

CHARACTERS (5 WOMEN, 3 MEN)

Young Laura...a girl of about six; and
Young Girl

Laura Ivory...a modest young woman, 19 and 29; and
Isabella Rheinfeldt...a masked young woman

Edward Ivory...an English gentleman, Laura's father, 45-50.

Madame Perrodon...Laura's governess, 40-50.

Carmilla/Young Woman...a beguiling visitor, 20's; and
Millarca...a masked party guest

General Spielsdorf...a family friend, 50-60; and
Hunchback...a vendor

The Countess...a commanding, mysterious woman, ageless; and
Madame de Comtesse...a masked party guest

Henry Ganz...a talented doctor, 30.

The play takes place in various spaces and in the courtyard garden of a modest castle outside an isolated forest in Austria; also in an ancient ruined chapel. Within the castle, furnishings should be minimal, suggestive, fluid. Perhaps there's a generous stairway, or a long, dark hallway leading to unseen rooms. Windows and doors are significant; exaggerated sound is essential. As for the chapel, stone and decay, and lingering memory.

Stage craft and magic may play a part in the telling of this story. Perhaps inexplicable things occur or appear...and vanish.

A sense of vast time, inhabited by shadow.

1850. Late summer and late fall.

"My dear it was a moment
to clutch at for a moment
so that you may believe in it
and believing is the act of love, I think
even in the telling, wherever it went."

Anne Sexton

"Am I not consanguineous? Am I not of her
blood?"

William Shakespeare, *Twelfth-Night*

ACT ONEPROLOGUE

Darkness. A clap of thunder, a strike of lightning. YOUNG LAURA, a girl of about six, is revealed sitting up in bed-- awake, but not afraid. From the darkness, under the drum of heavy rainfall:

Madame?
YOUNG LAURA

Rain. Lightning flashes.

Papa-?!
YOUNG LAURA

Darkness. Thunder crash. Lightning. Now a YOUNG WOMAN appears, standing behind the bed. She is dark-haired, ivory-skinned, exquisitely lovely; she moves beside the bed; YOUNG LAURA is startled, more curious than frightened. The YOUNG WOMAN joins her in bed, slipping beneath the coverlet. She caresses the girl, soothing her, holding her. YOUNG LAURA closes her eyes, the rain falls gently. Darkness.

YOUNG LAURA'S horrified cry. Thunder.

SCENE ONE

Early evening. Distant thunder.

Lights rise on the garden of a Gothic schloss in the midst of an Austrian forest. A thin film of mist steals over the grounds.

LAURA IVORY busily wields trowel and clippers as she tends the colorful flowers. She is nineteen. EDWARD IVORY rests on the nearby bench, enjoying his daughter, drifting. All is peace and sanctuary.

LAURA
Have you seen such a moon? Papa?

MADAME PERRODON enters, out of breath.

MADAME PERRODON

It is too much to ask...but in the future...could you kindly contain your strolls to an area *nearer the house*? All this walking, I very nearly keeled over from the effort! Dead as dirt, what use would I be to you then?

*(she drapes a lovely shawl over
Laura's shoulders)*

There. You look like your mother.

IVORY

To a fault.

LAURA

Thank you, Madame.

MADAME sits heavily on the bench.

MADAME PERRODON

A night like this, a young lady should have a wrap. And for Captain Ivory, a letter. Just arrived.

She hands him the letter.

IVORY

Laura was commenting on our moon.

MADAME PERRODON

That would be the cause of St. John's Eve-- patron saint of beekeepers.

IVORY

Beekeepers?

MADAME PERRODON

The hives are full 'a honey this night. Hearts are full, too, if you're a believer. Pay special mind to any stranger you meet under this honey moon. 'tis sure they'll find their way under your skin.

IVORY reads silently.

LAURA

If only a stranger could *find* us. Not here. A stranger would have no mind nor business venturing to such a lonely and primitive place as ours. I am fated to be forever friendless!

MADAME PERRODON

And what am I?

LAURA

You are my oldest and dearest, the most faithful friend a girl could ever want.

MADAME PERRODON

True enough.

LAURA

Still. It would be nice to have someone other than one's governess as friend. A *companion* is what I crave.

IVORY

(re: the letter)

General Spielsdorf cannot come to us so soon as I had hoped. I am afraid he is in great affliction.

MADAME PERRODON

A pity.

LAURA

When can we expect them?

IVORY

Not for months, I daresay.

LAURA

But they'll be dead. The cosmos, the delphinium, the lisianthus-- all limp and brown! Can't you persuade them to come earlier?

IVORY

I'm afraid not.

LAURA

But I have for weeks now been planning and preparing for them! Admittedly not so much for the dear General as for the pleasure of meeting his niece. And now I must *wait*? Really Papa, the thought of making a friend is all that's kept me from dying of *loneliness*.

IVORY

Laura--

LAURA

There is nothing to do here and no one to do it with and I am bored out of my mind! Why did you bring us here?

IVORY

Laura--

LAURA

Why must we continue to live in such a dreadful place, so far from anyone?

IVORY

I'm very glad now that you never met Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt.

LAURA

Because you hope to keep me locked away in this lonely prison for eternity?

IVORY

Because the poor young lady is dead.

MADAME PERRODON

No!

LAURA

Dead-? But how?

IVORY

Here is the General's letter. Written, no doubt, in the midst of confounding and unsettling grief.

LAURA reads the letter aloud.

LAURA

"I have lost my darling daughter, for as such I loved her."

GENERAL SPIELSDORF, revealed in a pool of light, speaks to the audience.

GENERAL

During the last days of dear Isabella's illness I was not able to write to you. Before then I had no idea of her danger. I have lost her, and now learn *all*, too late. The fiend who betrayed our infatuated hospitality has done it all. I thought I was receiving into my house innocence, gaiety, a charming companion for my lost Isabella. Heavens, what a fool I've been! I curse my conceited incredulity, my despicable affectation of superiority, my blindness, all too late! I cannot write or talk collectedly now. So soon as I shall have recovered, I will see you. I will then tell you all that I scarce put upon paper now. Farewell. Pray for me, dear friend.

The GENERAL disappears.

IVORY

From his letter I scarcely know the man.

LAURA

It's all so horrible.

MADAME PERRODON

A tragedy, pure and simple.

IVORY takes his daughter's hand.

IVORY

Your beautiful mother, may she rest in eternal peace, entrusted me with her most valuable treasure. Were anything to steal you from me, I should devote my remaining days to grieving your memory.

MADAME PERRODON

We can take comfort in her garden. Wasn't it always here your mother found solace?

IVORY

Indeed.

LAURA

Look at it. In this light, it's almost *alive*.

MADAME PERRODON

The moon this night is full of idyllic and magnetic influence.

(*pointing offstage*)

See there? When you look up at the front of the *schloss*, see how all its windows flash and twinkle with that silvery splendor? As if unseen hands had lighted up the rooms to receive fairy guests. Not that I put stock in foolish fairy talk, or superstitions of any ilk-- *nor should you*. Isn't that so, Captain Ivory?

IVORY

What--? Yes, quite.

MADAME PERRODON

(*aside, to Laura*)

Look at him, under the moon's sway. It acts on dreams, you know. On lunacy, on nervous people.

IVORY

It isn't the moon has my spirit.

MADAME PERRODON

A cousin of mine-- a mate of a merchant ship, having taken a nap on deck on such a night, awakened after a dream of an old woman *clawing* him on his cheek, only to find his formerly agreeable features horribly drawn to one side. His countenance never again recovered its equilibrium.

LAURA

How dreadful!

MADAME PERRODON

Not that I am the *superstitious* type, mind you. No, I am the *pay attention* type. I am the *vigilant* type. I am--

IVORY

Let us pray, now, for the General and his beloved niece.

(taking Laura's hand)

Heavenly Father, hear our humble plea. In Christ's name absolve the soul of thy servant, Isabella Rheinfeldt, from every bond of sin. Restore to her everlasting salvation, and give rest to her in thy sanctuary.

During this prayer Laura glances offstage, as if she's heard some noise. After a moment, her attention returns to the stage.

IVORY (CONT'D)

We ask that you take away our difficulties and release us from the selfish need to understand the loss of such a young and vigorous life. We pray in hope for all the dead known to you alone, and for their loved ones left to mourn. Thy will be done. Amen.

MADAME PERRODON

Amen. Now inside, before the moon plays anymore on you.

IVORY

In a bit, Madame. In a bit.

MADAME exits. Father and daughter absorb the night; then:

IVORY

"In truth I know not why I am so sad. It wearies me: you say it wearies you. But how I got it-- came by it..."
I forget the rest.

LAURA

You are in one of your moods.

IVORY

Something like it. I feel as if some great misfortune were hanging over us.

LAURA

It is this place! The dark of the forest, the solitude-- it plays on you as it does me. We should leave, Papa.

IVORY

Leave here?

LAURA

Tomorrow would not be too soon.

IVORY

Your dear mother is buried under this very soil. No, we will stay, Laura. This dark mood will pass uneventfully. It always does.

MADAME PERRODON rushes onstage.

MADAME PERRODON

There's been an accident on the grounds!

IVORY

What manner of accident--?

MADAME PERRODON

Directly past me it flew: a carriage, on the road just short of the drawbridge! They were moving at a break-neck pace, for reasons I can't fathom. The four horses swerved to avoid the old stone cross that sits by the roadside-- going head-long into a stand of trees!

IVORY

Good lord.

MADAME PERRODON

It's a frightful scene! Two horses down, the carriage upon its side. Footmen are removing the traces and survivors, if any.

LAURA

Oh no.

IVORY

Prepare a receiving room at once!

LAURA

What will we do, Papa?

IVORY

Whatever we can.

He quickly exits.

MADAME PERRODON

'tis the moon, I tell you. The cursed moon.

SCENE TWO

The interior of the schloss, that same evening. MADAME PERRODON sets out pillows and blankets.

LAURA

Do you think they lived?

MADAME PERRODON

No one has said otherwise. We hope for the best.

IVORY enters, carrying the lifeless body of a YOUNG WOMAN. Her face is hidden by the hood of her cloak. Trailing him is a pale but commanding woman dressed in black velvet-- the COUNTESS.

MADAME PERRODON

Oh, St. Mary! The poor lifeless child.

IVORY gently lays the young woman on the couch, then puts his fingers on her wrist, checking her pulse.

IVORY

She's certainly not dead, just stunned.

The COUNTESS dabs her eyes with a handkerchief.

COUNTESS

Thank god in heaven.

IVORY

Her heartbeat is distinguishable, but faint.

COUNTESS

Who was ever being so born to calamity? Here am I, on a journey of life and death, in which to lose an hour is possibly to lose all.

IVORY

(to Madame Perrodon)

Bring a bottle of salvolatile.

(to the Countess)

And for you, dear woman, after such a terrible fright, whatever we can offer--

COUNTESS

How far on, sir, can you tell, is the nearest village?

MADAME PERRODON

It's to there you were in such a hurry to arrive?

COUNTESS

No. But it is crucial that I arrive at my destination on the prescribed day. My child will just as well convalesce at length in a nearby inn.

IVORY

Madame, she is in no condition to be moved. If only for safety's sake--

COUNTESS

I cannot, dare not, delay.

IVORY

But she is--

COUNTESS

If you only knew the sad and untimely circumstances under which we travel. But never mind, there is nothing to be done and no time to waste.

IVORY

Dear lady, the nearest village is distant and affords no such inn as you could think of placing your daughter at.

MADAME PERRODON

Certainly not!

COUNTESS

(firm)

I *shall* leave her there, and I shall not see my darling-- or even hear of her, till my return.

MADAME PERRODON

What kind of mother--

IVORY

(cutting her off)

Madame Perrodon.

(to the Countess)

I insist you reconsider. You cannot allow your child to continue her journey, for any distance, without grave consequence.

LAURA

Let her stay with us.

IVORY, COUNTESS, and MADAME turn to Laura.

LAURA (CONT'D)

It would do her well, and...it would be delightful!

IVORY

It would be asking a great deal of Madame to entrust her child to our watch.

MADAME PERRODON

A great deal.

LAURA

I shall devote myself to her care above all else.

COUNTESS

I cannot do that. It would be to task your kindness and chivalry too cruelly, sir.

LAURA

Please, please, Papa?

She goes to him, touching his arm with her plea. An uncomfortable pause.

IVORY

It would, on the contrary, Madame, be to confer on us a great *kindness* at the moment when we most need it. My daughter has just been disappointed by a cruel misfortune. If you confide this young lady to our care, it will truly be her best consolation. Nowhere could you do so with more honest assurance of tenderness than here.

COUNTESS

Your offer is generous--

MADAME PERRODON

I don't go in much for kismet, but you landed at this place on this night for some reason. You'll do no better at an inn.

The COUNTESS goes to the YOUNG WOMAN; she kneels beside her, and whispers into her ear, then hastily kisses her. She rises, then turns to Ivory.

COUNTESS

Very well. There is one thing more..

(to Ivory)

Please, walk with me.

COUNTESS takes IVORY'S arm and swiftly walks him offstage. The YOUNG WOMAN, CARMILLA, stirs, her face still enveloped in her cloak hood.

CARMILLA

Where is Mamma..?

LAURA

She's awake--

MADAME soothes the YOUNG WOMAN.

MADAME PERRODON

Mum's gone for now, but she'll soon return, angel.

CARMILLA

Where am I-? What is this place?

LAURA

You're with friends, brand new friends.

CARMILLA

I don't see the carriage. Where is Matska, where is she?!
(*softly sobbing*)

LAURA

The poor thing.

MADAME PERRODON

(*to Carmilla*)

There, there. Too much excitement is all. We'll have some hot tea, then directly into a nice bed.

LAURA approaches, but MADAME puts a hand up.

MADAME PERRODON

One at a time is as much as she should at present convene with.

MADAME leads the YOUNG WOMAN upstairs/down the hall. Laura remains, alone.

IVORY enters, troubled.

LAURA

What is it, Papa?

IVORY

Just now, I remarked what an ill-looking pack those footmen were. Ugly, hang-dog-looking fellows. The driver, too. Strange. They are clever rogues, however. They got the carriage to right in a minute.

LAURA

But where did they come from?

IVORY

The lady didn't offer and I didn't ask. At any rate, she's gone. They've all left, as though they were never here.

LAURA

What more did she tell you before her departure?

IVORY

Indeed, very little. She said her daughter was in delicate health and nervous, but not subject to any kind of seizure--nor to any illusion, being in fact perfectly sane.

LAURA

How very odd to say all that.

IVORY

At all events it *was* said. She then said 'I am making a long journey of *vital importance*'-- emphasizing that-- 'rapid and secret. Until I return for my child, she will be silent as to who we are, whence we come, and whither we are traveling.'

LAURA

But why?

IVORY

That is all she said.

(conspiratorially)

But...when she said the word 'secret', she paused and fixed her eyes on mine. Like so.

(he gives Laura an arch look)

LAURA

(intrigued)

No!

IVORY

Further, when I took her hand it felt rather smooth and cold. Only when I glanced down did I see...that what I held was no less than a *black adder*, writhing and pulsing in my trembling hand!

LAURA

Papa, you're teasing!

IVORY

You saw how quickly she slipped away.

(He smiles, then:)

I hope I have not done a very foolish thing in taking charge of the young lady.

MADAME enters with lit candles.

MADAME PERRODON

Prettiest creature I ever saw. Gentle and sweet-voiced, too.

LAURA

You like her?

MADAME PERRODON

I like her extremely.

LAURA

A friend at last! Did you ask the girl's name, Papa?

IVORY

Never occurred to me.

LAURA

But *how*--?

CARMILLA

Most assuredly you, as I see you now. A beautiful young lady with golden hair and large blue eyes...and a sweet mouth. Your mouth-- as you are here.

(she outlines Laura's lips)

When I came to myself...I was again in my nursery at home. But your face I have never forgotten since. I could not be misled by mere resemblance-- *you are the lady whom I saw then!*

LAURA

Your story is *mine*. This is so very strange-- that you and I should have had, each of the other, so vivid a dream! I you and you me, looking as we do now, when of course we were both but children!

CARMILLA

I don't know which should be most afraid of the other. If you were less pretty I think I should be very much afraid of you.

(gazing at Laura)

I have never had a friend-- will I find one now?

LAURA

You have no idea, in such enduring solitude as surrounds me, what a joyous an event this is!

They are interrupted by knocking at the bedroom door.

MADAME PERRODON

(offstage)

It's well after noon. Are you yet asleep?

CARMILLA pulls the bedclothes over the two of them as MADAME PERRODON enters, followed by HENRY GANZ.

CARMILLA

(under covers)

'Tis the tomb of the sleeping beauties!

MADAME PERRODON

I should think at this hour of the day you'd have put more distance between you and your bed.

LAURA

(undercovers)

Who goes there?

MADAME PERRODON

This would be the physician your father sent for, a Doctor Ganz.

LAURA

(under covers)

Oh dear.

LAURA throws off the covers, sits up.

LAURA

Good afternoon, Henry.

CARMILLA sits up beside LAURA.

CARMILLA

Good afternoon, Henry.

GANZ

Good afternoon...indeed!

MADAME PERRODON

Well you wouldn't know it from the looks of this room. Dark as a crypt in here! You don't mind if I let the day in, Mademoiselle?

CARMILLA

Oh please do. I'm ever so much better.

MADAME PERRODON pulls aside a long drape, revealing a large window.

MADAME PERRODON

I suspect Doctor Ganz will determine your condition.

CARMILLA

In fact he will find nothing out of the ordinary. But the charming doctor may stay and visit anyway.

She smiles at Ganz.

LAURA

Shouldn't I stay, too?

MADAME PERRODON

Whatever for?

LAURA

I don't know.

MADAME PERRODON

We'll let the good doctor tend to his patient. Meanwhile, your father has suddenly determined the house needs "freshening up". How he supposes we'll do that is a mystery.

MADAME PERRODON exits.

LAURA

Shall I visit you later?

CARMILLA

I desire nothing more.

LAURA

Very well. I leave you to your examination, Doctor Ganz.

She lingers at the threshold.

I'll be very near by. Just outside this door. Should you need me.

GANZ

Thank you, Laura. I suspect we'll be fine.

During the following, GANZ conducts his examination of CARMILLA while LAURA, in a pool of light, addresses the audience.

LAURA

Her name was Carmilla. Her family ancient and noble. And she an exquisite mystery.

GANZ

Let's begin. May I..?

He places a stethoscope on CARMILLA'S chest.

LAURA

She would not reveal the name of her family, nor the name of their estate, nor even that of the country they lived in.

GANZ

Take a deep breath, please.

LAURA

Even the young doctor with his apparent charms could not persuade our accidental guest to say more.

GANZ

And another.

LAURA

He did ascertain something from an early recollection of hers.

GANZ

Good. Very good.

LAURA

Information which indicated a people of strange manners-- and customs of which I knew nothing.

GANZ

Now then...

LAURA

I gathered that her native country was much more remote and exotic than any of us had at first fancied.

GANZ

We will continue with you laying down.

LAURA

I was thoroughly smitten.

SCENE FOUR

Carmilla's room, evening.

LAURA

No, we shouldn't--

CARMILLA

But I want to. Please please please?

LAURA

It's night, you can't see anything out there.

Carmilla wears the shawl we saw Laura wearing earlier; she admires herself in a mirror.

LAURA

Carmilla. Where did you get that shawl?

CARMILLA

Madame gave it to me. Do you like it?

LAURA

It belonged to my mother.

CARMILLA

Oh. If you'd rather wear it--

LAURA

No. No, of course you should have it.

CARMILLA

Walk with me now, show me your garden.

I can't.

LAURA

Come, come, come on!

CARMILLA

But the doctor said--

LAURA

Oh "The doctor said--" Who cares what *he* thinks? What do you think, my beauty?

CARMILLA

I think you should do as the doctor says. Papa would be grieved beyond measure if anything were to--

LAURA

I *mean* about the good doctor. What do you think of him?

CARMILLA

I don't think anything at all.

LAURA

Is that so?

CARMILLA

It is.

LAURA

You don't find him the least bit handsome?

CARMILLA

No! He was a playmate from childhood days, his father was my mother's physician.

LAURA

You didn't notice how he looked at you?

CARMILLA

No.

LAURA

With hunger in his eyes.

CARMILLA

He did not. Did he?

LAURA

The blood coursing through his thick veins...

CARMILLA

You're being silly!

LAURA

CARMILLA

The taste of *love* on his *hot, wet, tongue*.

LAURA

You must stop, Carmilla!

CARMILLA

I shan't!

LAURA

I have no interest in him, nor he in me.

CARMILLA

Maybe *I* do.

LAURA

What-? Have an interest in him? I wouldn't care.

(she laughs, too gaily)

Really, I know nothing of you. Tell me anything, tell me a secret.

CARMILLA lays back and smiles.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Oh come, I know you have one! Tell me or I'll pinch you!

(pause)

You can't answer. I ought not to have asked.

CARMILLA

You were quite right to ask me that, or anything. You surprised me, Laura. You do not know how dear you are to me already. But I am under vows-- no nun half so awfully! I dare not tell my story yet, even to you.

LAURA

Knowing I would not divulge one *syllable* to any mortal breathing?

CARMILLA

(conspiratorial)

I will tell you something.

LAURA

Yes-?

Carmilla takes Laura's hand.

CARMILLA

We are living in a magnificent castle somewhere far away, just you and I.

LAURA

You and I? Alone?

CARMILLA

The castle is surrounded by marvelous gardens.

LAURA

Not forest, like this god-forsaken place.

CARMILLA

Only flowers, my darling, nothing but white flowers so we may enjoy them at night.

LAURA

At night-?

CARMILLA

When we take our strolls. I would sit on a bench, or a rock, or maybe a generous stump. We could talk and laugh, with not a care in the world, and I would watch you in your garden. I would like that. Would you like that?

LAURA

It's a lovely dream.

CARMILLA

My family owns such a castle. Huge and empty. We could run away and live there!

LAURA

And-?

CARMILLA

And we would be happy, like birds.

LAURA

What of my father? And your mother? When do you think she'll return for you? You must miss her--

CARMILLA

Don't ruin it!

LAURA

I--I'm sorry.

CARMILLA

I don't like to think about her. It's too sad.

(intense)

I don't want to be sad with you. I don't ever want to make you sad.

LAURA

I can't imagine you would.

CARMILLA

Were you ever at a ball?

LAURA

I've never been *anywhere*. What is it like?

CARMILLA

I almost forget, it is years ago.

LAURA

You are not so old. Your first ball can hardly be forgotten yet. Tell me!

CARMILLA

What occurred that night has confused the picture, made its colors faint. You see, I was wounded, here.
(*her hand on her heart*)

And never was the same since.

LAURA

Did you fall in love?

CARMILLA

Yes-- a cruel love-- strange love, that would have taken my life. But love will have its sacrifices.

LAURA

What happened?

CARMILLA

I can't say. Another night.

LAURA

Oh please tell me tonight, tell me about your heart. I want to know everything about you, my sweet friend.

CARMILLA suddenly falters, leaning on LAURA.

LAURA (CONT'D)

Carmilla--? What is it?

CARMILLA

(*softly, quickly*)

If your dear heart is ever wounded, my wild heart will bleed with yours.

LAURA

Are you ill?

CARMILLA

Listen to me. I live with you in your warm life...and you shall die-- die, sweetly die!, into mine.

LAURA

You're not making sense.
(calling offstage)
 MADAME PERRODON!

CARMILLA

Hold me, darling. Please hold me.

CARMILLA'S knees buckle under her.

LAURA

Sssh.

She helps CARMILLA to the bed. MADAME PERRODON rushes on.

MADAME PERRODON

What's gone on here?

CARMILLA

(mumbling softly, delirious)
 As I draw near to you, you in your turn will draw near to others...you will learn the rapture of that cruelty-- which yet is love.

LAURA

What can she mean?

MADAME PERRODON

It could be fever talking.
(to Carmilla)
 The doctor thinks you ought to have a maid to sit up with you tonight, dear. One of ours is waiting--

CARMILLA

(lucid, weak)
 No, please...

MADAME PERRODON

You will find her a very useful and quiet creature.

CARMILLA

I could not sleep. I never could with an attendant in the room.

MADAME PERRODON

She'll be no trouble. I'll only just have her--

CARMILLA

No! I shan't require any assistance.

MADAME PERRODON

Have it your way.

LAURA

I shall visit you in the morning?

CARMILLA

Yes, please-- but not early.

*(she smiles, takes LAURA'S hand,
kissing it slowly)*

Good night, darling. It is very hard to part with you, but good night.

MADAME PERRODON

Come, Laura. Our guest will have her rest now.

*THEY leave her. The door closes. The
echo of a key in the lock.*

MADAME PERRODON

Used to having things her way, isn't she?

LAURA

I dare say she's worn out.

MADAME PERRODON

Maybe she is maybe she isn't.

LAURA

What ever do you mean?

MADAME PERRODON

I don't yet know.

SCENE FIVE

The parlour, that evening.

GANZ

Remarkably she sustained no injuries. Her pulse is quite regular and she is apparently perfectly well.

IVORY

An extraordinarily lucky young woman.

GANZ

From your description of the accident, I would say she's from indestructible stock.

IVORY

And rather beautiful, wouldn't you say?

GANZ

Is she?

IVORY

I only wish I knew more of her-- and her family. God forbid something unforeseen should arise.

LAURA enters.

LAURA

Henry. You're still here.

GANZ

Yes. That is...yes.

IVORY

I have retained Doctor Ganz's services, for Carmilla's benefit. The doctor has given our young guest a favorable report.

GANZ

She would, however, benefit from bed rest.

LAURA

There's no harm, certainly, in my seeing her?

GANZ

Your company would no doubt give immeasurable pleasure. To her, that is.

IVORY

Yes, I believe it's time for some wine.

IVORY exits.

GANZ

Well. There you are. There it is. Here we are.

LAURA

Henry, may I confide in you?

GANZ

(too urgent)

I have long wished you would.

LAURA

How best to say this?

GANZ

Quickly and with no thought. Very like taking medicine.

LAURA

I am convinced I was visited by Carmilla when I was quite young.

GANZ

In a dream, you mean?

LAURA

They liked to tell me that.

During the following perhaps we see YOUNG LAURA in her bed, upset and tended by Madame Perrodon and a NURSE MAID.

LAURA (CONT'D)

They rushed into my room, trying to soothe over my terrified whimpering. Madame Perrodon going noisily about the room, a cavalier show of normalcy. But I heard the whispers. I told them how the young woman put her arms around me as we slept...how it felt so peaceful, until I was awakened by my own screams. And the pain. As if two needles ran deep into my breast! But when they examined me there was of course no puncture. No sign that anything at all had happened to me. I remember Papa stood at my bedside, talking cheerfully and asking the nurse questions. Telling me it was nothing but a dream and could not hurt me. But it was *not* a dream, Henry. It was too real and terrifying. I don't know what it was, but it was not a dream.

GANZ

I can only believe you.

LAURA

I was beginning to doubt myself. You must tell no one, lest they think strangely of me. Promise me you won't, Henry?

GANZ

With all my being. Not a word of it will escape this mouth.

IVORY enters with a wine tray.

IVORY

I'm rather good at this butler business.

(setting the tray down)

All this company has brought the house to life. It's downright festive! You'll join us for a glass, won't you Doctor?

GANZ

No. That is, I must go...study. Books.

(looks at Laura)

In utter and complete silence.

HE nods "good evening" and exits quickly.

IVORY

A nice young man. Good mind, decent face. Weren't you two playmates?

LAURA

We've grown up and have since shared only the rare glance.

IVORY

A man will invent a world in a woman's glance.

(raising a glass)

To Carmilla's good health!

LAURA

To Carmilla.

IVORY

Are you happy, dear?

LAURA

Very happy.

IVORY

Yes. I am content.

SCENE SIX

GENERAL SPIELSDORF stands in a pool of light. He appears more haggard and anxious than previously.

GENERAL

My old friend. Since my last letter I have devoted what concentration I have to inquiry, which has taken me as far as Vienna. The years that remain to me on earth may not be long, but by God's mercy I hope to accomplish a service to mankind before I die: to subserve the vengeance of Heaven upon the fiends who have murdered my poor niece in the spring of her hopes and beauty! *I have strange things to tell you, my dear friend, such as I myself would have scouted as incredible a few month's since. That Heaven should tolerate so monstrous an indulgence of the lusts and malignity of hell is my torture. But with God's blessing I will seek retribution.* I shall rest only when I have enabled honest people to sleep in their beds-- without being assailed by murderers.