little of the resources of either.

ALICE

Please, doctor, explain your conversion.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

I'm afraid the good Colonel would consign me to a madhouse. All I can say is that Una is far from well. I pray it will not be of lasting consequence, but in the meantime, Alice, you must not leave her alone for a single moment. That is the only direction I need give for the present, but it is indispensable.

ALICE

Yes, Doctor, of course.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

We can rely upon your kindness, Alice, I know. My own skill and science can be of no use. It will be necessary to acquire the proper means.

COLONEL ARDAGH

“Proper means?” What the devil does that mean?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

I will explain everything by and by. Munster Castle is north of here, is it not?

ALICE

Yes, you can see it from our garden when the fog is lifted.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

I hear the village around it is deserted.

COLONEL ARDAGH

It’s been fifty years since the smoke of a chimney was seen there, but plans are underway for extensive renovations.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

I was going to ask a colleague to come with me to explore the ruins. I hear there is a chapel there with a great many tombs, and I mean to unearth some of those fine people. With God’s blessing, I hope to accomplish a pious sacrilege which will enable honest people to sleep in their beds without fear of being murdered.

ALICE

Good heavens, Doctor, what are you saying?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

There is but one object which interests me during the years I have left on earth, and that is to wreak the vengeance that can still be accomplished by mortal men.

COLONEL ARDAGH

What vengeance?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

I mean to decapitate the monster, to strike off its head!

COLONEL ARDAGH

Strike off it’s head...?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Yes! With anything that can cleave through its murderous throat! You shall hear all about it when I return. Good day.

(DOCTOR HESSELIUS exits.)

COLONEL ARDAGH

Good God almighty! I've never seen old Hesselius so unsettled.

ALICE

He does seem distraught.

COLONEL ARDAGH

He's raving! I'm calling an abler physician.

ALICE

But there's no one here as learned or as kind.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Or as daft! This consultation has left me precisely where I was! Oh, Alice, what are we going to do? She's wasting away before our eyes.

ALICE

All I know is that whenever Una confides in me, she says she can't account for the change that's come over her.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Her damnable uncomplaining silence!

ALICE

And she's grown so...cold. I'm always afraid I've offended her. But we must have faith and pray for her safety.

COLONEL ARDAGH

With whom did you leave her?

ALICE

With Captain De Lacy; they've gone for a walk.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Thank heaven for him; he's already watching over her like a doting husband.

ALICE

I hope this sickness is not contagious. Perhaps Doctor Hesselius should have examined the Captain as well.

COLONEL ARDAGH

I already thought of that, but after that nonsense about tombs and monsters, I thought it best not to bother the poor man. In any case, the Captain shows no sign of weakness.

ALICE

Quite the contrary. He seems so strong, so full of vigor and life, while Una... *(she sighs)*
Now that she's finally betrothed to a good and noble gentleman, why does everything
seem so...gloomy? Why do I have such a sense of foreboding?

COLONEL ARDAGH

Well, my dear, as Hesselius said, life and death are mysterious states and we know little
of their resources. Too true, too true.

(Lights dim to blackness.)

SCENE 3

(In the moonlit garden, ULTOR sits with UNA.)

ULTOR

What a magnificent evening; the moonlight has made your face all aglow.

UNA

Alice says I'm too pale.

ULTOR

Your beauty has the fragility of the finest porcelain.

UNA

Yes, it breaks easily. I can scarcely walk as far as a child, and sometimes the little
strength I have falters and I faint.

ULTOR

Do you know what's causing your affliction?

UNA

No, but it seems to be affecting my dreams. They seem so real that I don't know if I'm
dreaming or awake.

ULTOR

Tell me.

UNA

Well, I...I'm conscious of lying in bed, then suddenly I fancy something moving. At first
I can't quite distinguish it, but then I see a monstrous black cat pacing back and forth as
if trapped in a cage. I'm so frightened, I can't cry out. It's as if my voice is paralyzed with
terror and then the beast springs onto the bed, its glowing green eyes approach my face,
and suddenly I feel a stinging pain as if two large knives were piercing my throat.

ULTOR

Oh, my dear Una.

UNA

When the swineherd's wife died last week, she thought something was strangling her, and it feels like that as well -- as if I can't gasp enough air to breathe.

ULTOR

But how do you feel now, at this moment? It would distress me if you were in pain.

UNA

I'm just weak, that's all, but when I am with you, I'm perfectly myself again. See how I've recovered.

ULTOR

(clasping her hand) Tell me, Una, do you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you? I've never had a true friend; shall I find one now?

UNA

Oh, Ultor, I don't know if I'm worthy to be your friend, though I...I feel...

ULTOR

What? What do you feel?

UNA

That I already know you, that I made your acquaintance years ago instead of weeks.

ULTOR

Yes, we're already so intimate, I feel I can tell you anything.

UNA

Then, tell me, who was your first love?

ULTOR

I have only felt love for one woman. Surely you must have guessed by now. She is you, Una, but you do not love me.

UNA

I...I don't know. I'm not sure what love is.

ULTOR

Some day you will learn, and then you will love me more than the world. *(pause)* Are you afraid to die?

UNA

Well, yes, isn't everyone?

ULTOR

But to die as lovers die -- together, so they may live together. I would live in you, and you would die for me, I love you so.

UNA

I would die for you?

ULTOR

Forgive me, I meant to say I would die for you so great is my love, for you are mine, you shall be mine, and you and I will be one forever. Can you grasp what I'm telling you, Una? (*taking her face in his hands*) Please look at me.

(A shrill laugh is heard. UNA gasps as TOBY appears with his sack of trinkets.)

TOBY

See here, milady!

UNA

Toby!

TOBY

Aye, will ye give a wee moment o' yer time? It's most urgent concernin' the plague yer ladyship.

ULTOR

Please, go away, sir; you're trespassing.

UNA

It's alright, Ultor. it's only Toby.

ULTOR

I'm certain your father doesn't approve of beggars wandering at liberty on his property.

TOBY

I ain't a beggar, sir! (*to Una*) I profess the art o' dentistry, milady, and yer noble friend here has the sharpest tooth -- long and pointed like a pike. With me keen sight I seen it, and if it happens t' hurt his lordship, I'll take me file t' make it blunt as a stump, ha, ha!

ULTOR

What impudence! Please leave these premises immediately!

TOBY

If m' lordship pleases, he'll no longer have the tooth o' a shark, but o' the handsome gent'lman he is.

ULTOR

How dare this charlatan insult me so?! Where is your father? I shall demand an apology from him!

UNA

Ultor, I've never seen you like this...

TOBY

I ain't meanin' to offend yer ladyship.

(TOBY takes a cross-shaped charm from his pouch, and ULTOR makes a grimace of disgust.)

TOBY

Cast your noble eyes on this, eh? Ha, ha! Methinks the little lady here should buy this treasure. 'Tis the medicine of a wise doctor, and I'll give it t' you cheap.

(ULTOR takes a menacing step towards TOBY, grasping his collar, but TOBY dangles the charm in front of him.)

TOBY

Hey!? Is yer lordship displeased? Have I been too bold?

UNA

Ultor! Stop it! Don't hurt him!

(ULTOR releases TOBY, then marches off.)

ULTOR

Good night, Una!

TOBY

When yer teeth want pullin' yer lordship, call on Toby, ha, ha!

UNA

Oh, Toby, now look what you've done! You've chased him away!

TOBY

Please, Miss Una, buy yerself a charm. It'll put the roses back in yer cheeks and help ye sleep deep and free o' the dark dreams.

UNA

Oh, go away! Leave us alone!

(UNA runs off as TOBY packs his wares and MAURA enters.)

TOBY

Maura, m' love, Toby's failed. Here, take it.

MAURA

I have no money.

TOBY

It's fer free. A present fer yer mistress against the needletooth. Put it neath 'er pillow -- t' keep her neck lily white.

MAURA

I...I will try.

(TOBY saunters off, whistling as lights dim to black.)

SCENE 4

(Several days later in Una's bedroom: UNA sits in bed, gazing in a mirror while ALICE sits nearby combing Una's hair.)

UNA

I'm no longer beautiful, Alice -- even my hair is dull.

ALICE

Nonsense, everyone admires you, especially our handsome Captain. By the time he returns from Limerick, you shall be our blooming Una once again.

UNA

I certainly don't feel blooming, but tell me, what does Doctor Hesselius think is the matter?

ALICE

He wasn't very specific, but said if the right steps are taken, you will be quite yourself, perhaps even singing like a bird, as you used to when Una kept no secrets from Alice.

UNA

Una knows what her sage Alice means, but there are sweeter birds, silent all day, that sing by night alone.

ALICE

What do you mean? *(pause)* Una, darling, in heaven's name confide in me.

UNA

But how can I confide in you when I haven't the words to...to describe what I feel.

ALICE

Won't you at least try?

UNA

(pause) Well, sometimes I feel a...a strange excitement that is... Oh, Alice, you must promise not to divulge a word of what I'm about to say.

ALICE

Yes, of course.

UNA

Well, I...I have these strange dreams of visitations by a...a large catlike beast who leaps onto the bed. Lately I hear it murmuring words -- almost like a lullaby. It comes so close, I can feel its hot breath which smells like sweet almonds, and its voice is deep and mournful.

ALICE

What does it say?

UNA

The words are unintelligible, but their effect is to send a torrent of tremors through my entire body. Oh, Alice, I cannot help myself, it thrills me! I wonder if this is the passion of love that people speak of? But how...? How can I love a beast?

ALICE

Oh, my darling Una, you can't. You have some sort of fever that's affecting your mind.

UNA

Sometimes it seems to change into the form of a... a man-- as if I am wishing it to become human. Then last night I had a strange sensation as if...as if a hand were being drawn along my cheek and neck. Like this.

(UNA strokes Alice's cheek and neck.)

ALICE

Yes, go on.

UNA

Then soft, warm lips were kissing my throat, my face, my lips...

(UNA slowly kisses Alice on the throat and lips. ALICE succumbs to the pleasure.)

ALICE

Ohhhhh... Oh, Una, you must stop...

(UNA ceases kissing and touches her breast.)

UNA

I felt my heart beating faster, my breath rising and falling as a warm liquid rushed into my throat, as if I were drowning. Then I felt convulsions of unspeakable pleasures until my senses left me and I became unconscious. (*pause*) I know my body has strange new powers. I can receive pleasure and give it as well. It is all I think of, all I desire. Oh, please, my dear Alice, let me kiss you again..

ALICE

No, no, Una, I...I feel so strange, but we mustn't -- do you hear something?

(There is a scratching at the door.)

UNA

Shush! Don't answer it!

ALICE

But why...?

UNA

Don't Alice, please! I beg of you!

ALICE

Heavens, Una, who could...?

MAURA

Please, miss, it's Maura! Open the door!

(ALICE rushes to open the door.)

ALICE

Heavens, Maura! You scared the life out of us!

(MAURA enters then presses Toby's charm into Una's hand.)

MAURA

Please, Miss Una, take this; pin it under your pillow tonight for quiet sleep.

ALICE

What is it? Why should Una want that?

MAURA

She knows, miss.

ALICE

Knows what? Tell me.

MAURA

It's against the vampire, miss -- the evil one.

(MAURA makes a gesture towards her throat as the COLONEL enters and notices the charm.)

COLONEL

What's going on here?! What's this?

(Pause as MAURA refuses to speak.)

ALICE

Well, it's a...a charm, an amulet against the...vampire.

COLONEL ARDAGH

What rubbish! We're well educated in this household, and this hysterical talk is exactly what accounts for Una's disease! Now get out and take your tawdry trinket with you!

(COLONEL ARDAGH returns the trinket to MAURA who thrusts it into ALICE'S hand, then dashes off.)

COLONEL ARDAGH

Impudent hag!

ALICE

Father, she meant no harm.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Give me that thing!

ALICE

Please, let me keep it, father. I just want to...to study it.

COLONEL ARDAGH

You're too sympathetic, Alice. These fools don't comprehend that diseases have natural causes, and it's almost always women who succumb. They're weaker, more susceptible to the worse sort of tittle-tattle, thereby evoking the very images of terror that infested their neighbors!

ALICE

But father, what if...what if this disease is different? Let's suppose it was possible that this vampire did in fact exist, and...

COLONEL ARDAGH

Nonsense! Even if it were possible -- which is preposterous! -- it certainly wouldn't be frightened off by bits of copper and colognes.

ALICE

What do you suppose it is? It looks like a cross that's been immersed in some unsavory herbs, and there's a strip of vellum with some sort of diagram or cabalistic ciphers. I wonder what they mean?

COLONEL ARDAGH

Nothing to bother our heads about, and we'll not waste time waiting here for another damned doctor! We're packing our bags tomorrow!

UNA

Tomorrow?

COLONEL

Yes! Now it's almost midnight, but I think you should stay with Una.

ALICE

Of course, father.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Now, Una, dear, sleep well.

UNA

Good night...

(The COLONEL kisses Una and leaves. SHE lies back in her bed with a sigh. An ethereal waltz is heard and UNA appears to become agitated.)

ALICE

Where should I sleep, Una? Should I lie next to you, the way I did when we were children.

UNA

Aren't you afraid?

ALICE

Of what?

UNA

Of me.

ALICE

I'm more afraid *for* you, and also of...of myself, but father wants me to stay, and Doctor Hesselius says I shouldn't leave you alone.

UNA

Well, they're wrong! I'll never get to sleep with you here, so if you really care for my welfare, then you'll go to your own room!

ALICE

Really, Una, you needn't raise your voice. I only want to help and pray for you.

UNA

Pray for yourself! -- that your life won't be wasted in a convent, your youth spent worshipping a God who's deaf and blind.

ALICE

Una! What's come over you?!

UNA
Please, please, go!

ALICE
Should I leave the charm?

UNA
No!

(ALICE leaves as UNA turns off the lamp, and lies quietly for a moment. There is an eerie howling and UNA sits up, staring as if in a trance. ULTOR enters and UNA speaks in a hypnotic whisper.)

UNA
Ultor...?

ULTOR
Yes, my dearest, look at me.

UNA
I...I wondered if it was you...

ULTOR
Are you pleased?

UNA
Oh, yes...

ULTOR
Do you know we're engaged? Your father has promised me your hand.

UNA
I suspected as much, but do you really want someone who is losing her beauty?

ULTOR
You're beautiful enough. *(pause)* I don't mean to wound your little heart, so please, darling, forgive me for obeying the irresistible law of my strength and weakness. If your heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours. In the rapture of my shame I live in your warm life, and you shall die -- die sweetly unto mine.

UNA
But I...I'm not ready to die.

ULTOR

As I draw near to you, you in your turn will draw near to others, and learn the rapture of that cruelty which yet is love.

(ULTOR kisses Una passionately, his teeth puncturing her throat, greedily drawing blood from her veins. When he lifts his head, blood dribbles from his lips and UNA faints. A tentative knocking is heard.)

MAURA

Psssst, Miss! Miss Una, please open up!

(ULTOR opens the door, hiding behind it. MAURA enters, and HE grasps her by the arm, drawing her inside the room.)

ULTOR

Hah! Little prune head, what are you doing here?

MAURA

Leave the lamb alone!

ULTOR

And take the old prune?

(MAURA holds up the amulet, but ULTOR snatches and throws it aside. Then HE grasps Maura's throat and drains her blood until SHE falls to the floor. The instant she falls, UNA awakens and screams! ULTOR dashes out the window as ALICE and the COLONEL enter.)

COLONEL ARDAGH

Good God almighty!

ALICE

Maura! Is she alright...?

(COLONEL ARDAGH grasps Maura's wrist to check her pulse.)

COLONEL ARDAGH

The poor woman's dead! What the devil happened?

UNA

I...I don't know. *(tearfully)* I...I was asleep.

COLONEL ARDAGH

What was she doing here?

ALICE

Look, there on the floor. She was trying to bring Una the amulet.

COLONEL ARDAGH

I'll carry Maura to her room, then send for an apothecary.

ALICE

And a priest!

COLONEL ARDAGH

Yes. Alice, stay with Una. Be brave, my dear girls.

(COLONEL ARDAGH carries MAURA from the room.)

ALICE

Oh, Una, what's happening to our happy home?

UNA

If only I'd kept it. She wouldn't have had to...

ALICE

You mustn't blame yourself; Maura had a weak heart. *(pause)* Una, what's that under your nightgown?

UNA

Nothing.

ALICE

You're bleeding. Please, Una, let me see.

UNA

No! It's nothing. I...I only scratched myself when I thought the beast was upon me -- in my dream.

ALICE

Those aren't scratches. They're small holes, like something pierced your flesh. Did Doctor Hesselius examine them?

UNA

Yes! Now please, stop badgering me! *(pause)* Oh, Alice, forgive my temper. Tell me, do you think it's possible to love someone so passionately you no longer care for your destiny -- for the destiny of your soul?

ALICE

Perhaps, but I think it would be an offense against God, and all that is sacred.

UNA

But how can it be? How can it be evil if it feels so...wonderful?

ALICE

Oh, my darling, Una, what will become of us?

(The SISTERS embrace as lights fade to black.)

SCENE 5

(The next morning in the parlor where DOCTOR HESSELIUS and COLONEL ARDAGH are seated.)

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Now, listen to me, Colonel: Those puncture marks on Una's neck indicate an advanced state of the strangest illness ever suffered by mortals. Believe me, I know. My own dear brother lost his wife and daughter, and I mean to unleash the vengeance of heaven upon the fiend who murdered them.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Forgive me, Doctor, but what have those murders to do with my poor child? So far you've done nothing but talk in riddles and failed to produce the slightest effect upon her disease!

(ALICE enters with the tea service.)

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Una is suffering a series of seizures. Her death is very near unless the final, fatal seizure is arrested. Then with great care and skill, her strength might possibly return.

ALICE

What is the nature of these seizures?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

You have no doubt heard the appalling legend that prevails in Northern Romania, in Turkish Servia, even in Russia -- the legend of the vampire. Well, your sister is suffering from the visits of such a creature.

COLONEL ARDAGH

What?! Ha, ha! Oh, you scholarly physicians! Into what quackeries you rush when all your theories have failed!

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

It is not a theory, Colonel; it is a fact, and one more assault might extinguish the last spark of Una's vitality which, believe me, is ready to expire.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Listen to yourself, Doctor. The life of my beloved daughter is at stake and you babble like a carnival conjuror! You're as ignorant as my servants! Alice, give Doctor Hesselius his coat and hat and show him out! I'm leaving immediately to find a capable physician

(COLONEL ARDAGH marches off while DOCTOR HESSELIUS sighs deeply, and ALICE grasps his hand.)

ALICE

Oh, Doctor, what are we to do?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Ah, then you believe me?

ALICE

Yes, with all my heart. I know something strange is happening. Una knows it too, but father is hopeless. Even Maura's death hasn't convinced him. He says it's her own fault, that to believe in vampires is to invite death to the door.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Then keep trying to persuade him.

ALICE

But how does a vampire exist? How does it come into being?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

According to my research, it begins when a person prone to wickedness, puts an end to himself. A suicide with a spiritual will to live, under certain lunar and circulatory influences, can become a vampire. Then it visits people in their slumbers and is sustained by a lust for living blood which supplies the vigor of its waking hours.

ALICE

Does it ever sleep?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Only in its own coffin. It returns there every dawn without displacing the grave sites since it can will itself to become a specter as well as a mortal being. *(he sighs)* Now listen to me, Alice: I have a like minded colleague prepared to proceed, but we need your sister's cooperation.

ALICE

I'm afraid Una might not be willingly. Apparently this vampire is also bringing -- well, it's giving her great...pleasure.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

She told you that?

ALICE

Yes, though I...I promised not to speak of it.

DOCTOR

I'm glad you did. Then she knows?

ALICE

She says it's a dream, some sort of beastly apparition pacing at the foot of her bed. Unfortunately, her soul is succumbing to its powers; it's very...seductive.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

If this is true, then it's better for us to remain silent, but I shall return later this evening, after your father's departure.

(DOCTOR HESSELIUS stands to leave, then hesitates, pulling a small painting from his bag.)

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Before I go, I wonder if you might recognize this gentleman?

ALICE

Why it's Captain de Lacy.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

You know him...?

ALICE

What a remarkable execution!

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Please, tell me what you know of him.

ALICE

Why we shall soon be related. He left for Limberick a week ago, but he's betrothed to Una -- though father hasn't told her yet. Oh, Doctor, could I show this portrait to her? Good heavens, you look ill...

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Alice, turn the portrait over and note the date on the back.

ALICE

1601! Good heavens! Well, I certainly don't know this gentleman, but Captain de Lacy is his very effigy!

(UNA enters.)

ALICE

Una! What are you doing here?!

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

You should be lying in your bed, young lady.

UNA

I just spoke with father and he says you're no longer my physician, so I shall do as I please. Besides, I'm feeling restless.

ALICE

Una, you shouldn't be so insolent! Doctor Hesselius is very concerned about you.

UNA

Well, he needn't be. I'm feeling quite fine today, as strong as a team of oxen.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Your sister is holding a very interesting portrait. Why don't you take a look.

UNA

(pause, staring at the painting) So Ultor has had his likeness taken.

ALICE

But he hasn't. Notice the date and the name: 1601, The Baron Turol de Lacy. He's been dead for more than a century.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Or not.

UNA

Whatever do you mean?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Perhaps you know.

UNA

I assure you I do not.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

The De Lacys are a decadent and depraved family with blood stained annals who continue to plague the human race.

ALICE

Good heavens!

UNA

Ha, ha! Father's right; you've become quite hysterical.

ALICE

Una!

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Look at that countenance: it is cruel and selfish, it is the expression of a vicious, violent and lustful tyrant.

UNA

You are quite wrong, doctor. It is the very likeness of Ultor, and he is the kindest, most passionate man who ever lived. Now please, leave our house!

ALICE

Una!

UNA

Ultor and I are engaged, Doctor, and I will not have you slandering his good name.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

(he sighs) Good day then, ladies.

(DOCTOR HESSELIUS leaves as ALICE turns to UNA.)

ALICE

So you know of the engagement?

UNA

Ultor told me, and we're both very happy -- happier than I ever thought possible.

ALICE

Why didn't you tell me that you knew?

UNA

It amused me to watch you and father wonder if Ultor would find me suitable or if I would care for him. Well, you needn't worry; we're already in love.

ALICE

But Una, that's so unlike you -- to keep us in suspense, toying with our affections while knowing all along.

UNA

It was father who toyed with me! He should have told me from the beginning; I'm not a child!

ALICE

He was afraid you wouldn't approve; he wanted to wait until you were well.

UNA

So now we all know, and when Ultor and I are married, we will leave here, but oh, my dear sister, how I shall miss you!

ALICE

And I shall miss you.

UNA

Now I'm feeling tired again, but please come in an hour to bid me good night.

ALICE

Yes, of course.

(UNA departs as lights dim to black.)

SCENE 6

(Later that evening, candlelight reveals Una's bedroom where ALICE is tucking her in.)

ALICE

Princess Una laid to rest, was by her guardian angel blessed.

UNA

Is the moon full?

ALICE

Yes.

UNA

Alice, you've been the dearest, kindest sister, and I know I've caused you considerable grief, but it will soon be over. I shall not live to see tomorrow's dawn.

ALICE

Shush! I'm certain we shall see you better tomorrow and better still the following day.

UNA

But I'm not ill; feel my temples, they are cool. Lay your fingers to my pulse; it's throb is slow and temperate. I was never more perfectly in health and yet I know that before the sun rises, I shall be no more.

ALICE

(starting to weep) Oh, Una, you mustn't say such things; your suffering distresses me so...

UNA

But my dear Alice, I'm not suffering. I have tasted ecstasy beyond endurance, raptures I never dreamed possible. Now please, won't you bring me a glass of warm milk?

ALICE

I'm not certain I should leave you -- even for a few moments. Oh, why isn't father here?!

UNA

I'll be fine.

(ALICE leaves as waltz music is heard and ULTOR enters dressed in a long dark cape.)

UNA

(whispering) Ultor? Ultor, darling...

ULTOR

My little bride, my lovely little Una, how you tremble, my dearest. Are you ready?

UNA

Yes, yes, quickly before Alice returns.

ULTOR

(grasping her, drawing her near) To the resurrection and the life. Say it!

UNA

The resurrection and the life.

ULTOR

Come, my darling.

UNA

I will, but shouldn't I call you by your rightful name: Turol de Lacy, Baron of Munster.

ULTOR

Yes, but how did you...?

(There is a scratching at the window.)

TOBY

Pssst. Needletooth, needletooth!

UNA

Toby...?

(TOBY opens the window and leaps inside. ULTOR grabs him by the collar and throws him on the floor.)

ULTOR

What are you peddling now, hunchback?

TOBY

Leave me, wolf-man, and her ladyship. Go wi' yer own kind where they take yer coffin.

ULTOR

What are you saying?! What coffin?!

TOBY

The one they carried out o' Munster Castle last night. They're renovatin' the ruins, yer lordship, heh, heh.

ULTOR

Not yet! It's not time! Where...where is it?!

TOBY

I followed 'em, spyin' t' see where they go and fer a few guineas I might recollect the place.

ULTOR

Tell me, hunchback! Tell me now!!

TOBY

Toby's afraid his memory ain't so...

(ULTOR reaches for Toby's throat.)

TOBY

Toby suddenly remembers, heh, heh.

ULTOR

Where!? Who's taken it?!

TOBY

Two men moved it last night, yer lordship, and it's pretty fresh too fer bein' so old, but they dragged it to the old carriage house.

UNA

What is this coffin to you, Ultor?

TOBY

'Tis his home, milady.

ULTOR

The amphibious dwelling of resurrected love...

TOBY

Wolf love!

UNA

But you said your home was Munster Castle...?

ULTOR

It is and I can explain, but I'm afraid I must leave you for now.

UNA

Please take me with you!

ULTOR

I can't.

UNA

Don't you...? Don't you love me?

ULTOR

I have crossed centuries to love you, and I'll only be gone for a few hours.

(TOBY has inched his way to the door and opens it.)

TOBY

Now, Alice! Hurry!

(ALICE runs into the room holding a large crucifix. TOBY produces another crucifix and together THEY approach ULTOR who attempts to flee, but falls, crying out in pain UNA leaves her bed to help him.)

ULTOR

Ahhhhhhhh....

UNA

Ultror! Ultror!

ALICE

No, Una, no! Stand back!

(TOBY puts down the crucifix and pulls out a stake tied to his back. HE stabs ULTOR who howls hideously, then mews like a cat. UNA faints, and ALICE rushes to her as TOBY pulls off his wig, revealing himself to be DOCTOR HESSELIUS.)

TOBY

Thank you, dear Alice. Together we've fulfilled my mission.

ALICE

Oh, Una, my dearest, darling Una...

(Lights dim to black.)

SCENE 7

(The next day in the parlor. DR. HESSELIUS sits with ALICE and COLONEL ARDAGH drinking brandy.)

COLONEL ARDAGH

Well, doctor, it seems you have delivered us from an unspeakable plague. I thank God for preserving her life, and curse my conceited incredulity --my despicable affectation of superiority! How could you endure it?!

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Please, Colonel, we must forget all that, and concentrate on making Una well again.

ALICE

She calls out his name every night.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

They claim the Baron was a passionate lover, a Dionysus in the art of carnal courtship.

COLONEL ARDAGH

To think that I believed I was welcoming a worthy husband for my little Una.

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

We must all try to rest. Tomorrow I shall call the commission, and the inquisition will be held according to law.

ALICE

What will they do, Doctor?

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Strike off the head, and burn it with the body on a pile of wood. Then the ashes are thrown upon the river and born away.

COLONEL ARDAGH

Then we'll be completely free from the pest?

DOCTOR

Well, not necessarily. You see, a vampire's relationship with a mortal is passionate enough, the victim can develop into a vampire as well.

ALICE

You mean there's a possibility that Una could become...?

COLONEL ARDAGH

Good heavens!

DOCTOR HESSELIUS

Only God knows. We must pray for Him to be merciful. Only He can judge her now.

(Lights fade on the parlor as music is heard and UNA is revealed asleep in her bed. Suddenly SHE sits up, staring straight ahead. HER mouth opens slightly, then she smiles, revealing long pointed teeth. Blackout.)

End of Play

Joseph Sheridan LeFanu

Joseph Sheridan LeFanu (1814-1873), a Dubliner and great grandnephew of the dramatist, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, was a lifelong melancholic who in later years became a recluse. Although LeFanu was a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin and studied for the bar, he renounced law for journalism and was the editor of several newspapers and periodicals. He married, but when his wife died, withdrew completely from society, refusing to see even his closest friends.

LeFanu was a successful and prolific author, but is most remembered for his supernatural stories. He is considered to be the father of the psychological ghost story, the first to realize that the personality of the beholder of a supernatural manifestation is as relevant as the manifestation itself. LeFanu was interested in fathoming the hidden psyches of his characters, of mapping out the boundaries of their realities, both perceived and imagined.

Uttor De Lacy is freely adapted. Liberties have been taken with regard to the plot, characters, and much of the dialog is inspired by the story rather than quoted directly.