



## The Count of San Filippo: A Tale of the Vampire

**Mauricio D'Tejada**

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*You want vampires? This book has a mean one. Fast-paced and tight, the writing succeeds in presenting this lethal predator in an abhorrent light.*

This vampire tale on steroids meets the horror genre in a nauseating parade of blood-drained victims. *The Count of San Filippo* walks a fine line between classic literature and urban fantasy. Mauricio D'Tejada's version of Count Dracula sinks his fangs into an enraptured reading audience, making the terrifying experience strangely titillating to fans of the Eastern European legend.

Set in Latin America, the story portrays a powerful, eccentric man who cavorts with his beautiful prey, luring one sophisticated woman in particular into a trance-like state of attraction. In this dream sequence, she wanders into his lair: "The furniture was heavy and dark. In the middle, the bed was a four poster antique holding its own roof, from which half transparent veils descended to a mattress covered with a deep purple brocade. There were also chairs and more tables and, on a wall, a large mirror covered with a black cloth."

Living on the outskirts of the city in a run-down old house, he feasts upon the area's residents as a serial killer, baffling law enforcement officials with his unusual method of execution. He remains incognito, a constant threat to frightened citizens. D'Tejada's story is actually quite simple, not a mystery—a killer is on the loose with an unusual murder weapon. This simplicity, however, adds to the tension rather than detracting from it.

In this scene, an impending sense of danger enhances the foreboding mood without detailed elaboration. "As in her earlier dreams, Sonia advanced into the room, experiencing, at the same time, the curious sensation that she was not alone in the house. It wasn't a certitude, but just a vague feeling."

The book is riddled with grammatical errors. Frequent enough to be distracting, chunks of awkward text are like stumbling blocks, disrupting the flow. Nonetheless, the writing, which is fast paced and tight, succeeds in presenting this lethal predator in an abhorrent light while juxtaposing the confusion and shock of supporting characters.

As the narrative progresses, it is apparent that this is the first installment of an intended series; like the serialized fiction of bygone days, this book does not truly conclude. Instead, it segues into the next one, leaving an opening for continuation. But it fails to provide adequate resolution for the first story.

*The Count of San Filippo* is D'Tejada's debut. The novel is a complex investigation, featuring morgue scenes and heated debate about the horrendous cause of death, even though the reason is obvious—blood loss and two holes in the neck. All who have acquired a taste for vampires take note.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (January 23, 2014)

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