Mr. Ridley Walter Voltowsky was not a count. However, he did own a brilliantly gloomy castle, a very nice gold pocket watch, a shiny black coffin, soft velvety capes (which he thought were very trendy) and a fine collection of bottled blood – everything from type O to Who Knows? Mr. Ridley Voltowsky was a vampire. And as truth may have it, he was a rather insecure vampire. But who could blame him? Every night he had to wake up from his coffin, walk groggily down the hall, and cringe as the long line of portraits mounted along the wall either rolled their eyes or heaved a great sigh. There was Great Grandfather Gilbert - Count of Spotsylvania, then Count Frankie Voltowsky (Ridley’s uncle), and so on and so forth with Count Harold, Countess Yvonne, Count Gresham, Count Jorge, etc. etc.

But as was said, Ridley was not a count. It just never happened for him. He really did nothing remarkable and only owned his fancy goods through inheritance. As a matter of fact, no one in his domain took him seriously as a vampire. Ridley was terribly embarrassed when a girl scout knocked on the front door and tried to sell him cookies last July. He bought the Thin Mints and sent her packing.

Poor Ridley loved himself, though. He thought he was a good person. He was proud that he ordered his blood via the “Got Blood?” association rather than personally…*borrowing* it from neighbors. “Got Blood?” is a charity organization after all. It was founded by Pius Wolfe, who thought summoning blood donors to feed the vampire population was a much more humane solution than allowing them to “hunt.” Pius was a very handsome, now a very *rich* gentleman about whom Ridley held strong suspicions disappeared when the moon was out.

But he tried not to judge.

These, and many others, are the reasons why his family looked down upon him. Ridley hunched his shoulders and tried to hide deeper in his cape.

At the end of the hall he turned and started to shuffle down the stairs to the wine cellar. He almost lost his fangs when a bored, drawling voice said,

“You look awful.”

Ridley jumped so high he hit his head on the low ceiling (he was a very, very short little vampire). With frantic eyes, and rubbing his bruise like mad, he glanced around until he found the source of the speaker, which happened to be the mirror his dear mom had given him. The mirror was a lovely gift and Ridley had treasured it since his mom gave it to him on his 118th birthday. But ever since it began his morning (or night, more like it) each and every day with insults and taunts, the mirror had found its permanent home deep in the cellar. With one last tousle of his short black hair, Ridley furrowed his eyebrows and tried to think of something mean to say back at it.

“Well thanks, you stupid inanimate object. I think your…your…” He swelled with excitement at finding a proper insult. “I think your glass is smudgy! You can’t even see straight!” he declared, waiting for its reaction. There was a long, uncomfortable silence before it replied with a genuinely disappointed tone.

“Nice try, Ridley. That’s really the best you could come up with today? Think of a better one tomorrow and I’ll forget you ever said that. And what would your dear mom think if she knew you called me ‘smudgy’?”

Ridley’s lip trembled and he huffed down the rest of the stair. The damp darkness of the cellar seemed to engulf him like an ocean with a sort of deafening pressure. He fumbled around for a match and struck it to life, lighting the oil lamp on the wall. “That’s better.”

He spun on his heel and gazed lovingly at the huge, horizontal barrels that cluttered the moldy, rock paved basement. He loved his collection of bloodwine. He had every bottle that meant everything to him. They were all dusty and never used, but very special. One cabinet stored the bottle his parents married with, and another was his Uncle’s Ceremonial Lordship bottle, drunk when he became a Count. Ridley thought he wanted to look at that one again, but when he took a stride to the cabinet, he tripped right over something very peculiar and bumped his chin on the cold floor. With a long groan, he rolled over and tried to decipher what caused his fall. A cheery voice echoed from the hall and he tried to set his spinning mind straight so he could hear it. It rattled back and forth between his ears for a few moments before he could focus on the floating words from the hall. He knew immediately it was not his mirror.

“And here you’ll find a portrait of ‘*Count*’,” (heavy emphasis on the quotations in her voice) “Gilbert Voltowsky. He is supposedly the first ‘*vampire*’ to inhabit such a ‘*spooky*’ castle. The more likely explanation for his reputation was that Gilbert was known not be very good with kids.” *True,* thought Ridley. Then he began to sweat (theoretically, of course) as he realized he was hearing voices. If his heart still beat, it would be pounding. “And kids are known to scramble at the words ‘I vant to drink your blood’!” she tried for a joke. Unenthusiastic mumbles from a group of voices was the reception. Ridley bonked his head on the floor repeatedly, trying to dispel the voices. Then, very unexpectedly, he opened his eyes again and found himself staring wide eyed into the face of a lady looking way too happy with blonde frizzy hair and red bead earrings.

“Do you need help, sir?” she asked sweetly. Ridley’s mouth hung open, but he did not answer. “Sir?”

Ridley just gawked. The lady raised her eyes to heaven and crossed her arms in front of her. “Sir, please go to the back of the tour group.” She said impatiently. Ridley was dumbfounded. He propped himself up on his elbows and looked around at the group of strangers packing into the very squishy cellar. They were wearing cameras and fake vampire teeth. Someone flashed a picture of him. He blinked hard twice and shook his head back and forth.

“T-tour? What do you mean tour? How did you get in here?!”

“Sir…?”

“Did you even knock?”

“Sir if you aren’t going to cooperate with –”

“THIS IS MY HOUSE!” Ridley was having hysterics. Someone flashed another picture of him. “Who is doing that??” he squeaked. But before any more complaints, demands, or shouts could be made, a tall, wide, dark man jerked him off the floor and lead him through the crowd up the stairs.

“So you think you live in a castle, huh wise guy?” rumbled the security guard, squeezing Ridley extremely tight and leading him so roughly that the little vampire hardly had to walk.

“Do you realize who I am?” Ridley barked, getting ready to boast his fangs.

“Let me guess,” began the guard, heavy on the sarcasm, “the Count?”

“Er…well, no. I’m not a count *per say*, but I *am* a vampire! Look at my fangs! See?”

“Uh huh, impressive.” The guard opened the massive front doors and shoved Ridley on the cobble street. “Find a way home, vampire. Turn into a bat or something.” And he shut the doors with a deafening creak and a cold click of the locks.

“This is not my day.” Ridley sighed.

\*\*\*

“*Please insert 50 cents to make a call”*

The device snarled at him. Ridley dug a hand in his pocket and pulled out its contents – pocket watch, Blood-2-Go (not to be confused with H2O), and finally wallet. He deposited the due 50 cents and morosely dialed the only number he knew. A professional voice answered the phone.

“Hello and thank you for calling ‘Got Blood!’ My name is Finnegan; would you like to make an order today?”

“Er, hello Finnegan. I’m not making an order. Actually, I’d like to talk to Mr. Wolfe. Is he in?”

“I’m sorry sir; Mr. Wolfe doesn’t take costumer calls.”

“Oh, well perhaps he’d make an exception? My name is Ridley Voltowsky, could you tell him that please?”

“Ridley Voltowsky? I send a shipment out to you every week; you’re our biggest costumer!” The man laughed. “I’ll get Pius for you, hold on…” And he transferred the call.

A new voice picked up the phone and was full of energy, confidence, and friendliness.

“Volt!! What a nice surprise, I was just thinking about you…”

“Er…really?”

“Yes, sir! I have a treat for you…we just got in something you’ll love…how does some type D blood sound to you?”

“Type D? I’ve never heard of type D…Sounds exotic….how much is it again?”

“It’s only a humble sum of –”

“WAIT! I didn’t call to buy anything! I need your help!”

“Is that so? Well,” Wolfe cleared his throat, “what can I do for you?”

“Humans invaded my castle!!”

“Okay…”

“I need help! I was thrown out!”

“Go on…”

Ridley hesitated, a little befuddled and very much annoyed. “Do I need to go on??”

Wolfe sighed. “Listen Rid, I can’t help you there. Why don’t you take it to court? I have a great lawyer you can use.” Ridley fiddled with the phone cord and thought quietly to himself. Finally, he sighed.

“No thanks, Mr. Wolfe. I guess I’ll just find another nice castle to dwell in.” He looked down sulkily at his shiny black shoes.

“Sorry, Volt,” Pius said sympathetically. “Oh shoot,” he started. “I gotta go Rid, that darn moon is out…I hate it when I have to change right in the middle of an –AWOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!”

Ridley hung up the phone. With broken spirits, he looked up on the hilltop where his dark, spooky castle stood; the spires twisting into the starry sky and the small flickering light from the lanterns shining through the dusty glass windows. He hung his head, stuck his hands in his pockets, and shuffled along the trail to the little neighborhood nestled below the rolling hills. If only he *could* turn into a bat. He thought bitterly that he’d rather be a bat than be Ridley Walter Voltowksy. Following the streetlights down the dust path to town, he slumped his shoulders and brought himself to hum a sad song.

\*\*\*

The rhythm of a human village was very misunderstood by folks such as Ridley. He didn’t understand the difference between residences and businesses, so when he came upon the town’s little coffee shop, he presently knocked on the glass door. The woman behind the counter, dressed in a green apron with a steaming cup of coffee etched on it, gave him an *are you okay?* look and waved him inside. Ridley bowed his head and let himself in, tinkling the door’s chimes. Clinking some money on the counter surface, he ordered one hot cup of coffee. Vampires don’t need drink, and they are naturally cold as ice, but Ridley thought the feel of a warm liquid swishing in your mouth was pleasant enough on a cold October night such as this. When he was served, he gently sipped the mug and spat back the liquid, extremely content. The young store owner gave him yet another peculiar look and Ridley just returned an embarrassed little smile, exposing his coffee-stained fangs. When she didn’t return it, his glum mood returned so cruelly it was like a light had been cut to pitch black and he was wallowing in it. *I wonder if they have basement vacancy,* he thought. But that fantasy was short lasted as he couldn’t gather the courage to ask the lady in front him. So instead he stood, bowed again, and left the shop.

“I need to think,” he mumbled to himself. “I need to get my house back!” A surge of anger overwhelmed him and he pounded a fist into the lamppost, denting the metal. He frowned so deeply he almost sobbed, and then stomped over to the curb of the street and sat down hard, one hand over his eyes.

“Excuse me, but what are you doing?” said a little voice. Ridley looked up, surprised. Apparently, he sat himself on the curb right next to a little girl, who was there first. She was dressed as a witch, holding a very nice purple pointed hat, wearing a frilly black and purple dress, and sporting an empty plastic pumpkin basket. She had beautiful tan skin and black hair, held back in a band. Her eyes were hazel, and it looked like they’d been crying.

“I’m sorry,” Ridley said in an almost whisper, and he scooted over a foot or so.

“No, it’s okay,” said the little voice. “I like your costume.”

Ridley said nothing, but the girl was persistent.

“What’s your name?”

Ridley looked at her, alarmed at her outgoingness and her interest in a broken little vampire like himself. “My name is Ridley.” His voice sounded almost ashamed to say it.

“I like that name,” said the girl. “I’m Molly.” She sniffled. There was an awkward silence. “Why are you sitting here?” Molly finally asked.

“My house became a tourist hotspot,” Ridley said miserably.

“Where’s your house?”

“It’s that castle up there on the hill.” He pointed. Molly mouthed the word “wow.”

“You live in the count’s castle? But the ghost stories say there’s vampires up there!”

“No vampires,” Ridley sighed, “just me. Just the one. And I’m no count.”

“I thought tourists went there for years. But they only go at night on Halloween.”

Ridley slapped his forehead. “Stupid me, that’s it! I bet they *have* been touring there for years and I slept right through them!” Molly couldn’t fathom what he was talking about.

“You sleep during the day?” she asked. “Why?”

“Well,” he chuckled, “because I’m a vampire. We all do that.” He smiled sheepishly. Instead of being frightened by his fangs, Molly smiled a wide smile and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. Her sniffling reminded Ridley of something.

“Now wait just a minute,” he said. “Why are *you* here? And where are yourparents?” He looked around the deserted little town.

“They think I’m out trick or treating,” she muttered, the smile gone.

“And why aren’t you?” Ridley asked gently.

“Because my friends were supposed to meet me here. They forgot.” Molly wiped her eye. Ridley was aghast for a moment, trying to decipher how kids could be so mean. He pulled his eyebrows together with a frown and shook his head, furious with the nameless children. Twice he opened his mouth to say something, but lost his words both times. Finally, he leaned forward, clasping his heads together and whispered, “I’m sorry, dear.”

“S’okay,” she mumbled. “I bet they never got to meet a real live vampire before,” she said, brightening up. Ridley smiled at her.

“No,” he said. “I’m sure they’ve not.”

The next brilliant idea in the history of brilliant ideas came from Molly. She suggested very enthusiastically that she and Ridley try to *scare* the tourists from his home. In the light of nothing else to do, Ridley agreed and they walked their way to the library to look at some classic vampire haunts and pranks. Ridley sat at the uncomfortable library table and waited while Molly searched the shelves and piled it with books on vampires, haunted houses, and Halloween. Ridley couldn’t read fast enough to keep up with Molly’s piling on books. He skimmed his way through the titles and rubbed his hands together excitedly.

Finally, Molly sat with him and they dove into the ocean of texts.

“This one’s a classic!” Molly whispered eagerly. “*The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.”

“Oh yes, I love that one! Halloween is my favorite holiday, you know.”

“Ooh what about this book? *A History of Famous Vampires*.” She read it hungrily but slowly (the big words were still rather confusing for her. And for Ridley, for that matter.). “There’s Count Dracula from Transylvania. He was really important, wasn’t he? A real big shot, right? And let’s see…Count Chocula. He’s not really much help, is he? Chocolate has *never* been known to scare people away! What else do we have here, what else….Edward Cullen.” She sighed “That’s no help either. They’re not gonna run away if you try to ‘dazzle’ them.” She laughed and said earnestly, “We need some *real* scary material.” She clicked her tongue thoughtfully.

“I’ve got an idea,” said Ridley. “What if we, um, hide somewhere in the house, and then, when they *least* expect it, we jump out and say ‘boo’?”

Molly gave him a blank stare for a few moments.

“That’s a *great* idea,” she finally said.

\*\*\*

“Okay, help me up please,” Molly said as they reached the stone walls of the castle. They found a perfect break-in spot where a window was left open, though very high up. Ridley lifted Molly on his shoulders and she grabbed hold of the window frame and snuck in. Then, fumbling around some, she threw down a chair for Ridley to climb on and then heave himself in. The wooden chair clunked down the wall and Ridley winced. “A little noise is okay,” Molly assured “It’s ‘spooky’.” And Ridley stepped up on the chair, hauling himself through the window. He fell over and landed on the dust floor of his pumpkin carving room, coughing and sneezing. Molly helped him up, and he dusted off his nice clothes. His dignity seemed to be a squirming fish that was very slippery to hold on to, especially trying to shake slimy pumpkin seeds off his hand. Molly smiled up at him, giggling slightly. Ridley couldn’t help but give a loving smile back, though also couldn’t help a little embarrassment from touching his eyes.

Suddenly, the familiar cheery voice penetrated their ears of the cold silence. It was coming from below, and the tour was in the foyer now, where the grand staircase was with balconies placed on either side of the room. “Come on, to the balcony!” Ridley clapped his hands once and brushed through the door and out to the top of the grand staircase. The tour was admiring the chandelier above with heads tilted all the way back and did not notice Ridley or Molly in the slightest. Ridley gave Molly a wink and was about to, very foolishly, jump down the stairs and say “boo!” when a thunderous howl shook the walls of Ridley Voltowsky’s home. Everyone jumped in shock and looked around fearfully. The tour guide tried to smooth it over with jokes and explanations, but no one would listen. The man with the camera ran over to a window and craned his neck for a view of the countryside.

“What was that?” Molly whispered, true fear in her voice. There was a strong bark from just out the window and Ridley gasped.

“*Pius!*”

A massive, shaggy, black-as-night wolf jumped through the window and the tourist dropped and broke his camera, falling to the ground. The werewolf had apparently changed his mind about helping Ridley. All the humans screamed and ran, except for Molly, who gripped Ridley’s arm as tight as she could and buried herself in his cape. Pius was barking and snarling at the tour guide, who refused to believe there was a crisis, but trembling, bended to pick up the clipboard she’d dropped in fright.

“Pius!!” Ridley shouted. “*PIUS!* STOP!” But Pius’ mind was twisted into fierce instinct and rage. He wouldn’t acknowledge Ridley or anyone. Things were going too far, and Pius was going to hurt the tour guide. “Stay here!” Ridley ordered Molly firmly. He took down the stairs three at a time and jumped in front of Pius, between him and the cowering lady. He held out his cloak wide with his arms spread to make himself look big and did his best snarl to get Mr. Wolfe’s attention. Pius pulled back his ears slightly but a growl still rumbled on the corner of his furry muzzle.

“Please, Pius,” Ridley begged, still waving his arms to keep the werewolf back.

“Ridley!” Molly shouted. She had run into the pumpkin carving room and got a small blade from the tool drawer to throw to her vampire friend. But Pius saw this as a threat and he forgot about Ridley, launching up after Molly. “No!” Ridley shouted, and he jumped on Pius right before he reached Molly, tackling him to the ground with his immense strength, and toppling expensive tables, chairs, and decorations along the way. Pius yelped and whimpered, struggling against Ridley and hating every moment of being pinned down. He thrashed and heaved and snapped his jaws, piercing painful (but not severe) cuts to Ridley, but was no match on the vampire’s grip.

“Pius…” Ridley whispered, his voice strained from being under so much effort. The big canine whined, and a wispy gray cloud passed over the bright, watching full moon. Slowly, the gigantic form melted away into a very rattled, scruffy, and exhausted man. Mr. Wolfe rubbed his eyes and groaned loudly. Ridley pulled himself back, panting. Molly was trembling, and still holding the small blade firmly. Pius heaved himself into a sitting position and looked around. Noticing the vampire next to him panting and weary, he made a sad face as realization hit him.

“Sorry, friend.” He said quietly, breathing heavily himself.

“R-Ridley,” Molly stammered. “You saved me.”

“He did?” Pius asked, quite alarmed and bemused. Ridley was still kneeling at Pius’ side, too tired to move or explain. But instead of having to move, Molly dropped the blade with a clatter and came to him, giving Ridley the biggest hug he’d ever had in his life. Ridley was so shocked that he just knelt there for a moment, wondering what he should do. But a sense of overwhelming happiness enfolded him and he smiled widely before he squeezed back, very tight.

“Oh my dear,” Pius began. “Oh goodness…” He rubbed his forehead, trying to remember how on earth he could have mistaken Molly for an enemy. “My dear, please, please forgive me.” He was torturing himself. Molly pulled herself out of Ridley’s bear hug and gave Pius a tentative look. He returned it with pleading eyes. Slowly, and with a shaky hand, she reached out and touched his shoulder. It was warm. After a moment, Molly nodded and Pius’ heart soared. He smiled and turned his soulful eyes on Ridley, nodding. Ridley was about to rise to his feet, but Molly stopped him.

“Wait,” she said. “I want to do something first while you’re down there.” She retrieved the small pumpkin carving blade and returned before Ridley. She smiled and put on her best diplomatic, royalty-make-believe face; sticking her nose up high, and raising the blade above Ridley’s shoulder.

“Mr. Ridley…er…”

“*Voltowsky*,” Pius coughed heavily into his fist.

“Mr. Ridley Voltowsky, by order of the honorable companionship of us friends,” she glanced at Pius and meekly smiled, to assure him that he was included, “and to recognize one of the finest vampires among them all, for bravery and kindness, I dub you Count of this castle.” Ridley beamed at her, somehow feeling miraculously warm, his spirit alight. Molly gently tapped each shoulder with the flat of the little blade, and Ridley almost did something he hadn’t done in a hundred years – cry.

Count Ridley honorably stood and bowed, and Pius clapped his big calloused hands with a laugh.

“And you two,” the count said, all dignified, “are welcome in my home at any time for any occasion, my dear, dear friends.”

There was one person in the room however, unlike the others, who was not celebrating. The tour guide still stood cemented to the ground, shaking so hard she was almost vibrating. Ridley turned to her now.

“Madam,” he said politely, “I ask that you please call first before sending your next tour. I’d be glad to *schedule* an appointment any time.” And he gave her a toothy smile. Her eyes were bugging out inches farther than they should and she nodded vehemently, trying to pull a brave smile but failing miserably.

“Now then,” Ridley continued, “before you need to get home, my dear, how about some candy? I’ve got loads of it stored around here somewhere…”

“Or can I interest you in some type D blood?? We are having a sale you know…” The werewolf winked and they all laughed before enjoying the rest of their Halloween celebrations. It was, indeed, a very “spooky” and very happy Halloween.

HAPPY ENDING!! HOPE YOU HAD FUN ☺