

Excerpt from **Dracula** (1897)
by Bram Stoker

In this excerpt, Dr. John Seward and Dr. Van Helsing have a moment of rest after administering to a particularly challenging case. They are returning from the funeral of a young woman, a patient which they have failed to save, leaving the young man who loved her behind to grieve. In the carriage which they share, Dr. Van Helsing (typically grim and professional) has had an outburst of emotion, laughing uncontrollably until he cries, laughing and crying again, in turns. Dr. John Seward believes he has witnessed a nervous fit in his friend, and asks Dr. Van Helsing, after he has calmed down, why he laughs at such a time. Dr. Van Helsing's response is as follows:

“Ah, you don't comprehend, friend John. Do not think that I am not sad, though I laugh. See, I have cried even when the laugh did choke me. But no more think that I am all sorry when I cry, for the laugh he come just the same. Keep it always with you that laughter who knock at your door and say, ‘May I come in?’ is not the true laughter. No! he is a king, and he come when and how he like. He ask no person; he choose no time of suitability. He say, ‘I am here.’ Behold, in example I grieve my heart out for that so sweet young girl; I give my blood for her, though I am old and worn; I give my time, my skill, my sleep; I let my other sufferers want that so she may have all. And yet I can laugh at her very grave—laugh when the clay from the spade of the sexton drop upon her coffin and say ‘Thud! thud!’ to my heart, till it send back the blood from my cheek. My heart bleed for that poor boy—that dear boy, so of the age of mine own boy had I been so blessed that he live, and with his hair and eyes the same. There, you know now why I love him so. And yet when he say things that touch my husband-heart to the quick, and make my father-heart yearn to him as to no other man—not even to you, friend John, for we are more level in experiences than father and son—yet even at such moment King Laugh he come to me and shout and bellow in my ear, ‘Here I am! here I am!’ till the blood come dance back and bring some of the sunshine that he carry with him to my cheek. Oh, friend John, it is a strange world, a sad world, a world full of miseries, and woes, and troubles; and yet when King Laugh come he make them all dance to the tune he play. Bleeding hearts, and dry bones of the churchyard, and tears that burn as they fall—all dance together to the music that he make with that smileless mouth of him. And believe me, friend John, that he is good to come, and kind. Ah, we men and women are like ropes drawn tight with strain that pull us different ways. Then tears come; and, like the rain on the ropes, they brace us up, until perhaps the strain become too great, and we break. But King Laugh he come like the sunshine, and he ease off the strain again; and we bear to go on with our labour, what it may be.”