



# My Carmilla

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**Category:** Romance, New Adult, Lesbian Romance

**Description:** "Carmilla..." I broke for air, but her pomegranate-red lips latched onto mine again.

"No, let me steal your breath, darling," she murmured against my mouth. "I want to hold it captive between my teeth. Only another kiss could tempt me to set it free."

In the decaying grandeur of the schloss, Laura drowns in loneliness. But fate arrives with a carriage crash, delivering the enigmatic Carmilla to her doorstep. Their connection is instant, a wildfire scorching through the desolate halls. Stolen touches blossom into forbidden nights, and a hunger awakens within Laura – a hunger mirrored in Carmilla's gaze.

As desire consumes them, a dark truth seeps through the cracks in their stolen paradise. A string of unexplained illnesses plagues the village's young women. Laura is forced to confront a horrifying truth: the woman she loves may be the very monster stealing the lifeblood of their world. Torn between love and fear, Laura must make a choice. Can she surrender to a love that burns brighter than eternity itself, even if it damns her soul?

**Total Pages (Source):** 27

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

## Chapter 1:

A sea of wildflowers swayed in the breeze, shades of lavender, gold, and pinks. I knelt to pick a handful of daisies, Bertha's favorite flowers. Today, my bounty wasn't for the usual vase. The air thrummed with cicadas, a low, rhythmic hum matching my anticipation. Tomorrow, General Spielsdorf and his niece would arrive for a month-long stay, and I wanted to create a welcoming haven for Bertha.

Marking off the days felt like counting down to a long-desired feast. The halls of the schloss, despite its inhabitants – my father and governesses – were vast and isolating. The prospect of a girl my age, a companion, was a rare treat.

Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, my governess, had suggested writing letters to Bertha. A written introduction, she'd said, would make the girl feel more welcome during her stay. So began a rapt exchange of letters, and somewhere along the pages, a friendship had quickly blossomed.

A splash of vibrant blue caught my eye. Forget-me-nots, flowers conveying affection. They joined the growing bouquet, followed by a cluster of pink carnations, their ruffled edges mirroring the playful spirit that danced in Bertha's letters. I nestled a blushing peony in the bouquet, a whisper of the shyness I harbored about meeting the girl. The basket overflowed with flowers now. With each bloom, I had poured my affections, a serenade sung in the language of flowers.

Barefoot on the mossy ground, I walked back to the schloss when a flower hidden among the tall grasses caught my attention. A solitary bloom, defiant in its isolation. *Lycoris radiata* or spider lily some called it. The flower stood tall and proud, its

spindly stamens pulsing with crimson hues. Its petals, the color of freshly spilled blood.

The flower's unsettling beauty ensnared me. Tentatively, I plucked the lycoris, its stamen brushing my palm like a spider's legs, and placed it in the center of the bouquet. The other flowers paled in comparison, their gentle pastels muted against the sharp red.

"Laura," said Madame Perrodon. "How many times must I remind you that it is not proper for a young lady to traipse around barefoot?"

Perhaps, Madame, fresh air and sunshine are more proper than restricting one's spirit. In lieu of that, I simply smiled. "Don't worry about me. The earth agrees with my toes."

"Let the girl be," Mademoiselle De Lafontaine said to a glaring Madame Perrodon. "Didn't the Greeks believe that feeling the earth with bare feet connected one with the divine?" Her smile, crinkling the corners of her eyes, held a warmth that felt vaguely maternal, a welcome comfort in the absence of my own mother.

"Have any letters come for me?" I asked my governesses.

Madame Perrodon shook her head. "They're all for your father, child. Restorations, all of them."

It wasn't a secret that my father's financial woes were as vast as the drafty halls themselves. The schloss, inherited through my mother, loomed above us, a crumbling testament to past glory. Its once grandeur felt like a mocking echo, a constant reminder of the wealth that had seeped away like rainwater through cracked roofs. The funds to restore the schloss, to chase away the creeping shadows and mend the gaping wounds of time, simply weren't there.

“I see,” I said. “Do tell me when Bertha’s letter comes.”

“She is no doubt busy packing,” said Mademoiselle De Lafontaine.

“You must be right. Excuse me.” I tried to not let the disappointment show. This week was the first in many in which Bertha’s letter had not arrived yet.

I scuttled to my room and re-read the latest letter from Bertha.

My dearest Laura,

Tonight, I shall find myself amidst a glittering throng at Lady Carmine’s soiree, a garden of perfumed silks and meticulously sculpted mustaches. The so-called gentlemen will be there in droves, sporting their most fetching waistcoats and attempting to charm young ladies with tales of their latest foxhunt or horse races—whichever they deem more intellectually stimulating. Their eyes, however, will be drawn to bodices far more readily than any brains. I admit a part of me enjoys observing the guests at these parties. It reminds me of a flock of pigeons vying for the plumpest breadcrumb, only far less graceful and infinitely more pretentious.

The thought of enduring this spectacle without your discerning commentary fills me with dread. You are the antidote to the social poison that permeates these gatherings. Nonetheless, I shall do my best to conquer the evening in your honor and promise to tell you everything. From the delectable pastries to the exquisite gowns to the music they play for the waltzes. Yet, every detail will be tinged with the ache of your absence. You, dear Laura, are the missing note that completes the melody.

If you were only here, I might steal away with you at a secluded balcony and waltz with you under the silvery moon. I close my eyes and imagine the warmth of your hand in mine. Until we meet, my thoughts and dreams will be filled with your presence.

Yours,

Bertha

My fingers traced the worn creases of the page. It was hardly necessary to re-read it again for I had memorized the letter by heart. Bertha's ink-stained page contained more than mere words. It showed glimpses of her spirit, her laughter echoing in the witty turns of phrase, and her playful teasing in our banter. And there was something else, something that shimmered just out of reach, like a firefly in the twilight.

Though Bertha might not see it in time before her departure, I penned another missive to her, imagining the many things we'd do upon her arrival. Like sneaking down to the lake, under a cloak of stars, resting my head in her lap as she recited her favorite poem under the apple tree. My spirit ached, a hollow yearning for her companionship.

I tucked the new letter beside the first, the candle flickering on the nightstand mirroring the restless dance in my mind, and crawled into bed. My dreams became a continuation of my daydreams, blurring the lines between reality and the world we had painted with our words. In that hazy space between waking and slumber, I dreamt of her stepping off the page, her voice finally a melody sung in the real world, no longer a phantom song in my imagination.

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The next day after my lessons with the governesses, I made my escape. I ventured to the woods, birdsongs replacing Madame Perrodon's monotone of Latin prayers. Sunlight dappled through a canopy of emerald leaves, painting the path in a mosaic of light and shadow. My basket, a woven willow with a worn handle, hung comfortably at my hip.

Plump blueberries nestled like sapphires; glistening raspberries like scattered rubies.

Bertha's favorites. Each step felt like a treasure hunt, a quest to fill my basket with the sweetest jewels of summer. I imagined the flush of pleasure on Bertha's face as she bit into the ripe fruit. Her lovely berry-kissed mouth.

"Laura," came a tensed voice behind me.

## Page 2

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“Papa?”

“We must speak right away, Laura.” The wrinkles on his forehead deepened, and his mouth drew into a taut line.

“Are you well?”

“I am well enough,” he said, then paused, as if deliberating his words. “But Bertha isn’t.”

“What do you mean?”

A shadow creased his weathered face. “Bertha had taken ill recently. I received a letter from the general today and...I’m afraid the worst has happened.”

His words ripped through me. The basket dropped, the berries spilling to my feet. “That... can’t be.”

“Her letters stopped coming, didn’t they?”

No. Impossible. Bertha was perfectly fine in her last letter, readying herself to attend a soiree of all things. To go from that to...

“I know how much you were looking forward to her visit—”

“Let me see the letter, please.” I needed to see the words, the proof etched on paper, or else I wouldn’t believe it.

“Laura,” he began, his voice low and strained, “the general’s letter... it’s, well, quite unsettling.”

“Please, let me see it,” I said again, my voice breaking.

My father handed me the letter, and I read it to myself:

My dear friend,

Words fail me as I write this, burdened by the heaviest grief imaginable. I have lost my darling daughter for as such I loved her. The illness that stole her from me took her swiftly, and during those final days, I was too consumed by her suffering to write to you. Now, the truth crashes into me like a rogue wave. How I was woefully uninformed of the danger she faced. She slipped from this world innocent, cradled in the hope of a beautiful afterlife. Thank God for that small mercy. My dear Bertha never suspected the cause of her pain, never knew the monstrosity behind her demise.

I devote the rest of my days to a single, burning purpose – to find and extinguish the source of this unimaginable misery. I am told I might achieve this righteous vengeance, but for now, the path before me is shrouded in darkness. I curse myself, my arrogance, my blindness, my stubborn refusal to see the truth—all too late now.

I cannot write more or talk for my mind is plagued with grief. When the raw edges of this wound dull, I plan to begin my investigation. It may lead me all the way to Vienna. Come autumn, two months hence, or perhaps sooner if I have the strength, I will come to you and Laura. Then, I will tell you all that I scarce dare put upon paper now.

Farewell, dear friend. Your prayers are the only solace I can find.

Reinhart Spielsdorf



“I still don’t understand,” I said, choking on my voice. “The general says Bertha fell ill and speaks of some... unspeakable monstrosity.”

“Grief can do that to a man,” my father said sympathetically, “chip away at his sanity, warp his logic. The good general simply can't accept Bertha's passing.” He took the letter back, his tone softening. "Laura, you've known the general since you were a child. He is a man of reason. This ramble of monstrosities is the sign of a broken mind." My father placed a hand on my shaking shoulder. "He will recover, in time. As will all of us.”

As will all of us.

Those words. Heavy, like a stone sinking through a quiet pond, rippling the fragile peace with each circle. Grief was a thief. It ransacked the most intimate corners of one’s life, stealing the warmth that had filled them, and replacing it with a hollowness that echoed with absence. I wanted to believe my father. That I would recover from the news of Bertha. But how did one mend a shattered heart?

The news of Bertha tasted like ashes on my tongue, a bitter aftertaste that lingered long after the initial shock had passed. My grief was a storm cloud, casting an inky shadow over my mood throughout the next few days. My governesses tried to coax me from the confines of my room, urging me to take a walk and breathe in some fresh air. Their attempts were unsuccessful. A shroud of sorrow draped itself around me, making the world duller somehow, drained of their usual color. Stepping outside would be no different.

I opened the window and threw out the wilting flowers I had picked for Bertha. They had lost their color too.

I didn’t know what to do with myself when my carefully constructed plans with Bertha had unraveled like a spool of thread. In bed, I listened to the rain lash against

the windowpane, and the tears spilled, messy and uncontrollable, a cathartic release of the reservoir of sorrow that had collected throughout the day. I picked up the unsent letter to Bertha. Drops streamed down my cheeks onto the page, mirroring the trails of ink that bled from the words.

My letter felt like a lead weight in my hand, each sentence a future stolen. Our union lay in ashes, consumed by the flames of fate. I held the letter to the candlelight. And watched it burn too.

The edges curled and blackened like the decaying leaves of autumn. Hungrily, the fire devoured the written words and unspoken words I hadn't had the chance to say, leaving behind wisps of smoke, dying embers, and regret.

Exhaustion finally began to pull at my eyelids. Sleep arrived, a heavy cloak pulling me deeper into the darkness. From it, a vision unfurled, vibrant and strange.

## Page 3

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A young woman emerged from the shadows of my room, draped in nothing but a gossamer cloak of moonlight. She moved with the fluidity of smoke, her footsteps as silent as the fall of snow. Closer to my bed she drew, and I felt a pull, an invisible thread connecting us, along with an inexplicable yearning.

Her skin, pale and moon-kissed, was a lovely contrast to her midnight hair. Her lips were pomegranate-red, full and inviting. She was beauty personified yet held a captivating edge, like a rose with thorns.

“Bertha?” I asked.

No answer.

“Laura.” My name left her mouth, a silken whisper.

The young woman extended a hand. Our fingers met, and her touch was a brush of two opposing forces. Fire and ice. Desire and fear. Yet, the girl’s gaze held a promise that aroused my senses. She leaned close, night blooming on her breath. A rush of heat filled me as our lips met. It was a slow, deliberate kiss; a brush of silk and velvet, a delicate dance of tongues and breaths. An insatiable thirst for more.

She crawled into my bed, and something pierced my breast. The sharp sting sent a tremor throughout my entire being. I woke up with a scream.

The sheets were damp with sweat, the moonlight a cold intruder on my face. I felt my neck, the phantom sensation of the bite still lingering along with the aftershocks of my release. Shame burned inside, a counterpoint to the thrill that danced on my skin.

I squeezed her eyes shut, willing the dream away, but the memory of the bite, of the girl's red lips, remained like the persistent ache between my legs.

Mademoiselle De Lafontaine burst through my door with Madame Perrodon close behind her heels. "What on earth—"

"A bite." My voice shook. "Right here." I lowered the collar of my nightgown, but there was no mark. No hint of teeth.

"God heavens child, it was only a bad dream."

Mademoiselle De Lafontaine frowned. "What did you dream about?"

I stared recounted the horrid nightmare to my governesses, how the fiend had crawled into my bed, the searing sting of her bite. I left out the kiss or my own involvement in it.

"The moon is almost full outside," said De Lafontaine. "They say a full moon has a potent hand in dreams and one's state of mind." She trailed off, staring at the luminary outside. "Some even say that when a moon shines exceptionally brightly, that it indicates preternatural activity. Unnatural ongoing...a perversity from nature."

"Hush now," said Madame Perrodon. "You'll scare the child."

"Pay no mind to my ramblings." She forced a smile, and her voice turned sympathetic. "You are distraught over Bertha, hence the cause of your nightmare. Go back to sleep, and we shall watch over you."

"She will say her prayers first," said Madame Perrodon. "Go on."

I did as I was told.

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.”

“Amen,” she whispered.

Moonlight bled through the window, painting silver streaks across the rumpled sheets. Sleep slowly overcame me, blurring out the wisps of conversation between Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine in my half-asleep state.

“What do you think it means?”

“A reasonable explanation that our addled minds are clearly lacking.”

“But someone did lie there,” Mademoiselle De Lafontaine said quietly. “When I felt the bed next to her, the place was still warm.”

## Chapter 2:

The next day, I cloistered myself in my room, coming to terms with Bertha’s demise. My dream from the previous night had a hand in that. The raw, visceral images I had seen was a silver lining in that my nightmare had eclipsed the grief. The sordid encounter with the beautiful fiend had stirred something within me and left a mark that the morning sun couldn’t erase.

Around the late afternoon, my governesses forced me out of the schloss to get some air. My father decided to accompany us as well, saying the woodland air would revitalize our spirits. The trio conversed on our walk, forced mundane pleasantries,

but I said nothing.

Late afternoon bled into evening, and a strange disquietude stirred inside me, a restless tide pulling at the shores of my composure. The cicadas' drone became a maddening, high-pitched chorus.

"We ought to head back," said Madame Perrodon.

"Can we stay a bit longer, please?" I asked.

## Page 4

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My father murmured his assent.

Deeper we ventured into the heart of the forest, and I felt drawn by an unseen force, the pull growing stronger with every step. The rising moon made its appearance, full and bright as a pearl. The chattering of the cicadas began to fade, replaced by a quietness that had fallen upon us.

None of us spoke; the grass muffled our steps; the air was still, pregnant with the anticipation of a coming beat. Even the forest seemed to hold its breath. It was a precipice, the hush before a storm; time teetering on the brink of something that would shatter the stillness.

The first note of a thunderstorm, a woman's scream in the distance.

My father jerked his head. "What in the devil—"

From the trees, midnight black horses erupted into sight, wildly galloping as though possessed by a demonic frenzy. A carriage swayed behind them, like a ship thrown about in a storm. The roots of the trees reached for the carriage's wheels, gnarled wooden fingers, snaring the vehicle in its grasp.

The carriage crashed in the woods, and one of my governesses cried out. Horses lay sprawled on the ground, entangled in a mess of reins and leather. The horsemen staggered to their feet and scrambled around the wreckage. Gently, they eased a young lady onto the grassy slope, her form draped against the earth like a fallen bloom.

Moonlight filtered through trees, casting an otherworldly glow upon the girl's porcelain face. Her features, pale yet striking, held an otherworldly quality, and her hair was darker than a moonless night.

A stately woman, who looked to be the girl's mother, extricated herself from the carriage. Her attire, though worn and travel-stained, held a hint of a bygone elegance. Her face was without a blemish, save for a small mole near her eye.

My father approached the woman, and the rest of us trailed from a distance. The woman's face came into full view. She was beautiful in a sharp way, like the edges of a glinting blade.

"May I be of assistance, madam?" asked my father.

"I am most grateful, sir, but I fear I must press on." Her gaze swept over the horsemen uprighting the carriage. "It is a matter of life and death. Every delay chips away at the fragile thread of hope. I cannot, dare not, linger." Her voice intensified. "How far is the nearest village? I must find refuge for my daughter, even if it means leaving her behind for a time."

"She could stay with us." The words spilled from my lips like a reflex.

A sharp glance from my father landed on me, a silent reprimand for speaking out of turn, for daring to make such a weighty decision without his consent. He cleared his throat, the silence stretching before he finally spoke.

"If that is agreeable to madam," he said, his voice tight, but measured.

"Oh, I cannot impose on your hospitality. At least, let me compensate you for the time being." The woman reached into her bag and pulled out several notes.



“You are generous, madam,” my father said, eyeing the money. “Truth be told, my daughter has suffered a great disappointment recently. Allowing the young lady to stay here would be a small comfort to her. Besides, the next village is miles ahead, and their accommodations...” he paused, searching for the right words, “wouldn't be suitable for a young lady. It wouldn't be safe for her to travel further tonight.”

The woman flicked a glance from me to my father. "You are most kind, sir. Carmilla is fortunate to have encountered such good souls during this unexpected turn of events.”

Carmilla. Each syllable of the girl's name flowed like pearls strung on a silk thread.

The horses whinnied impatiently. Carmilla's mother took my father aside, exchanging brief words of when she'd return, and stuffed the handful of notes into his eager hand. She flicked a harried glance at her daughter and kissed the girl's cheek quickly before climbing back into the carriage. Its wheels churned up dust as it disappeared down the road, leaving behind Carmilla and a trail of unanswered questions in its wake.

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Sunlight bled through the lace curtains, painting stripes across the antique rug. I stirred, the warmth a welcome contrast to the previous night's chill.

The gaslight coughed, casting grotesque shapes on the cobblestone walls. Straining my ears, I caught snippets of hushed conversation that trickled through the hallway.

"Amnesia," the doctor declared. "Temporary, in all likelihood. Physically, there seems to be no lasting damage."

"Thank heavens," said my father, the relief in his voice evident.

Down the hallway, my governesses spotted me lurking by the doorway. Their starched lips pursed in unison.

"Laura," Madame Perrodon said, her voice laced with disapproval, "Miss Carmilla needs rest."

"I just wanted to see her for a moment."

"Your father was quite clear, Laura." Mademoiselle De Lafontaine nudged my elbow.

"You must stay in your rooms for the time being. There is enough to deal with on such short notice as it is."

Their words were like iron bars clanging shut, more invisible boundaries they sought to impose. But the thought of Carmilla, adrift in a sea of forgetfulness by herself, made something inside me ache.

## Page 5

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That night, driven by a yearning I couldn't quell, I disobeyed their orders. My defiance was a wildflower pushing through a crack in the pavement. The governesses' chidings echoed in my mind, but a pull like a siren's song propelled me forward. My feet, silent on the worn floorboards, took me on a pilgrimage to Carmilla's room. With each step closer, the air grew thick with anticipation, a mixture of apprehension and a bizarre sense of trespassing though it was my own home.

My hand reached for the forbidden door. It creaked open, a whisper on the hinge.

Our visitor lay stretched out in one of the schloss's most splendid chambers. Though grand and spacious, the room held an air of haughty formality. A tapestry, a macabre masterpiece woven in faded threads, hung across from the bed, showcasing a forlorn Cleopatra clutching the asp to her breast.

Beside the flickering candles on the nightstand, the girl sat propped against the headboard. Her slender silhouette was framed by the soft glow of candlelights, and her lovely, delicate form seemed ethereal against the crisp white sheets. Her white nightgown, the fabric cascading around her in gentle folds, only magnified her fragility.

A smile flowered on her lips. "What fortunate circumstances have placed me in a beautiful room, with a companion just as beautiful?" Her demure voice, sweet as candied violets, sent a heat creeping on my neck.

My gaze lingered on her mouth, a hint of parted fullness and rose blooming against the pale canvas of her skin. A warmth bloomed in my chest, spreading outwards like ripples on a pond.

“I wanted to say hello and see how you were faring tonight.” My tongue suddenly felt thick. “Apologies, I haven’t properly introduced myself yet. I’m Laura.”

Talking to Carmilla stirred a nervous energy within me. It was a pleasant disorientation that left me tongue-tied and fumbling with words.

Carmilla's lips curved into a subtle smile, her amusement a faint crinkle at the corners of her eyes. “A pleasure,” she replied. “Please, call me Carmilla.”

"Carmilla," I said softly, her name a caress on my tongue.

Silence stretched for a moment, and I was trying my best to keep my insatiable curiosity at bay, but it gnawed at me. I had the incessant urge to know everything, anything, about her.

"You were traveling with your mother," I said. "Where were you headed?"

Her smile faltered for a moment, a flicker of something unreadable crossing her features. “I do not remember, I'm afraid.”

“Where do you and your mother live?”

“Somewhere in Styria.”

I pressed on with another question, and another, but her answers were vague, elusive as smoke. Tendrils of amnesia coiled around her memories, obscuring them from my view. The carriage accident had not only dented metal and shattered glass, but had also fractured her memories.

Carmilla stared at the woven cloth with Cleopatra and the asp. “I am sorry,” she said softly. "I would weave a tapestry of my past for you, but the threads are frayed, lost

in the loom of time."

I shook my head. "Think nothing of it. Let your memories return at their own pace. Rest now, and perhaps tomorrow, the fog will lift."

"Thank you, Laura." Carmilla smiled and laid her hand atop mine. "Sleep well. May your dreams be untroubled." Her touch lingered on my skin, the heat a tangible thing, spreading like wildfire through dry grass.

Snatching my hand away, I managed a smile. "Goodnight, Carmilla."

"Goodnight, dear Laura."

I returned to my room, and a kaleidoscope of emotions swirled inside myself. Like a shaken snow globe, a chaotic mix of fascination, curiosity, and a flicker of something more.

### Chapter 3:

I couldn't shake the image of Carmilla from my mind the next day. Every rustle of silk in the hallway, every conversation had me craning my neck, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. Breakfast turned to lunch, the minutes stretching into an eternity under the watchful eyes of my governesses.

"You must let her rest," they had said, noticing my restlessness.

When my governesses left for the market, and my father was busy downstairs with the laborers he had hired to restore the parlor, I seized my chance. I made my way to Carmilla's room. The door stood ajar, a silent invitation. Gently, I pushed open the heavy oak door to Carmilla's chambers.

The room was cloaked in flickering shadows of candlelight. Thick drapes smothered any prying sunlight, plunging the room into a sultry twilight. Carmilla lay sprawled amongst the tangled sheets. Her lips were parted, a soft sigh escaping them like she was having an unbidden dream. A rosiness colored her usually pale face, a flush that had nothing to do with the warmth of the candles.

A loose curl whispered down her cheek. My fingers itched to trace its tempting path, a slow descent down the curve of her face, to tuck it behind her ear. As I leaned in, her eyes fluttered open, a startling violet against her pale face, heavy-lidded with sleep and something more, something entirely too aware.

"Good afternoon," I said, my voice a touch strained. "I didn't mean to startle you awake."

Carmilla stirred with a languid grace, turning her head towards me like a bloom unfolding. "Such a shame, it was a most interesting dream. Though," she continued, a slow smile spreading on her lips, "waking to the source of my dream isn't quite the rude awakening I was expecting."

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The implication hung heavy in the air, thick and intoxicating. Her candor left me breathless, my tongue thick and useless in my mouth.

Carmilla stretched her arms, the sheets falling away to reveal a glimpse of creamy skin. "Is it afternoon already?"

"Nearly," I admitted. "You slept like a stone."

"Forgive my tardiness. I didn't have much of an appetite for breakfast."

"Perhaps you need the curtains opened a touch," I said. "Some fresh air and sunlight might do you well."

Her hand shot out, swift as a viper's strike, and captured mine before I could reach for the drapes. Her grip was surprisingly strong.

"You are the only sun I need." Her words were a caress, and the shadows seemed to dance even closer as she leaned in. She smiled at me, the movement stretching the shadows beneath her high cheekbones. Carmilla's beauty was undeniable, but a hint of something else lurked beneath the surface. A gleam in her eyes, like a beautiful snake basking in the cool of its shaded den. "Besides, sunlight tends to give me a dreadful headache. I fear I'm a delicate hothouse flower."

"What if we stay in the shade?"

"I suppose that's alright."

We stepped outside the schloss, the scent of honeysuckle heavy in the warm air. The late afternoon sun beat down, so I led Carmilla through a walkway with weeping willows, arm in arm. Their branches, heavy with emerald leaves, formed a cool, green canopy overhead.

“I must show you my favorite spot of all. The lake—” I stilled, spotting a thin strand of silk dangling from a branch overhead. A plump, writhing caterpillar clung to the end of it. I quickly side-stepped it, that familiar aversion to anything with too many legs creeping in.

Carmilla laughed, a sound as light and musical as wind chimes. “Don’t tell me this creature frightens you.” She reached out, her fingers brushing the caterpillar’s silken thread. “Girls are like caterpillars too, you know. Butterflies when the summer comes, but in the meantime they are grubs and larvae.”

The comparison did not sit well with me. “I’m not certain I agree.”

““Don’t you see? They spend their lives diligently consuming. Lessons, social graces, expectations. It’s all a form of sustenance, gathering the strength needed for something more.” Her hand, still hovering near the caterpillar, traced an invisible path in the air. “Hidden away in their chrysalis, they undergo a metamorphosis, and in the summer, they emerge as winged butterflies.” Her tone shifted, evocative, as her dark eyes pinned mine. “Vibrant, free.”

"Free," I echoed, the word hanging heavy on my tongue.

Her implication was clear. I was trapped in a state of larval existence. My life, confined within the schloss, was stifling as a tightly spun cocoon, but Carmilla's arrival had stirred a yearning for something more. A part of me craved the transformation she spoke of, a chance to break free from the chrysalis of my preordained life.



"What if the transformation doesn't happen?" I asked, eyeing the caterpillar dangling precariously above. "What if the caterpillar gets stuck or trapped in its cocoon?"

"Well..." Carmilla gently plucked the caterpillar from its silken thread, and it wriggled faintly, a blind, instinctive movement. Sometimes," she said, her voice a soft caress, "the cocoon needs a little help to break free."

Her other hand, light as a feather, brushed my cheek, and my breath hitched. Like the cicadas, shedding their exoskeletons to emerge with vibrant wings, I knew, with a deep, unsettling certainty, that I would too emerge from my chrysalis. But what would I become on the other side?

Carmilla wrapped a hand around my waist, a possessive claim that both startled and thrilled me. Her touch sent a spark that traveled down my spine like a wayward bolt of lightning.

"You said you wanted to show me the lake?" she said.

"Oh...yes. It's just beyond the thicket."

We pushed through the dense foliage, the air thick with the musky scent of damp earth and the sweet perfume of wildflowers. Finally, the trees parted, revealing a shimmering expanse of water that mirrored the vastness of the twilight sky.

"I come here sometimes," I said. "To get away from it all. It feels more home than the schloss ever was." The hidden lake, a jewel tucked away in the heart of the forest, had always been a private sanctuary until now. It was the first time I had shared it with someone else. That I wanted to share it with someone else.

"It's beautiful." Carmilla stood beside me, her silhouette stark against the fiery glow of the setting sun. "Shall we go for a swim?"

The thought of shedding my clothes, of standing before Carmilla in my most vulnerable state made my breath catch in my throat. For a moment, the world seemed to shrink to encompass only the intensity of her gaze and the unexpected yearning that flared within me.

"Alright," I managed.

We retreated to the secluded edge of the clearing, removing our garments one by one. The act felt like a slow, deliberate stripping away of not just my clothes, but also my inhibitions. I snuck glances at Carmilla's form, her body a sculpted symphony of curves and shadows bathed in the golden light. She reminded me of an ethereal beauty captured in classical paintings of goddesses and nymphs. The rosy, puckered nipples, the delicate indentations at the small of her back, each detail etched itself into my memory, arousing feelings that had been dormant until now.

Carmilla's gaze found mine, and it held a glimmer of knowing, as if she understood the tempest churning within me. Heat flooded my cheeks, a blush creeping up my neck. I felt exposed in front of her, raw. Yet, here she stood, unashamed in her nudity.

We were both stripped bare, standing at the bank of the lake, a precipice of something primal and unknown. A silent challenge flickered in the depths of her eyes. A dare, an invitation to a world I wasn't sure I belonged to.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

Carmilla dove into the water.

A hesitant breath escaped my lips, and then I was following her, the sultry air replaced by the cold embrace of the water. Carmilla glided through the depths, her form a pale silhouette. She moved like a swan – effortless, graceful – while my own movements resembled something of a duck. We swam together, her legs brushing mine. The cold water did little to dampen the building heat. Each touch sent shivers down my spine. Exhilarating, terrifying

“Did you swim often as a child?” I asked.

She sighed. “Again, you forget my condition.”

I hadn’t forgotten. My curiosity about her still thrummed like a taut bowstring. I yearned to learn everything about her, but her past was a locked door tantalizingly out of reach. “You do not remember your childhood at all? Your parents? Your home?”

“Dear Laura, I’m still a melody with missing notes.” She swiped her damp tendrils back. “I think I’m quite done with swimming.” She swam past me without a second glance and pulled herself from the riverbank, looking like a water nymph just returning to the shore.

Did my questioning cause her ire? Had I pried too deeply? It was as if my questions cast a shadow over her.

I climbed the bank and dressed with her. Carmilla moved languidly as if she was still wading through water. Verbena flowers brushed her ankle, and Carmilla shivered,

side-stepping them.

"Are you tired, Carmilla?"

"A touch. There, under that grand oak, shall we rest a while?"

Under the tree we sat. Carmilla closed her eyes and leaned her head into my lap. Her wet hair, the color of the darkest ink, fanned out like tentacles against my thighs. I couldn't resist the urge to adorn her hair with daisies that dotted the grass. Gently, I wove them through her ebony tresses until they looked like stars in a midnight sky. Carmilla sighed. The act felt intimate, a silent connection blooming between us.

"It's a shame you can't remember," I said after some time. "I'm sorry."

"But I'll always remember these moments with you." Carmilla's fingers brushed absently against the blooms. She resembled a fallen angel just now, her beauty breathtaking yet tinged with a certain melancholy. Her eyes fluttered open. "Tell me about yours instead. Your childhood."

"There's not much to tell," I said, the words tasting like dust in my mouth. "I was brought up in the solitude of a grand schloss. My father and I, we've lived here alone for as long as I can remember. Well, except for the governesses, tutors... and a parade of faces that have blurred together over the years. My mother," I continued, my voice catching, "passed during my infancy."

"I'm sorry," she said, her fingers threading mine. "It must've been difficult for you."

"I was fortunate enough to have my governesses fill the void."

Carmilla gave me a pained smile. "But they didn't, did they?"

I said nothing. It wasn't a question that needed an answer.

Memories of my mother clung to me like cobwebs, dusty and cold in the recesses of my mind. I'd always tried so hard to appear composed, to hide that gaping chasm in my life, but how easily Carmilla could see right through the facade.

“We never truly recover from the sting of loss.” She reached out and pulled me into her arms. “Tell me more about your mother, Laura.”

Her soft words were like a knife probing at a wound that still hadn't healed. My breath hitched in my throat, caught between the solace of Carmilla's embrace, the comforting press of her body against mine, and a primal instinct to flee.

“I...don't know much about her except that she was a Styrian woman descended from the House of Karnstein.

"The House of Karnstein," said Carmilla. "Quite a powerful line..."

“Are you familiar with it?”

She leaned back against the tree. “I am descended from the House of Karnstein."

“Are you?” I pressed forwards, hope blooming in my voice. Perhaps the amnesia was fading. “Tell me, did you know my mother? Her name was Katharina."

Carmilla's face remained a mask of impassivity. She shook her head, the movement slightly hesitant. “I don't know her. My connection to the House of Karnstein is quite distant, you see.”

A stab of disappointment washed over me. “Perhaps your mother knew her then? They would have been around the same age, I imagine.”

Carmilla's brow furrowed, a crease appearing between her perfectly arched brows. A hand flew to her head, and her face strained. "Apologies, it hurts. The effort of remembering."

Guilt pricked me. I had pressed her too hard. So focused I'd been on unraveling her past and mine that I had failed to see the toll it was taking on her. "Let's go back inside," I said, my voice softer now. "It'll be dark soon."

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

Carmilla accepted my hand, her touch sending an unexpected spark coursing through me. Hand in hand, we walked back towards the schloss and that strange uneasiness took hold of me again.

I must've been imagining it. How the evening shadows seemed to deepen around Carmilla.

"Do you hear that?" she asked suddenly.

I strained to listen. A distant, mournful melody drifted on the breeze. It was a slow, hymn-like song, tinged with sorrow. The sound grew louder, and a procession came into view. It wound its way down the dusky path toward us. A line of villagers, cloaked in black, carried a simple wooden casket on their shoulders.

I rose to offer my respect as an older woman walked past. "My condolences to your party. Who is it?"

"The daughter of the locksmith," she said somberly. "The poor girl claimed to see a ghost a fortnight ago. She's been fading ever since, until yesterday, when she finally succumbed. The swineherd's wife died just last week. She, too, spoke of monstrous fevered dreams."

"Don't talk about such things," Carmilla said, her voice sharp. "Don't you want to sleep tonight?"

The woman stilled at Carmilla's outburst. She said nothing, quietly walking past us.

I touched her hand. "Carmilla, are you alright?"

Her face had drained of its usual pale cast, and a grimace contorted her features. "The music," she rasped. "The noise... it's unbearable. It grates on my ears." A harsh edge filled her voice. "Death is inevitable, a release even. Shouldn't we be happy to be free from this mortal coil?"

"Carmilla, everyone is afraid to die."

"But to die as lovers may - to die together, so that they may live together." Her hand flew to her ears, pressing against them as if to block out the sound of the hymn entirely. "Sit here, next to me, closer. My ears can't bear any more of that noise. It sets my nerves on edge. Hold my hand, squeeze it. Harder, even harder."

Gritting her teeth, hands clenching and unclenching, she stared fixedly at the ground, her body wracked with uncontrollable tremors. Finally, a low, guttural cry escaped her lips, the hysteria slowly giving way.

Torn between sympathy and a growing unease, I spotted beads of sweat dotting Carmilla's brow. "Here." I placed a supportive arm around Carmilla's waist. The touch anchored Carmilla, and she leaned heavily on me. "We should head back," I said gently. "You need to rest."

Carmilla nodded mutely, her eyes fluttering closed. The weight on my arm felt unsettlingly light, as if I were supporting a hollow shell of a girl. The dying light cast shadows seemed to writhe and contort around them, mirroring the disquiet churning in my stomach.

The cobbled path crunched beneath our boots as we made our way back from the village. The midday sun cast a welcome glow on my face while Carmilla preferred the cool shade of a wide-brimmed straw hat.



Rounding a corner, we came upon a curious sight: a ramshackle cart overflowing with colorful scarves, trinkets, and dusty vials.

"Good day, Fräulein Laura," said the small bearded man. He was a familiar sight, visiting the schloss twice a year to peddle his wares.

A large black hound padded beside him, its amber eyes fixed on us. The dog growled, low and guttural, its hackles rising.

"Quiet, flea-bitten beast." The man clamped the leash on the agitated dog, silencing it, and turned to us. "Perhaps your ladyships seek wares to ward off the foul miasma that hangs in the air...that malady that tears through the village like a ravenous wolf."

Carmilla leaned forward. "What remedy do your baubles offer?"

He held up various amulets for us to see. "These, milady, are no mere baubles. They are amulets of moonstone, blessed under a full moon, to keep the shadows at bay. Simply wear one around your neck, and the shadows will hold no terror.

"I shall sleep soundly knowing I am safe from the touch of the night." Carmilla picked up a silver locket engraved with a crescent moon, tracing its intricate design with a slender finger. "Wouldn't you, Laura?"

I handed the man a few coins. "One for each of us, please."

"A wise choice, indeed." As Old Man Gregor handed us the trinkets, his eyes flicked to Carmilla. "Milady, such a pretty face deserves a flawless frame, wouldn't you say?" The man unfurled a leather case, its surface scarred and worn with age. Inside lay an arsenal of strange implements – polished steel claws, small files, and pincers held shut by a spring mechanism. The man's gaze lingered on Carmilla's canines. "Sharp they are. A beautiful lady with a carnivore's smile...that wouldn't do, would

it?" He chuckled, gesturing at his mouth. "I can make 'em nice and round, match the rest of your beauty. No more the teeth of a fish."

Fury bloomed in Carmilla's eyes. Her scarlet lips curled back, a flash of teeth, and she spat at his feet.

Recoiling, the man swore. I grabbed Carmilla's arm and whisked her away before the situation could spiral.

"The audacity of that insolent peddler," she fumed.

"Pay no mind to him," I said. "I think your teeth are quite becoming."

"Don't lie." Carmilla let out a hollow laugh. "Your flattery is as delicate as a spider's web, pretty words spun from deception. You probably find my teeth as odious as that odious man."

## Page 9

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I paused and traced the line of her jaw with my thumb. “No, I mean it.” A flicker of surprise chased away the fire in her eyes.

"Have you seen a baroque pearl?" I asked, my finger resting on the corner of her parted mouth. "Its irregular curves possess a beauty that a perfectly round pearl can never compare to."

“Are you certain about that?” A slow smile curved her lips, dangerous as a serpent’s uncoiling. She parted her lips wider, letting my finger slip in.

“Indeed,” I breathed. The world narrowed to the press of her rose-colored mouth against my skin. My touch grazed the edge of a pointed canine. My voice was a whisper, barely audible in the charged silence. “They reflect a wildness that is a part of you, a part that makes you undeniably Carmilla.”

“How poetic,” she murmured around my finger.

Carmilla bit down, and I sucked in a harsh breath. Her bite was sharp, a quick pinch of pain that faded almost instantly, leaving behind a burning ember of awareness. Her bite didn’t pierce the skin, but the implication hung heavy in the air – a mere suggestion of what she could inflict if she chose.

She retracted her lips from my finger. Her bite left an indentation on skin, a brand etched in heat, marking me for her own. My forefinger stung from the press of her teeth, throbbing in time with the pounding of my heart.

And then her lips touched my cheek, soft as a fallen petal, but beneath the tenderness

lurked a shadow. Like the kiss of Judas.

#### Chapter 4:

The flickering candlelight danced across the silver cutlery, casting shadows that snaked across the white tablecloth. We had settled ourselves at dinner – my father at the head of the table, my governesses at his left and right, flanking him like, and Carmilla directly across from me.

“Let us say grace.” Madame Perrodon clasped her hands. “Heavenly Father, bless this food, and bless our friends and family who've come to dine with us today.” She did the sign of the cross. “In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.”

“Amen,” I recited, noting that Carmilla didn't join in with us.

During dinner, she barely touched her plate, the roast quail growing cold under her indifferent gaze. But her eyes flitted towards a basket overflowing with late spring bounty and landed on a pomegranate. Its skin blushed a deep crimson, hinting at the ripeness within.

“They're the last of the season, from our orchard,” said Madame Perrodon. “Do help yourself, Miss Carmilla.”

“Thank you.” With a swift, graceful movement, Carmilla tore into the fruit. A burst of ruby-red seeds spilled forth. She dug an elegant finger into the flesh and clawed out the seeds nestled within the white membrane. She brought her wrist up, and her tongue darted out to catch the rivulets of crimson.

Under the table, my fingers curled. At the carnal beauty of it, at the unadulterated desire as she devoured the fruit; how the pale ivory of her skin contrasted against the vivid red. My gaze lingered on Carmilla's stained lips, her pomegranate-mouth. Eve

was sorely misled by the serpent's apple. Surely, it was the pomegranate, the forbidden fruit, that held the true temptation.

"I fear I have some unsettling news." My father set his cutlery aside, his voice heavy. "There's been another one."

My spoon clattered against my bowl, and cold dread coiled in my stomach. The air grew heavy, the silence thick enough to slice with the dull knife in my hand. We all knew what he meant.

"Who is it this time?" I asked.

"The baker's daughter from the village. Same languishing symptoms as Bertha, same fevered dreams."

Carmilla sat hunched over her plate, picking apart the ruby red seeds of her pomegranate. Her full lips, usually curved in a playful smile, were pressed into a tight line.

"It seems unnatural," said Mademoiselle De Lafontaine. "Like something from the old stories, curses and malevolent spirits."

"You are an educated woman," said my father. "Don't speak of such ridiculous things."

"We mustn't dwell on such gloomy news," said Madame Perrodon, her voice tinged with a forced cheer. "Have you heard about the masquerade ball that Lord Caspian and Lady Thalassa are hosting next week in the town over?"

"A masquerade ball?" I asked.

“Yes,” she said. “My cousin Artemisia mentioned it in a letter I recently received from her. She is to attend with her mistress, Lady Viola Voltaire.”

My father cleared his throat, his disapproval a familiar weight in the air. "Isn't that rather frivolous, considering the circumstances?"

“A touch of frivolity might be just what is needed,” said Madame Perrodon. “A chance for people to take their minds off things.”

Even if it was just an illusion, like the masks they wore.

“I quite agree.” Carmilla's hand brushed mine under the table. "Imagine, a night where identities are hidden," she mused. "Where you can forget who you are, what burdens you carry, and simply...be."

## Page 10

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

The image of swirling gowns, masked faces, and glittering chandeliers danced in my head. It was a world away from our drafty, stone manor.

"Please, Papa," I pleaded, pushing my uneaten food aside. "We can't be cooped up here forever, can we?"

"Well," said Madame Perrodon. "It might be a wonderful opportunity for Laura to practice her social graces."

Madame Perrodon joined in. "It is important for a young lady to navigate the intricacies of conversation and etiquette after all, sir. Laura rarely has the opportunities to do so here."

Father steepled his fingers, his gaze fixed on the crackling fire. The silence stretched, thick and heavy. "Very well," he said, with a tone that seemed more resigned than enthusiastic.

"They'll need appropriate dresses, monsieur." Mademoiselle De Lafontaine looked at my father expectantly.

"Of course," he said. "I suppose I can spare the change. The girls deserve only the finest."

Yes, finest. Dresses bought with the money Carmilla's mother had practically poured into his lap.

"Now remember," he said, "I am only agreeing to this as long as you both stay within

sight of your governesses.”

Carmilla extracted a seed from her pomegranate, a shadow of a smile playing on her lips. “Of course. We wouldn’t dare to disobey.”

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The day of the ball had arrived, and I waited nervously at the landing for Carmilla.

Carmilla swept down the spiral staircase in a crimson gown. A black lace mask, intricate as a spider's web, veiled the upper half of her face. The mask was adorned with a single ruby teardrop. The jewel caught the lamp light and gleamed like a drop of fresh blood. Carmilla was forbidden fruit, bathed in the glow of temptation, and how I ached to take a bite.

"You look exquisite," I managed to say.

"Thank you, dear Laura. As do you." Her gaze lingered on me. Layers of champagne chiffon cascaded down my form, each ripple catching the soft glow of the room. Delicate silver threads winked like constellations across a midsummer night. The dress felt like a celestial map, an invitation for only her eyes to explore its galaxies.

“Do you like it?” I asked.

"More than you know, darling." A crescent moon of a smile edged her lips. “But you'd look just as beautiful in a sackcloth...or nothing at all." Her sultry gaze traveled across my dress again, this time a slow perusal. Like she was undressing me with her eyes, leaving me breathless and wanting. For a heartbeat, I glimpsed hunger in those depths, stars flaring bright against the inky black of her mask. A blackhole that wanted to swallow me whole. But her eyes quickly dipped down, shrouding her expression.



“I confess, I am quite envious.”

I smiled. “You envious of me? I find that hard to believe.”

“I’m quite serious. I am not particularly of gentlemen asking you to dance. You are the light to my darkness, but a light I wish to hold between my palms, to keep you solely to myself.”

My face warmed. How easily her words opened doors that ought to stay closed.

Madame Perrodon joined us in the foyer. “There you are, my dears.”

My governesses fussed over Carmilla and I. We were prepped with a flurry of combs like we were debutantes at our first season. After we settled into the carriage, the ride was filled with my governesses’ excited chatter. Their voices were a welcome distraction from the incidents plaguing the village, but it felt like a desperate attempt to paint normalcy on a canvas smeared with shadows. I could feel the darkness lurking just beyond our facade, a hungry beast waiting to devour the illusion.

The carriage lurched to a halt along with my stomach. “Come along, girls,” said Mademoiselle De Lafontaine.

The grand doors of the ballroom swung open, revealing a sea of faces, hidden behind feathers, jewels, and fantastical creatures. There were the classic carnival masks, all harlequin smiles and bold colors, alongside elegant silver, gold, and black lace masks.

Mademoiselle De Lafontaine’s eyes scanned the crowd through her butterfly mask and landed on a group of three figures moving in perfect unison. Their costumes, a coordinated aquatic symphony, drew every eye.

A young woman in an aquamarine gown that shimmered like a mermaid's tail donned

a mask crafted entirely of delicate seashells. Flanking her on either side were a handsome gentleman sporting an impressive octopus mask with its tentacles seemingly reaching out to grasp the crowd, and another young lady whose mask, adorned with flowing blue and green silks, resembled a graceful angelfish.

"Artemisia?" my governess ventured.

The young woman in the angelfish mask turned at the sound of her name. A smile, genuine and warm, spread across her features as she recognized my governess.

"Auntie, it's been too long. This is my mistress, Miss Viola, and Mr. Florian, the butler."

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I offered a smile, trying not to stare openly, at the undeniably beautiful trio. Lady Viola's porcelain skin and dark hair possessed an ethereal quality like Carmilla.

"You know my charge, Laura, and this our new guest, Carmilla. She is staying at the schloss temporarily. We thought the ball would be a welcome distraction after...you know."

Artemisia nodded solemnly. "We've heard about the strange illness. Rumors from the gossip mill, but nothing more."

"Indeed," said Viola, her gaze lingering on Carmilla for a beat too long before she schooled her expression.

Florian, the butler, stepped forward and bowed to Carmilla and I. "A pleasure to meet you. The rumors paint a bleak picture, but I see health blooming where they speak of decay." His words were polite, but his eyes, dark and sharp, lingered on Carmilla.

Carmilla inclined her head in a curt nod, her expression unreadable. A bubble of tension filled the space between them, and I wanted to pin-prick it.

"Well then," said Artemisia, "shall we rejoin the festivities?" Arm in arm, she led the butler and Viola away.

In the throng, the trio exchanged stolen glances at each other, veiled flirtations. A secret language understood only by them. It twisted inside me like an envious serpent, its coils around me tight. I craved what they had. I craved that with a fierceness that surprised even myself.

“Will you dance, Laura?” Carmilla’s lips, a perfect bow painted crimson, parted in a smile.

I regained myself. “Only if I may have a dance with you.”

The melody dipped and soared, drawing the guests into a swirling mass on the ballroom floor. A shadow detached itself from the periphery of the crowd. A masked gentleman, his clothes spilled ink against the gilded walls, cut through the throng and approached us.

Did he wish to ask one of us to dance with him? Annoyance filled me, his presence feeling like an unwelcome note. He drew closer, dousing Carmilla’s smile. She gripped my shoulder.

“Carmilla?”

She forced a smile, but it faltered at the edges. “I’m fine. Just need some air.”

We snuck past my governesses and found a secluded balcony. I closed the drapes behind us. Carmilla leaned against the railing, face tensed, like a sorrowful statue bathed in moonlight. Disquiet settled in my stomach.

“What’s wrong, Carmilla?”

“For a moment, that man reminded me of someone. Someone long ago.” Her eyes clouded for a second as though she was reliving a past memory. “It is nothing. Shall we return inside?”

Her forced composure did not fool me. “Nothings,” I said, “are often a tell-tale sign for something. Tell me, Carmilla. Please.”

She smiled at me sadly. "I wish my amnesia took this particular memory away from me. My time at masquerade balls has not always been pleasant. There was one that...left me with this." She touched the mark etched on her neck.

I traced the scar, and my voice grew tight. "Who did this to you, Carmilla?"

"A serpent masquerading as a gentleman." Her words scraped raw against the silk of the night. "He was all smiles and charm, until the music stopped and the masks came off. Literally, in his case." A sardonic laugh escaped her. Carmilla turned, the moonlight catching the glint of a tear down her cheek and the wrath in her eyes. "He forced himself on me, his mouth on my neck and..." She swallowed hard. "I tried to scream, but he covered my mouth so no one could hear."

The sting of unshed tears burned my eyes. I embraced Carmilla, my body wracked with fury. A fierce protectiveness clawed its way up from the depths of my being. "That was no man. He was a monster."

"And I was a lamb who trusted a wolf in sheep's clothing, but this lamb, " she said, a sharp glint entering her eyes, "learned to bite that night. I sank my teeth into his hand, harder than a starving wolf, until his blood painted my tongue." She closed her eyes and licked her lip. "I remember the taste of it even now, even as the curses ripped from his throat as he shoved me to the ground."

The image of Carmilla, a cornered animal lashing out at her attacker, filled me with a mix of anger and fierce admiration. Even as a victim, there was a primal strength within her.

Carmilla leaned into my embrace. "The bite saved me," she whispered, "and cursed me all at once. That girl died that night and was reborn into something sharper, harder, forged in the crucible of that dark night."

My hands instinctively reached out, cupping her face. The moon highlighted the anger, the vulnerability in her features. I ached to erase the pain in her eyes, to undo the monstrous act that had scarred her forever.

"No matter the years that pass by, the scar remains," she said, pulling away, "a constant echo of that night."

"Then let it be a reminder of something else."

I leaned down, pressing a soft kiss to the scar on her neck. Carmilla held still. The memory of the monster would remain, etched in her skin, but I vowed to write over it. A promise to be her sanctuary from whatever darkness that had forever touched her.

"This," I said, tracing the outline of the scar with my thumb, "is a mark of your strength. A reminder of the night you survived, not the one you endured." A single drop traced a glistening path down Carmilla's cheek, and I brushed it away with the pad of my thumb. "Dance with me, Carmilla."

## Page 12

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Carmilla took my extended hand, and her arresting smile unfurled like a moonflower.

The music, almost forgotten, swirled back into focus, a heady waltz that filled the air. Carmilla settled her hand on my waist.

We swayed together, a dance of unspoken words, our bodies moving in perfect harmony. A confession caught in my throat, like a trapped bird yearning to escape the cage. How I longed to tear away our masks, to whisper the truth that burned in my heart, but I held my tongue captive.

Perhaps that was well enough, because conversation seemed unnecessary, a clumsy attempt to express what our bodies already communicated. Every touch, every brush of our bodies, was a spark igniting a wildfire within me. The flames licked at the edges of my control, threatening to consume me whole.

The music swelled, and the crescendo mirrored the rising heat of the moment. The world narrowed to just her. Her pomegranate-mouth.

I couldn't tell who initiated the kiss. Only that our lips met in a clash, tender and urgent. She tasted like ripe fruit kissed by the summer sun and something wild, intoxicating. Dark desire pulsed through me, raw and primal, throbbing in tune to the music. How I wanted to kiss away the memory of that night, to erase every ill touch that beast had placed on her skin. To brand her skin with my own touch, claim her as my own.

“Laura? Carmilla?”

The voice of my governess jolted my thoughts. Carmilla and I broke away. A thread of silver stretched and snapped between our lips, proof of the entanglement we were creating.

“We’re coming,” I called out. I tore my gaze from Carmilla’s lips, flushed and slightly swollen. A blush burned across my cheeks. Shame battled with the thrill of the stolen moment, a delicious tension that coursed through my veins.

Carmilla regained her composure with practiced ease, smoothing her crimson dress.

“Whatever are you doing here?” said Madame Perrodon, swiping aside the curtain to the balcony.

“The effort of all the dancing caught up to me,” said Carmilla. “Laura was kind enough to escort me so that I might get some fresh air.”

“Is that so?” Madame Perrodon shepherded back to the ballroom. She scanned the guests. Some were drifting towards the exit, their carriages waiting in a line of glittering coaches. “There, she is.”

She had spotted Artemisia’s party and we followed behind my governess.

“Write to me more often, will you?” Mademoiselle De Lafontaine planted a kiss on her niece’s cheek.

Viola approached me, seeing her maid occupied. “Might I have a word, Miss Laura?”

“Yes?”

Her gaze swept over the sea of masks and landed on the one of black lace. “It would



do you well to remember appearances can be deceiving. Sometimes, the most beautiful gardens harbor the deadliest thorns.”

Before I could formulate a response, Viola turned and glided away, rejoining Artemisia and the butler at the entrance.

## Chapter 5:

Carmilla hadn't made her way downstairs this afternoon yet, leaving me preoccupied with my thoughts. I sat at the piano, reliving the sweet heat of last night. We had stolen a kiss under the moonlight, a brief moment that had irrevocably altered something in me and rewrote the boundaries of my world.

The melody flowed from me, a bittersweet sonata. a torrent of emotions crashing against the ivory keys. The lingering taste of Carmilla's kiss still hung heavy on my tongue. My conflicting feelings towards her poured out in rising and falling chords. I was drowning in a sea of conflicting sensations – fear, desire, a possessive adoration that bordered on obsession.

“May I join you?”

Carmilla's voice, a soft caress, startled me like a cymbal crash. I fumbled over the keys.

“Of course,” I said, leaving her space on the bench.

Carmilla moved toward me, the silk of her dress whispering against the wood. She settled beside me. The first notes she played were hesitant, a single, melancholic melody line. Her fingers fluttered, her movements as graceful as a descending arpeggio, then her touch on the keys grew bolder. The piece took on a new life, the tempo rising and gaining a new urgency with each passing note.

I joined in. We moved together, our fingers dancing a passionate waltz across the ivories, a dance both tender and fraught with tension. Her hand grazed mine, and a shiver traced my spine. In her touch, I found a symphony unlike any other. It sent a tremor through me, awakening a hunger I didn't know existed. A part of me recoiled from the intensity, yet a primal whisper within me urged me closer.

Our fingers intertwined on a single key, a brief, unexpected touch that sent a jolt through me. The discordant clang of the doorbell shattered the spell. Carmilla's fingers flinched, the final notes hanging heavy in the air. We disentangled ourselves from the duet.

“Coming.” My father's voice echoed through the foyer, followed by the shuffling of unfamiliar feet. Carmilla and I entered through the parlor doorway, witnessing two men delivering a mountain of ornately wrapped packages.

“Papa, what is all this?”

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"Some heirlooms from the House of Karnstein. Your mother's people wanted to clear out some space, and I thought they might fit nicely in the restored parlor."

Carmilla's posture stiffened slightly as the men unwrapped golden framed portraits, filigreed books, and intricately carved boxes. Nestled amongst a stack of leather-bound volumes, lay a small, worn journal. Its cover was intricate with swirling vines and a tarnished silver clasp that gleamed faintly.

One of the men wiped his brow, muttering to my father. "Another poor girl down at the mill, same strange symptoms. Fevered dreams, lethargy, and..."

My father cleared his throat, eyeing me before returning his gaze to the worker. "Dreadful business, of course," he said, as if not wanting to allow this conversation to continue in my presence. "If I may show you where to place that mirror."

The men left the room, and I slipped the antique journal into my pocket. My gaze drifted back to the portraits, each face staring out from its gilded frame. One stood out in particular. A portrait of a young woman with striking remarkable beauty. Her dark hair was piled high in an intricate style of a bygone era. I read the date scrawled in the corner. 1724.

"Carmilla, look at this. It's like looking into a mirror."

The woman in the painting bore a striking resemblance to Carmilla. The same high cheekbones, onyx eyes, that full, sensual mouth. The only difference was the portrait's hairstyle and unblemished neck. No hint of a scar.

“How curious...” Carmilla glided closer and studied the canvas. She traced the painted face with a slender finger. "The resemblance is uncanny."

"Isn't she lovely? Like a goddess trapped in time." My gaze darted towards my father, ensuring he was still distracted, before adding in a hushed voice, "Perhaps I could hang it in my room."

Carmilla leaned in close. "How intimate," she whispered, her lips grazing my earlobe. "To share your sleeping quarters with a ghost from the past. I would object to the idea if she didn't look so much like me."

The possessive tone of her voice sent shivers down my spine. I took a hesitant step back, the air between us thick. "I shall return upstairs after I find a nail to affix the painting. Excuse me."

A frown twisting her beautiful face as I brushed past her. As much as I craved Carmilla's presence, a whispered warning from the deepest part of myself urged me to flee. To avoid these unspeakable feelings she was stirring in me. Like a moth to flame, I was drawn to Carmilla, but the danger of fire held me at bay.

I entered my father's study, and the scent of pipe tobacco hung heavy in the air. My search for the nail evaporated with the sight of a single, crisp sheet of paper resting on his ornately carved desk.

The general's elegant script danced before my eyes. Was there more news about Bertha?

With a swift glance around the room, I unfolded the letter. The words swam before my eyes. The truth was laid bare. The true nature of the general's original visit. It was never to introduce a friend for his niece, Bertha. It was to foster a courting plan—between the much older general and myself. My stomach churned. Bertha's

passing had merely delayed his visit, not deterred it. He would be arriving in a month.

My blood burned, fury coursing through my veins. I tore through the desk drawers and unearthed a stack of correspondences between my father and general. Letters spanning for over a year about a betrothal I had never consented to.

I tore the letter in my hand and ran to his quarters. I did not knock.

“Laura,” my father said with a frown, “what’s the meaning of this?”

“This.” I threw the pieces of the torn letter. “When were you going to tell me?”

He held himself calmly. “I didn’t want you to find out this way. I had fully planned to tell you.”

“You didn’t even ask me.” My voice shook.

“Laura, you are a woman of marriageable age,” he said, as though he was explaining something to a small child. “I was merely acting in your own interest. It is my duty to find you a suitable husband.”

Bile rose in my throat, the taste metallic on my tongue. "Suitable for whom? You or me?"

He laughed, a humorless sound. “This is about your future. A marriage to him would grant you the security and position you deserve. The general is a distinguished gentleman, a war hero—”

"With a predatory eye for young women," I finished, my voice laced with disgust. "He's old enough to be my father."

My father rose from his desk. "That," he said coldly, "will be quite enough." A steely glint hardened his gaze. "You will not speak about the general with such disrespect. The general is a man of means. He offers a generous dowry. A marriage to him would secure your future, and by extension, our family's."

"And if I do not wish to marry the general?"

A flicker of anger sparked in my father's eyes. "This is about duty. The war has left us in financial ruin, Laura. This marriage is our chance to restore the schloss. To salvage what's left of our legacy."

His words rang hollow. This wasn't about duty. This was about my father's interests. I was meant to be a sacrifice on the altar of his own pride, and the ugly truth gnawed at me. The betrayal of a parent left the most treacherous of wounds.

"You will not sully his generous offer," he said steadily. "You have an obligation to your family."

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Family. The word sounded foreign on his tongue. The family he spoke of felt more like a crumbling castle, its foundations eroded over time just like the schloss. The only family I had left now was the only I was starting to form with Carmilla, a girl whose very existence was a rebellion against everything, everyone, that had imprisoned me for so long.

A dam had broken within me, a torrent of anger that had been barricaded up. My voice rose, echoing in the confines of the study. "I deserve to have a say in my own life."

"Don't raise your voice against me." His eyes narrowed. "I don't know what's gotten into you as of late. You've changed."

He was right. Carmilla had unleashed something within me. She hadn't just unlocked my hidden desires; she was the spark that ignited the dormant fire of my voice.

"I won't be your bargaining chip," I said. "Nor will I cling to the general's offer like a barnacle to a rotting ship as you so easily do." The words were laced with a venom I hadn't known I possessed.

"How dare you —"

I turned on my heel and the heavy oak door slammed shut behind me with a resounding finality.

Heat scorched me from within, a furnace stoked by unadulterated rage. My life felt like a marionette show, with unseen hands pulling the strings and writing a script I

never had a say in. The men in my life were drawing the map of my life with bold strokes, ignoring the path I wanted to choose for myself.

I ran upstairs to the only haven in the schloss. Carmilla's room.

I burst through the door and threw myself into her waiting arms, the dam of my emotions finally breaching. Tears streamed down my face, hot and relentless, staining her nightgown, but Carmilla held me tight.

She pressed a kiss to my temple. "My darling, what's wrong?"

Between choked sobs, I poured out what had just happened.

"That pompous relic will never claim you. You are mine," she said fiercely, cupping my face, "and mine alone."

I buried my face in the haven of her neck, the familiar scent of jasmines and something else, something primal and intoxicating, filling my senses. How I yearned to be hers, completely and irrevocably.

She tilted my chin up, her eyes burning with an intensity that sent a shiver down my spine. "I won't let them," she said, voice low and dangerous, a promise laced with something that tasted suspiciously like a threat. "They won't take you from me. You are mine. You shall be mine; you and I are one forever."

In that moment, I craved to be consumed by her, to become a single entity.

Chapter 6:

The atmosphere at dinner was tense. My governesses exchanged nervous glances at each other, knowing something had happened between my father and I, but neither



dared to ask.

After we had finished eating, we all retired to our rooms for the night, except for me. I waited until my governesses had extinguished their lamps before making my way to Carmilla's quarters.

“I was waiting for you.” She opened the door, her lovely face bathed in the glow of a single candle she held. “I should like to get some air before retiring for the night. Care to escort me?”

“I thought you’d never ask.”

Downstairs the grandfather clock chimed the witching hour as we slipped out of a side door in the kitchen. The cool night air washed over us like a balm. Outside, the moon hung full and luminous in the inky black sky, casting an ethereal glow over the orchard. The sweet, cloying fragrance of spring enveloped us. Apple blossoms, camellias, and roses.

“Look at the full moon,” I said. “It reminds me of that night you arrived.”

“Are you glad I came?”

“More than you know, dear Carmilla.” The stagnant waters of my existence craved a tempest. I envisioned myself as a wave, gathering momentum, yearning to crash against the sharp edges of her presence. To be broken down and remade. To rise from the churning sea; reborn and alive.

Carmilla brushed a stray curl from my neck, her fingers lingering. “Then stay with me forever.”

“Nothing is forever, Carmilla.”

“Galaxies and the elements cycle in different forms but never disappear...these things are forever as an eternal afterlife.”

“I would stay with you forever if I could, dear Carmilla.”

“What if I offered you forever?” she asked, her voice a silken thread. “Would you take it?”

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"I'm...not sure." Her words were intoxicating as they were unsettling. A promise of a world both beautiful and terrifying. A life that transcended the boundaries of this mortal existence. Bound together with Carmilla forever. My mind conjured images of endless nights spent with Carmilla, our laughter echoing through moonlit orchards, stolen touches and kisses.

"You mustn't," said Carmilla. Her eyes, so dark they seemed to hold the secrets of the universe, narrowed at me. "You mustn't be bound by the limitations of your mortality."

The way she spoke, the intensity in her gaze, sent a thrill of curiosity and a flicker of fear through me. This was madness, this conversation, these thoughts, all of it. Yet in Carmilla's eyes, I caught a reflection of my own yearning, a longing for something beyond the confines of my current world.

"Carmilla," I said, my voice barely above a breath, "what are you saying?"

She leaned closer, soft lips brushing my ear. Her breath, cool and scented with something faintly floral, prickled the hairs of my neck. "I'm saying that I'll never be content with these stolen moments with you. Even a lifetime would be hard to bear." Her voice dropped low, soft as the rustle of moth wings. "Only forever could be enough."

She pressed a kiss on the hollow of my throat, and I stepped back from her, trembling. I yearned for her closeness, but a specter of danger lurked in the shadows of her affection. Like a serpent coiled around a rose.

“Why must you say things like this? Why must you make me feel these unspeakable things?”

"Because," she said, her eyes locking with mine, "I love you."

The word, a simple declaration, hung heavy in the air, a double-edged sword that promised both salvation and ruin. I stared into Carmilla's eyes, desperately searching for what I didn't know. Instead, I saw a reflection of my own turmoil and something else mirrored in the depths of her gaze. Love.

I loved her too.

“Carmilla,” I whispered, “whatever can come out of these feelings?”

“Many things, if you only let yourself.”

I let out a forced laugh. “I can understand how Eve succumbed to temptation in the garden of Eden.”

“I am no serpent leading you astray.”

“Don't you see?” I said, my voice raw. "You've turned me into someone I no longer recognize, inflaming my thoughts—spurring me on relentlessly.”

“I cannot take credit for your transformation. You had the predilection all along. I merely was the wind that fueled the fire...”

I bit my lip, wanting to retort. But I had nothing to say when she was damnably right.

The truth echoed within me like a song I'd always known the words to. Being with Carmilla had awakened something in me, something that had lay dormant and

untouched until now. Being with her was like stepping out of a dimly lit room into blinding sunlight, disorienting at first, but revealing the world in vivid color. The realization had been unfolding like a flower in slow motion. My old understanding of myself had cracked open like a seed, revealing a tender shoot reaching for a light I hadn't known existed. Past moments with female friends crystallized like forgotten photographs, their smiles and shared glances taking on a new, brighter meaning.

“The only way to rid yourself of temptation is to yield to it. Why must you deny it, Laura?” The question pierced me, the words exposing a raw nerve.

My unspoken desires were slumbering, longing to bloom, but constantly pruned and restrained. Until now. Carmilla was the rainstorm that coaxed the secret garden to unfurl, petal by petal.

“Carmilla,” I whispered, and her name came out like a dark confession. I brushed the cool porcelain of her cheek. “You make me feel so many things that it terrifies me.”

She tilted her head, her eyes gleaming obsidian under the moonlight. "Fear is a curious thing. Sometimes it's a coiled viper, fangs bared in warning. Other times, it's a trembling butterfly, its wings desperate to explore the unknown." Her breath ghosted across my lips. "Fear is natural, but denial is a cage that only imprisons, little butterfly."

Carmilla was close, but leaned no more, only waited as her words unraveled me. And then I understood. She wanted me willingly or not at all.

I bridged the distance between us and met her lips. Her mouth unfurled like a rose. Her kiss was both the sanctuary and the storm. My resistance to Carmilla crumbled like sandcastles under a tide, overpowered by a force I could no longer control. Her hands were in my hair, the small of my back; my hands were on her waist, pulling her closer. My skin tingled under her touch, like a thousand flowers awakening at their

roots; her lingering fingers made them bloom.

“Carmilla...” I broke for air, but her pomegranate-red lips latched onto mine again.

"No, let me steal your breath, darling," she murmured against my mouth. "I want to hold it captive between my teeth. Only another kiss could tempt me to set it free."

Her kiss deepened, and I disappeared into it. Our tongues settled into a slow, deliberate waltz, an exploration that spoke of unspoken questions and a need for something more than just answers. The taste of her lingered as she pulled away.

“Tell me,” she said, her breath hot against my cheek. “Can he give you this?”

My arms tightened around her. “I don’t even want to think of him.”

She smiled and pressed her lips against mine once more. "You taste like moonlight, darling. Sweet, wild, and something born of stars."

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A yearning, sharp and sweet, echoed in my chest. "I would," I said softly. "Stay with you forever if I could."

"Then, let us make the most of our stolen moments," she whispered.

Her hand slipped down my back, tracing the curve of my spine with a touch that sent shivers cascading across my flesh. My fingers traced the smooth column of her throat, the cool onyx amulet nestled against her skin, a contrast to the heat building between our skin.

Moonlight traced patterns across the discarded silks and linens on the grass. Crumpled muslin gowns, their buttons gleaming like fallen stars. Our bodies pressed together in a tangle of limbs, and our perfumes intermingled in the air. Wild roses and night-blooming jasmine. How sweetly they blended together.

It was my first time lying with another, and I fumbled in my fervor. My touches felt like misplaced commas, the tentative caresses like poorly translated sentences, failing to capture the depth of my desire but when Carmilla's lips parted, her sighs sounded like poetry.

Her body was a language I longed to be fluent in. She, on the other hand, seemed well-versed with mine. With unerring instinct, she knew exactly where I divined her touch next. Her tongue dipped into the crook of my collarbone, lapping at the sensitive skin.

"Please...don't stop." My voice was thick with desire, the traitorous yearning within me warring with the rational part of my mind.

My body surrendered under her tutelage. I arched my back, a silent plea met with her eager tongue tracing a path down my breasts, my navel. She moved lower and lower, leaving a trail of blazing kisses in her wake. My breath hitched as I dissolved atop her tongue.

She rose from my legs and sat up, licking her glistening lips. "Come here, darling."

I surrendered to her mouth, and she fed me the taste of myself. Somehow it seemed sweeter coming from her mouth.

Our legs entwined, a slow building rhythm of thrusting thighs, slick with wetness. Her fingers dug into my back, grounding me, anchoring me to this moment. Through ragged breaths, I called out her name like litany.

"Carmilla, Carmilla, my Carmilla."

Her name in my mouth sounded like scripture.

"Yes, darling. Hold onto me. Come for me."

A coiled spring in the pit of my stomach tightened with every breath. The tension crested, reaching an unbearable peak. We spilled into each other, and a cry escaped my lips; my eyes were wet.

The tremors of release subsided, carving the path for a confession that burned in my throat. Words that would ignite the air if spoken aloud. Words too precious to remain unsaid.

I lay upon Carmilla's breast, and my raw whisper grazed her lips.

"I love you, too."



## Chapter 7:

The ghosts of last night's kisses lingered on my lips. The memory of her touch ignited a fire in my veins, a delicious reminder of the night we had shared. Even now, the taste of her remained on my tongue, the tang of a sea-breeze and sweet musk. Our roots were so entwined in each other, our shared vices, vines that bound us.

I leaned against the window seat. A strange languor wormed its way through my limbs. My head felt like a cotton ball, pleasantly light, but a disquieting haze clung to the edges of my vision. My gaze drifted across the distant village. Those girls who had fallen ill... hadn't they complained of lethargy?

A cold dread snaked through me. I tried to silence it, that insistent voice in the back of my head that whispered, What if whatever plagued them had brushed against me too?

The bedroom door creaked open, and Carmilla slipped in, her silhouette framed by the light streaming from the hallway. "Laura, my dearest, you look pale."

I turned and feebly smiled. "Just a touch of weariness. Perhaps the long walks we've been taking have caught up with me."

Carmilla's touch was cool and gentle as she brushed a strand of hair from my forehead. "Perhaps a glass of something restorative is just what you need. Let me fetch you some wine."

Carmilla returned with two crystal goblets filled with ruby-red liquid.

I roused myself as Carmilla glided across the room, her nightgown whispering against the floorboards. Her dark hair shone like a raven's wing; her cheeks had a healthy flush that resembled rouge. She looked like the picture of health, the entirely

opposite of what I was feeling.

Carmilla raised her glass. "Shall we drink to us?"

"To us." I clinked my glass against hers and lifted it to my lips, inhaling the scent of wild berries. A burst of sweetness warmed my insides, and a pleasant drowsiness seeped into my bones. "Carmilla, this fatigue...you don't think it's—"

"Hush, my love. Don't think such thoughts." Carmilla set the empty goblet on the window ledge, her touch lingering possessively on my hand. "You are mine, flesh and blood. I swear upon the moon to never let anyone or anything take you away from me."

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My eyes drifted close. "You mustn't make promises you can't keep."

"I never break my promises. Not the ones that matter." Carmilla dipped her finger in the glass and stroked my lips until wine painted my lips. "And here is a goblet more intoxicating than any wine." She raised her glass, then lifted my face to hers.

The wine flowed from her mouth into mine. A heady concoction that flooded my senses. I drank her in, convinced she was the antidote, but the intoxication she brought forth seemed like a drug, sweet poison that filled me with a delicious languor.

"I want to drink from you," she whispered against my mouth, "until we taste the same. Until we become one." Her lips brushed my temple. "I vow that we shall always be together."

"Always together," I said, the words a soft echo.

Then, like smoke dissipating in the breeze, she was gone. I called out her name, a desperate plea that echoed off the empty walls. I found the back door that led outside.

"There you are."

Carmilla stood in the midnight garden, all alabaster skin and raven hair. She wore nothing but a strip of moonlight. How beautiful she looked; her face sculpted from moonlight and stardust: Her crimson lips curved into a smile, her silent invitation impossible to resist.

I reached out, tracing the elegant line of Carmilla's cheek.

She leaned in, her lips brushing my ear. "Mine," she whispered. "Utterly and eternally mine."

Her fingertips trailed down my arms, my waist, the curve of a hip. Carmilla's lips, cool and soft, found mine. I surrendered to the kiss, the world around us fading away until there was only her, the press of her curves against mine, the frantic beat of my traitorous heart.

A tremor ran through me as her hand skimmed between my bare legs. My breath hitched when her fingers found their mark.

"This is what you crave, isn't it, darling?" Her voice was dark velvet against my ear.

Carmilla's kiss deepened and her touches turned urgent, shifting. Her tenderness morphed into something sharper, more primal. Feral. I gasped, a mixture of pleasure and fear coiling in my gut.

"This is your surrender, darling," she rasped. "You belong to me, now and forever. I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so."

She pushed her leg between mine and moved like a rogue wave, retreating from the shore of my body before crashing upon it again. "You will think me cruel, selfish, but love is always selfish; the more ardent the more selfish."

I closed my eyes, the pressure building between my legs, throbbing. "Carmilla...I—"

A searing sensation bloomed on my breast. It was a single, sharp puncture that sent me convulsing over the edge. A scream tore from my mouth, but Carmilla silenced it with a crushing kiss. Her eyes took on an unsettling glow; her movements were

erratic, predatory. Somewhere through the haze of pain and pleasure, panic clawed at my throat.

Her teeth sunk into the soft flesh of my neck.

Gasping, I woke in the darkness. A weight on the bed, a searing pain above my breast – like needles digging deep. Something loomed over my bed and stalked back with unnatural swiftness. A monstrous black creature, its feral eyes burning with hunger. Terror constricted my throat. The thing moved like a wraith, its form contorting and dissolving into wisps of shadow.

I frantically searched my room. Moonlight streamed through the window, illuminating dust motes dancing in its silvery path. But in that pale light, I saw her. Carmilla stood near the dressing screen, blood staining her white nightgown like a macabre rose in bloom.

"Carmilla..." My voice came out hoarse, raw with terror.

A flicker and she was swallowed by the very shadows themselves. My breath came in ragged gasps as I scrambled out of bed. The floorboards were cold beneath my bare feet, a contrast to the feverish heat burning my skin. Had the strange illness that plagued the village girls manifested this horrific vision? Or had I truly witnessed Carmilla battling some unseen entity?

I threw the door open and screamed for help. My frantic cries echoed down the dimly lit hallway. Mademoiselle De Lafontaine and Madame Perrodon rushed in, their faces a mask of concern. Behind them, my father loomed, his nightshirt rumpled and his expression stormy.

"What's the meaning of this, Laura?"

"There... there was something here." My voice cracked, the enormity of what I had just witnessed difficult to put into words. I gestured to the empty space where Carmilla had stood. "A monster... and Carmilla was hurt. She...She had blood on her." I forced the words out in a shuddering breath. "Something took her."

My father exchanged a glance with Madame Perrodon. Her face, usually composed, was etched with a flicker of fear.

My father strode towards Carmilla's room. He knocked firmly, loudly. No answer.

"Carmilla?" he said, voice raised. Again. Once, twice, thrice. My father grasped the handle, his knuckles turning white. "Blast, it's locked."

I found my voice. "Carmilla told me she has a fear of robbers and locks her door at night."

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My father ignored me and fixed his gaze on the ornately carved oak door. With a deep breath, he summoned all his strength and shoulder-barged it. The sturdy wood splintered under the force, and the door swung open.

Darkness. The room was empty. Not a single trace of Carmilla remained. Only the lingering perfume of night-blooming jasmines.

### Chapter 8:

Panic curdled in my stomach as we searched the drafty halls. Hours bled into one another as we combed the schloss, each door yielding a room of disappointment. My father, a usually composed man, ran a hand through his hair, muttering about the impossible situation he'd be in explaining Carmilla's disappearance to her mother. My own grief was a different kind. Finally, driven by a desperate hope, I burst through Carmilla's chambers once again.

And there she was. Standing by her dressing table, bathed in the soft glow of dawn, a vision in white. Relief slammed into me like a tidal wave. I raced towards her, a strangled cry escaping my lips. Tears streamed down my face as I crashed into her embrace. Her warmth, the familiar scent of jasmine, was a balm to my frayed nerves. I kissed her again and again, a desperate confirmation of her presence. I needed to know she wasn't a mirage, that the feel of her body wasn't a figment of my imagination.

"Carmilla," I said, my voice choked with relief. "What happened?"

A flicker of disorientation crossed her face. "I went to bed last night and had a

dreamless sleep, my darling. You can imagine my surprise when I woke and found myself here."

She trailed off, her gaze falling on the frantic faces of my governesses and father who had followed me in.

Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, ever the picture of composure, seemed to age a decade in that moment. "Thank heavens, child. We have been in agony about you."

Madame Perrodon collapsed in her seat. "Wherever have you been?"

"I'm not sure," she said.

My father stepped forward. "For mercy's sake, Carmilla," he said, his voice laced with exasperation, "explain all you can."

"It was past two last night," she began, "when I went to sleep in my usual manner, with all the doors locked – the one to the dressing room, and the one leading to the gallery. My sleep was undisturbed, yet, I woke up on that very sofa in the dressing room." She gestured towards the plush furniture, concern straining her features. "How could this have happened?"

My father paced the room, mulling over her story. "May I offer a conjecture, Carmilla?"

"Please do."

"Have you ever been suspected of sleepwalking?"

"Never, since I was a child."



"But you did walk in your sleep as a young girl?"

She nodded slowly. "Yes, I have been told that."

"Why, then that is the explanation." He proceeded to paint a picture. Carmilla, lost in the throes of a forgotten slumber, unlocking doors and wandering aimlessly through the labyrinthine schloss. "With so many rooms and hidden corners, it wouldn't be surprising for her to have remained undiscovered during our initial search."

Carmilla listened intently, her expression thoughtful. "I suppose I see your point."

"But, papa," I began, "how do you explain her presence on the sofa? We searched that room thoroughly."

"Perhaps Carmilla wandered further after our search and, awakening spontaneously, found herself there. He clapped his hands together a little too forcefully. "And so, we can all congratulate ourselves on a simple case of sleepwalking. Nothing sinister, nothing to alarm anyone. All's well that ends well."

His explanation, a neat little bow tied around the strange occurrence, seemed to appease everyone else. But as I looked into Carmilla's eyes, a flicker of something unreadable passed through them. A disquiet settled in my gut, a whisper against the words of father's logic.

"What about what I saw?" I said quietly. "That monster, the blood." I didn't look at Carmilla.

"A dream," said my father. "That's all it was." My father's gaze drifted from Carmilla to me. It lingered for a beat too long. I knew exactly what he was thinking. The contrast between us was stark. Carmilla, even after a night of supposed sleepwalking, radiated an otherworldly beauty. I could almost hear him compare the vibrant flush

that had returned to Carmilla's cheeks with the pallor that had leached from mine over the past few days.

My father searched my face and frowned. "Laura, are you feeling quite alright?"

"I'm perfectly fine, papa." My voice lacked its usual conviction. Truth be told, I felt like a wilted flower, the exhaustion of the night clinging to me.

He studied me for a moment longer, his brow furrowed. "Perhaps a touch of nerves after this ordeal...Still, it wouldn't hurt to have Dr. Spielsberg take a look at you tomorrow."

"An excellent suggestion," said Carmilla. "A night of worry can take its toll even on the most robust constitution. Let the good doctor put your mind at ease, Laura."

Her words were kind, but the flicker in her eyes unnerved me.

### Chapter 9:

The doctor peered at me with a frown that mirrored the one creasing my brow. I'd recounted the oppressive dreams that plagued me at night and the languor that clung to me like damp wool in the day.

"If you don't mind," he said, "would you lower your collar?" The doctor's face steeled as he focused on my exposed skin. Nestled just below my collarbone, was a small angry spot like a bruised violet.

"As I suspected. I've seen the similar affliction in the village girls." His words struck me like a thunderclap. "And also another time...eighteen years ago, if memory serves right." He trailed off as his eyes flicked to my father, a flicker of something unreadable passing through their depths.

Eighteen years ago. When my mother had been stolen from my life.

"What were the symptoms back then?" I asked quietly.

"Fevered dreams, listlessness and..." The doctor paused, as though deliberating how much he should say. "Other ailments can have similar features so I cannot come to a sound conclusion yet."

He didn't mention the mark.

A cold dread coiled in my stomach. Whatever was plaguing the village, whatever had taken my mother all those years ago, was stirring once again. This time, I feared it was coming for me.

“No need to worry, my dear,” Dr. Abernathy said, perhaps sensing the panic in my eyes. “Nothing a bit of rest and some restorative tonic won't cure. You have nothing to fear if you follow my instructions.” He looked at my father. “Might I have a word?”

The heavy oak door swung shut, leaving me alone with my maelstrom of thoughts, but I strained my ears. Through the door, their hushed voices carried. A few words pierced through my veil of anxiety. “...priest...” I heard the doctor say, and then my father's harsh reply cutting through the doctor's words. “Madness...”

My father re-entered the room, his face a mask of forced composure. “You will be attended to by your governesses,” he said, voice clipped. “I must attend to some business with the general.”

“What business?”

He evaded my gaze. “Matters beyond your concern. Rest assured, I shall return shortly.”

Once he had left, Carmilla turned to me. “Would you like to go for a swim? The cold water might do you well.”

The lake had always been a sanctuary, a place where the weight of the world seemed to ease.

“Yes...please.”

We lied to my governesses about picking berries and stole away. We walked to the edge of the lake and discarded our clothes in a heap. The spring air sent shivers dancing across my skin.

We slipped into the lake, and the initial shock of the cold water stole my breath away, a jolt through my systems. We swam side by side, our bodies drawn together, finding comfort in the press of skin against skin. We emerged from the water together, the air drying our skin with a caress. The fading light of the day cast the world in a soft, ethereal glow.

Shivering slightly, I put on my shift. Carmilla's mouth tightened.

"What is it?" I asked.

"May I?" Her fingers slid upwards, inch by inch. My leg tingled, sending a pleasant shiver down my spine and lower. Her hand paused. "You are menstruating."

My cheeks warmed as a pink drop rolled down my leg. "It wasn't supposed to come now... Must be the stress."

"Allow me." Her tone was light, but her eyes were dark as the night. She pressed a finger against my trembling thighs.

Heat rose to my face. "Don't..."

She dragged the finger along my inner thigh, the drop smearing against my skin. "There is another here." Her hand wandered, pushing up my shift. Traveling upwards.

"What are you—"

The grip on my hips tightened. She ran her tongue along my inner thigh. Her lovely

mouth came between my legs. No, not that. She wouldn't.

She licked a droplet of blood, and a hungry shudder escaped her. Her serpentine tongue lapped at me. Stirring, searing. A throaty sound reverberated from her throat.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

Carmilla was unraveling before me. Day into night. Quickly transforming into someone—something else entirely. Fear flared in me along a wave of desire. That I could shake her composure... to affect her like this, I shivered.

"Mm." Carmilla sucked harder. "You taste delicious." She tilted her head, and her hot lips traveled along my thigh.

I drew in a gasp of pain. Fangs broke the skin, singeing every thought to oblivion.

"Carmilla—" I fisted her hair with both hands. If she did anything now, I wouldn't deny her. If she were to keep going, if she were to pin me underneath her, bare and spread wide—

"Darling," she said, licking the wound on my thigh, "you must come with me, loving me, to death; or else hate me, and still come with me. Can't you see how much I need you?"

And how I needed her too. It was almost painful.

"Let me do the same for you," I said.

My gaze, filled with a desperate reverence, followed the line of her white nightgown where it disappeared between the folds of her legs. I traced her body, a temple of sinuous curves and moon-kissed skin. I knelt before her dark altar and worshiped the juncture between her thighs.

She tasted like nectar distilled from fallen stars; like every black desire of my soul.

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That night, my head was flooded with images of our recent sordid encounter, her sweet words. I ached to bottle this feeling, to hold these moments with her forever, like a souvenir.

I turned my gaze to the stack of leather-bound journals my mother's family had sent. Each one seemed to hold stories from a life far removed from my own. Perhaps, I thought, one of them could hold mine now.

I picked one, a lovely silver filigreed journal with latticed etchings. The aged leather cover creaked in protest as I wrestled it open. Inside the cover, lay a name in faded ink. "Katharina Karnstein," read a flowery handwriting. My mother's name. A mother who had always remained a distant figure, lost to a fever when I was a babe.

I devoured the entries, each a snapshot into a life vastly different from my own. The loneliness in her words was palpable, the frustration of being a young woman trapped in a loveless union. My father, a stern and stoic man, remained largely absent, focused on his business affairs. Only in mentions of a babe did a flicker of warmth seep through the page.

Then, an entry unlike the others.

June 12th, 1852:

"Tonight a soiree at Marin Manor. A suffocating affair, filled with the usual gossip and posturing. But amidst the sea of forgettable faces, one stood out. A woman of stately beauty. Tall and statuesque, with hair as dark as the night and marble skin. A single black mark adorned her cheekbone, and her eyes... oh, those eyes! Blue pools that seemed to hold ancient secrets. We exchanged a few words, and a strange connection sparked between us. A yearning I cannot explain. Perhaps loneliness



breeds a kinship of its own."

My breath hitched in my throat. A tall elegant woman; ebony hair, pale skin, the mole near her eye. The description was an unnerving echo of Carmilla's mother.

A folded piece of paper tucked within the pages fluttered to the floor. I snatched it up, my hands trembling. I unfolded the letter and my eyes scanned the faded ink:

"Katharina, my unexpected confidante, society suffocates you. I see it in the way you bite your lip when forced into conversation with vacuous men, the way your gaze wanders to the moonlit sky as they drone on about horse races and social graces. I can see it, that wildness in you. A thirst for something more that mirrors the hunger in my own soul. How I long to whisk you away from the prying eyes of society. Meet me near the lake at our usual time. Yours eternally, Lilith."

Lilith. I recalled a similar variation of that name. Lilith, the first wife of Adam, banished from Eden for her defiance. According to the stories, she had become the mother of demons, a night-born creature forever ostracized from the light.

I turned to the next page of the journal, afraid of what I would find.

June 18th, 1852:

Stole away to meet Lilitha at our hidden haven by the lake. There are things that transpired between us. Experiences too intimate, too raw to write onto this cold, unfeeling paper. My body aches in the most wonderful way possible, and my mind replays the stolen moments, each one branding itself deeper into my memory.

June 23rd, 1852:

A wave of exhaustion claims me this week, a lethargy so profound it feels like a

strange comfort in its intensity. The insistent cries of the babe throughout the night are the only explanation I can grasp for this bone-deep weariness. I surrendered to my bed for most of the day, dreams swirling me — vivid, unsettling, unspeakable things. They leave me with a lingering sense of unease upon waking. The doctor dismisses it to hysteria, a figment of my imagination, but I think he is wrong. After all, he can't explain the two small puncture marks on my neck.

June 27th, 1852:

I scarcely have the energy to write today. Lilita visited today. She smiles and assures me all will be well.

I turned the page again. Blank.

The entries had stopped. My mind churned, and I clutched the journal to my chest. A sense of foreboding twisted my stomach. Carmilla and the woman who had captivated my mother...I could no longer turn a blind eye to the similarities. The past was reaching out, its tendrils tangling with my present, and threatening to drag me into something I couldn't begin to comprehend.

## Page 21

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

My gaze wandered to the painting above my mantle, tracing the features that looked so similar to Carmilla. I eyed the inscription at the bottom.

Mircalla Karnstein. Mircalla.

My mind sifted through the letters of Mircalla, rearranging them until another name emerged in its place.

Carmilla.

Realization struck me like a tidal wave, churning my insides. The young woman in the painting was Carmilla.

My thoughts reeled. It all made a horrifying kind of sense. Carmilla's aversion to sunlight, the pallor of her skin, her peculiar mannerisms. The puzzle pieces snapped into place, forming a picture I desperately wished remained blurred. Legends and folklore flooded my mind, tales of bloodthirsty creatures who walked the night, stealing lives in the darkness and never aged.

A floorboard creaked from behind. Every muscle in my body tensed. I spun around to see a figure in the door, her silhouette outlined against the pale light. I felt like I was staring into a broken mirror, the pieces reflecting a distorted image of the girl I thought I knew.

"Carmilla." Her name caught in my throat. My hand instinctively reached for the amulet I wore.

"Dearest," she said, frowning, "you look like you've seen a ghost."

"Carmilla," I whispered, "what are you?"

A slight crease marred her brow. "I'm your companion, of course. Your friend." She raised my hand to her lips and placed a gentle kiss. "Your love."

I flinched from her touch, from that word. Carmilla drew in a breath, looking at me though I had slapped her.

My gaze darted back to the painting, then back to her. "The painting," I said, my voice shaking. The words stuck in my throat, the monstrous truth hovering unspoken in the air. "It's you, isn't it?"

The smile on her lips faltered. A flicker of something akin to fear crossed her features. "Please, Laura," she said quietly, "the truth is a portrait best left unfinished."

"Carmilla," I said, her name a desperate plea on my lips. "Tell me the truth."

The silence stretched, thick with tension. Carmilla's facade seemed to waver. "There are things," she began, her voice strained, "things I haven't shared with you. Secrets I've kept for a very long time." She moved towards the painting, her long fingers trailing along the worn canvas. "Mircalla Karnstein," she said softly, "was who I once was."

A wave of nausea washed over me. "Why?" I forced the word out, my voice raw. "Why this masquerade? Why me?"

She looked at me with a sadness that mirrored my own turmoil. "Because," she said, her voice soft, "loneliness is a terrible hunger, too. For a brief moment with you, I felt alive again. Not just existing, but truly living."

The weight of her words settled on me like a shroud. Loneliness was indeed a terrible hunger. A hunger I had felt for too long. And Carmilla knew this. Knew all the right words to say. The image of a spider sprang to mind, patiently weaving its web, waiting for the unsuspecting fly.

“You lied to me,” I said.

She forced her gaze away from the painting. "Does it matter, my love? The heart that beats for you is the same." She stepped toward me. "Have your feelings changed now?"

Suppressing my feelings for Carmilla was like trying to hold back a tidal wave with my bare hands, a futile battle. Every whispered word, every stolen glance became an offering, fueling the dark altar of my obsession. Perhaps I ought to give in to the bitter truth, to her poisoned kisses. Like a sacrificial lamb, willing to offer itself to the flames of her allure.

No. I would not succumb to her wicked spell.

“You used me, lied to me, betrayed me.” The accusations hung heavy in the air. "I was nothing but another one of your pawns." My voice cracked, mirroring the splintering of the trust I thought we'd built. "Your mother used my mother, played with her life all those years ago. And now you're doing the same to me."

“No, Laura!” She grasped my wrist, and the contact sent a jolt through me, a conflicting mix of repulsion and an undeniable warmth.

"This feeling," I said, my voice shaking, "this impossible pull towards you, it's a symptom of your vile curse, a parasite feasting on my weakness."

"No," she said, her voice firming with conviction, "What you feel is of your own

accord." Her lunar eyes bore into mine yet held a softness that threatened to crack my resolve. "I love you, Laura, as you love me."

Love. The word tasted bitter on my tongue. "Is that what you told the other girls? Promises of love and devotion, only to drain them dry like withered husks."

"I have been in love with no one, and never will," she said fiercely, "unless it should be with you."

A cold fury ignited within me, burning away the last remnants of naivety. "You killed Bertha. All those villagers..."

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

Carmilla flinched, a flicker of pain crossing her face. "They were sustenance. It's how I can live in your world."

"Sustenance." The word felt grotesque, like a butcher describing livestock. "You fed off those girls like a parasite, leeches their life force to satisfy your bloodlust." My voice trembled with hot anger. "You could have at least saved them. Given them your gift, your curse, whatever you call it. Made them one of you."

Carmilla's gaze met mine, a flicker of despair momentarily clouding her usually vibrant eyes. "There was never a choice," she said, her voice laced with a weariness that belied her youthful appearance. "It takes centuries for a vampire to gather the strength to share the curse with another. And once you've turned a human, you cannot turn another until you gather the energy for it again. I've waited all these years for you." Her voice dropped to a soft whisper against my lips. "Turning another is the most intimate act for a vampire. Blood for blood, a bond forged in the fires of passion. A contract etched into eternity. I wanted you to be my first—and last."

How could these monstrous pronouncements incite romantic feelings in me? The idea of sharing an eternity with her, bound by blood and desire, held a perverse appeal. Was I truly so susceptible to her charms, even knowing the darkness they masked?

'Damnation,' I whispered. "That's what you're offering me."

"Not damnation," she said. "But freedom. Freedom from the shackles of mortality, freedom to experience eternity by my side. All these years, I've been waiting. Waiting for someone who would make the choice willingly, someone who wouldn't be a victim, but a partner."

Her words tasted like ashes in my mouth, choking away any hint of affection. My trust in her was shattered, the pieces lying scattered beyond repair.

“Laura,” she pleaded. “Don't let fear and anger cloud what you feel. I know you still love me...please, say something.”

“I can't even look at you.”

Carmilla recoiled as though I had slapped her. I hoped the bite of my words did as much.

I knew my words deepened the chasm that had opened between us, and a part of me longed to reach out, to bridge the gap; but the other part, the rational part, recoiled. Yet her words resonated in a corner of my traitorous heart.

I still loved her.

The realization clawed me inside. The love for a woman who was both a monster and my everything.

“Just go,” I whispered.

The silence that followed was a living thing, a suffocating weight that settled around me as she disappeared into the shadows.

Chapter 10:

The sun bled a weak apology for light the next day, but Carmilla's absence cast a deeper shadow. She was gone, vanished like a wisp of smoke. My father and governesses bustled about in a worried flurry, convinced it was another sleepwalking episode.



I didn't have the heart to tell them the reason was me.

"Bloody hell," said my father. "On the day the general is supposed to arrive, no less."

"She'll reappear, monsieur." Madame Perrodon's voice was a practiced balm. "Remember how we searched the entire schloss only to find her later?"

"For now, the best thing to do is wait," said Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, her usual poise slightly ruffled. "In the meantime, we should prepare for the general's visit."

They busied themselves with preparations, a distraction for them. But not for me. Carmilla lingered in my mind like the smoky tendril of an extinguished flame.

I couldn't escape her. Her essence caught in my hair, in my clothes, in my skin. She had infiltrated every pore of my mind, weaving herself into the tapestry of my thoughts. She was everywhere, a weed that had burrowed into the fabric of my being.

I wanted to see her desperately. I needed something from her. Closure, at the very least after we had shared. I stole away to our secret spot.

The lake.

Carmilla stood there, behind the rose bushes, waiting for me. "I knew you would come." She cupped my cheek, her voice soft. "I'm so sorry for what I've done, Laura." The apology hung in the air, a fragile bridge attempting to connect the chasm of betrayal.

"If I could change who I am...what I am, I would. I was thrown into this life, and all the darkness that comes with it. Do you think I want to hunt? To feel the guilt that comes with it. I do it all to survive, just like you need water to live."

“I didn’t come here for an explanation,” I said. “I came here for closure. For truth. No more lies, Carmilla.”

“What do you wish to know?”

“These feelings...” I clutched my chest. “I cannot suffer under your thrall any longer. Please,” I begged her. “Release me from it.”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

“Darling,” she said sadly. “That is not my doing. I swear to you.”

“How can I trust you?”

“I’ll prove it to you. Pick those flowers.” She pointed to the verbena growing near the lake.

I picked the flowers and offered them to her, unsure of how this was supposed to prove anything. She stilled, taking a breath, then dipped her finger into the flower’s mouth. Her skin burned, turning mottled.

“Carmilla—what’s happening?”

She hissed in pain. “This is vervain. It makes us weak, hinders us from using our powers. I cannot thrall you under this. Now, ask me a question.”

“Did you thrall me to love you?”

“No,” she whispered. Blood trickled down her finger where the skin had burned.

I wrenched the flowers from her. A storm of emotions warred within me.

“This makes little difference, I know. How foolish I was.” Carmilla barked a hollow laugh and swiped her wounded hand at a rose bush. One of the roses fell to my feet. “Thinking you could ever love a vile creature like myself. A monster spawned from eternal night, forever cursed to wander in the shadows and plague humanity.”

"You're wrong," I said, my voice a whisper. I cradled the fallen flower in my hand, and a trail of scarlet dripped from my pricked finger. "My heart still belongs to you. Thorns and all, you are the rose I chose."

Carmilla's eyes softened. "Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood." Gently, she brought my finger to her mouth and sucked the blood away. "I love you."

"Come with me," I said, and we walked into the lake. The moon glinted against the water, a pale reflection of the life I once knew. Moonlight bathed us in a silvery glow, and the cool water enveloped us, a baptism of our bond forged under the watchful eye of the moon. We emerged from the water, hand in hand, and I felt reborn, revitalized by the shared experience of our moonlit baptism.

Her crimson lips parted and leaned in. There was no resisting the pull. I tilted my head upwards, meeting her lips in a kiss as natural as the sun sinking below the horizon.

"Laura."

I jerked my head at the strangled cry. Madame Perrodon stood at a distance, a hand over her mouth.

I recoiled. Carmilla shifted into the shadows, transforming into her monstrous form and quickly disappearing.

"Demon..." Madame Perrodon's voice cracked.

A cold dread settled over me. There was no turning back. No amount of explanation could erase the terror etched across Madame Perrodon's face.

My governess breathed hard, staring at the empty shadows where Carmilla had stood

a moment before. "To think I've nurtured a viper in my bosom. Two of them." Her gaze swept towards me. The condemnation and disappointment in her eyes was a searing brand.

"Please," I said, taking a tentative step forward. "Carmilla... she's not what you think. She's—"

"A monster," Madame Perrodon spat. "It is clear that this demon has possessed and perverted your mind. You need a priest. Exorcism."

The image of hooded figures chanting in Latin, holy water burning my skin, ripped through my thoughts. But it was the cold fire in Madame Perrodon's eyes that chilled me to the bone. A fire fueled by religious fanaticism and the burning desire to purge the "evil" from me.

I needed to explain, to make her understand the bond I shared with Carmilla, how I felt most myself when I was with her, how being apart from Carmilla felt like tearing a piece of my soul away. But the words wouldn't form; my tongue felt like lead.

Madame Perrodon grabbed my wrist, her grip tight. "You are fortunate that ours is a merciful God who forgives mortal sins. Recite the Act of Contrition, child. Ask the Lord to cleanse you."

"I don't need to be cleansed."

She slapped my face, hard. "You will do as the Rite of Penance instructs. Repentance is a meager offering on the Lord's altar after the transgressions you've committed."

"Falling in love isn't a sin."

Eyes blazing, Madame Perrodon twisted my arm behind my shoulder. A white-hot

bolt of pain lanced through me. I forced my lips to move.

“O my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because of thy just punishments, but most of all because they offend Thee, my God, who art all good and deserving of all my love. I firmly resolve with the help of Thy grace to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin.” Tears streamed down my face. “Amen.”

“Amen,” she said.

She propelled me forwards. The wind whipped my stinging cheek, carrying the echoes of my unspoken pleas into the air.

Chapter 11:

Back at the schloss, the general had already arrived. We were all settled neatly in the parlor after Madame Perrodon dragged me back from the lake. She had given me a rosary for penance, fifty Hail Mary’s the start to my punishment, while she conversed with my father downstairs. How much she told my father, I did not know, but it must’ve been enough because my father didn’t even look at me.

“Do not be cross with Laura,” the general spoke lowly. “I will still accept her, and you must, too.”

I curled my hands into my lap. The irony that the general was standing up for me in his own twisted way. I couldn’t bear to look at the man I was supposed to marry, the man who I felt nothing but loathing toward even before I met him.

“The fiend lures in innocents with her charms,” the general said. “Then she feast on their blood, an elixir that offers her a fleeting taste of life before plunging her deeper into darkness.” He closed his eyes. “Your late wife came from the House of Karnstein, no?”

My father stiffened. "A distant connection. What are you insinuating?"

“That she might’ve succumbed to her unfortunate fate simply based on her connection.

Blood calls to blood. Legend has it that vampires torment their living descendants...even the long-lost ones. What I mean to say, you cannot blame Laura. Your daughter has only been a victim in this. The she-demon thrallled her, a wicked spell that caused a lapse in judgment.”

“She didn’t thrall me,” I burst out. “I went willingly with Carmilla.”

“Carmilla.” He spat the name like it was a curse. “Millarca, Mircalla...masks for the same beast. A thousand faces, each a lie. To Bertha, she was Millarca. They met at a soiree. Bertha, my sweet, innocent girl, was captivated by her charm. And then...” His voice cracked, betraying the grief that simmered beneath his anger, a grief so raw it scraped against my soul.

"I'm sorry," I whispered. How could I explain that Carmilla wasn't some malicious entity, but simply...existing? Just as humans needed water, she needed blood.

"So am I. I won’t let what happened to Bertha won't happen to you."

“What do we do?” asked my father.

The general's response was a cold, clinical plan. Isolate me. My governesses would take turns watching me, preventing Carmilla from visiting. The general and my father would see the priest, then visit the Karnstein ruins.

Once again, the men in my life were making decisions that would dictate my fate, leaving me as a pawn on their chessboard.

My voice cracked a whisper. “What will you do once you reach the ruins?”



“We end it,” he said coldly. A murderous gleam in his eyes. “We sever the head from the serpent.”

The air in the room turned suffocating. The image of Carmilla's lifeless head rolling in the dust of those ruins filled my mind. A strangled sob escaped me.

“Forgive me.” The general's voice lost some of its edge. “These words aren't for a young woman to hear, especially my future wife.”

Bile rose in my throat, a rising tide of nausea threatening to spill over.

“Madame Perrodon,” my father called out. “Please escort Laura to her room, and keep watch.”

“Of course, sir,” she said as the men left.

I had to reach Carmilla, to warn her of the general and my father's plan. I would find a way, even if I had to tear through these walls with my bare hands. Her life hung in the balance, and I, the pawn on the chessboard, refused to play their game.

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Across the room, Madame Perrodon sat hunched over a quilt, her arthritic fingers working meticulously. From time to time, she'd cast a furtive glance in my direction.

I stared at the bible in my hands. Its words held no solace for me, offering only a hollow promise of redemption I no longer craved. I pretended to read while my mind scheme an escape.

My governesses kept vigil over me, their shifts changing like clockwork, ensuring Carmilla wouldn't show her face. They couldn't watch me every moment. Surely,

they needed sleep sometime. I focused on the window, on the gnarled branch that stretched out like a beckoning hand.

Evening crept in, and De Lafontaine took up her turn. An hour elapsed, and her rhythmic knitting slowed, her head nodding slightly. I waited until her snores filled the stillness.

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

I inched towards the window. My fingers brushed the cool glass. Just as I reached for the latch, a tug pulled at my sleeve. I turned around.

De Lafontaine stood there, looking frail and lost in her nightgown. "Laura," her voice was barely a whisper, "you shouldn't."

"Please," I pleaded, "If Carmilla dies, I don't know how I shall live."

"You love her, don't you?"

Shakily, I nodded.

A melancholic smile touched her lips. "I fell in love once. A few years ago, before I became a governess. We were kindred spirits. I always thought we'd be together, but an arranged marriage tore us apart. She married a man for her family, and I became a governess. Not a day goes by that I don't think about how differently life could have been if we had both been braver."

She took my hand. "Warn her, Laura. Be braver than I was."

"Thank you," I whispered.

She pulled me into her arms. It was a long embrace, almost as if she knew it might be the last. Stepping back, she gave me a resolute nod. "Go now, child. May fate be kinder to you than it was to me."

Pulling away, I took one last look at my governess, her face etched with regret and

understanding. With her tear-stained confession echoing in my heart, I clambered out the window. The gnarled branch awaited, offering a precarious path to freedom - and perhaps, redemption.

## Chapter 12:

I stood dwarfed by the ruins, their immensity pressing down on me like a suffocating weight. Each crumbling archway seemed a gaping maw, poised to devour me whole. A whisper of something ancient and terrible stirred within their decaying stones. The air hung thick with the scent of damp earth and something else, something primal and unsettling.

I tore through the desolate halls of Karnstein, my feet echoing.  
“Carmilla...Carmilla!”

Each crumbling archway, each shadowed alcove, fueled my growing panic. And then a flicker of movement in the distance.

Carmilla.

Relief flooded me, a wave so powerful it briefly stole my breath. I surged forward, the rough flagstones protesting beneath my pounding feet. I threw my arms around Carmilla in a desperate embrace. The familiar scent of jasmine and something deeper, wilder, washed over me, an anchor in the storm of fear.

"What are you doing here?" Carmilla's voice, a low whisper.

"It's not safe here anymore," I breathed out, the words tumbling over each other in haste. "They're coming. The general...my father...they want to kill you. We have to leave. Now, before it's too late."

A heavy silence descended upon us, broken only by the ragged gasps of my breath. Then, a sound that sent a jolt of terror through me. The thud of heavy boots echoing off the crumbling stones. Carmilla stiffened in my arms, her voice dropping to a venomous hiss.

"Damn them," she cursed.

General Spieldorf and my father burst into the chambers.

"Get away from her!" The General's voice was a thunderclap in the cavernous ruins.

I froze. Moonlight cast flickering shadows that danced across Carmilla's shifting form. Smoke and darkness swirled around her, devouring what little light there was. The shadows coalesced into a thing born from nightmares, a grotesque outline of a monstrous feline. Its eyes burned with an unholy light, the same spark of fury I had often seen flare in Carmilla's eyes.

The creature snarled at the general.

"I'll put an end to you, you miserable beast." The man brandished his sword, the polished metal glinting momentarily in the moonlight before being swallowed by the swirling darkness that surrounded Carmilla.

I started toward her, and a vise-like grip took hold of my arms, pinning them behind my shoulders. I thrashed against my father's grasp, a wild animal trapped in a cage.

"It's for your own good, Laura."

"Carmilla, run!"

Carmilla wore a smile as sharp as a broken shard of glass. Her monstrous cat-like

form lunged for the general, unleashing the fury of a goddess scorned. Her attacks came like bolts of lightning, sudden and sharp. The General moved with surprising agility despite his age. He parried Carmilla's lunges, the clang of metal echoing through the ruins. Carmilla staggered, her foot catching on a loose stone. She quickly recovered, but not fast enough. The general landed a glancing blow on Carmilla.

“Don’t hurt Carmilla,” I pleaded. “Please.”

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*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

He lunged again, his sword flashing like a shard of broken moonlight as it arced through the air towards Carmilla. The blade struck Carmilla, and she hissed a cry of pain.

“Carmilla!”

My father's grip tightened on my arms like a steel vise. “Don’t watch what happens next.”

The General lunged, and this time Carmilla barely dodged his blade, diving just in time as it tore through the air where her head had been.

I kicked my leg backwards until the grip on my arms were no more. I launched myself into the fray.

The general thrust his sword at Carmilla, and a surge of adrenaline propelled me forward. I intercepted them, between the shouts and clashing steel. The general’s face contorted with a hideous mixture of fear and righteousness as he lunged at Carmilla. My world narrowed, focused on the gleaming point of the general's sword arcing towards Carmilla. I pushed her out of the way.

Time seemed to warp, stretching and compressing in a single, agonizing instant. A blow landed, searing pain lancing through me. A shout ripped from my throat. I stumbled back, a growing crimson stain blooming across the pale fabric of my dress. The world tilted.

“Laura!” My father’s voice, a distant echo in the storm.

Carmilla's scream pierced the air. She was like a vengeful angel, a goddess scorned, witnessing the desecration of her temple. A lover enraged. In that moment, she wasn't just beautiful, she was a force of nature – a tempest of grief, a whirlwind of teeth and fury.

Summoning all her strength, she lashed out at the general with claws and struck him. His sword dropped to the floor before he did.

“Blast, finish it.” he hissed.

My father reluctantly took up the general's sword. “Keep away from her, you bloody fiend.”

Carmilla snarled at him and swiped the sword out of his hand. She bared her fangs and bit him. He clutched his shoulder, staggering back.

She swooped me into her arms, and the scenery changed, like there had been a lapse in time. I felt like I was fading in and out of consciousness.

“Drink,” Carmilla said, pressing her wrist to my mouth.

I bit down and drank. The world dissolved into a blur of light and dark. Something shifted within me, like a coiled spring just released. The world seemed to tilt on its axis. The ruins, Carmilla – all blurred at the edges. A new hunger stirred within me. It was a nascent hunger, its tongue tentatively exploring the unfamiliar yearning that bloomed within me.

My fingers held her wrist tighter.

“That's it,” she said softly.



A chill seeped into my veins, warring with the white-hot fire consuming my insides. My vision tunneled, the world shrinking to a pinprick focused on Carmilla's frantic gaze. The air grew thick and metallic, every breath a struggle. I dug into her skin, desperate for an anchor in the swirling chaos. My muscles spasmed and then I surrendered, going slack. Darkness crept at the edges of my vision, a welcome oblivion.

### Chapter 13:

The world blurred in and out of focus. Disoriented, I tried to sit up, but a dull ache throbbed in my skull, pinning me to the floor. Where was I?

“Are you awake, love?”

Moonlight spilled through the stained glass. Small specks danced in the silver beams. I stirred, taking in a thousand candles flickering around me, ancient stone walls, an altar, and then Carmilla knelt before me.

“The chapel of the Karnstein ruins,” she said, anticipating my question. She helped me sit up. “I brought you here after that horrible mess.”

I stared at my gown, my torn, bloodstained dress replaced with antique lace.

“What...what happened?”

She let out a humorless laugh. “The beasts fled with their tail between their legs.”

“They’ll be back, you know. They’ll come hunting for you with the villagers and their pitched forks.”

A fierce glint flickered in Carmilla’s eyes. “Let them come. They won’t find us.”

“We’re leaving?”

*Source Creation Date: July 12, 2025, 5:18 pm*

“Do you not want to? Think about it, darling. We can go anywhere, start anew with our lives. With each other.”

I closed my eyes, picturing sun-drenched meadows and a little cottage. “That would be nice...” A world beyond the pitchforks and torches, beyond whispers and condemnations. A new life, hand-in-hand with Carmilla.

"Then let us not waste time." Carmilla entwined her fingers with mine, her voice a seductive whisper. "The world is waiting for us."

She rose, her raven hair cascading down in rivulets. Carmilla wore the same ivory lace gown as I, long and moon-colored. She led me in front of the altar.

“Did you know?” she said. "Kissing was an ancient Roman tradition to sign a contract."

“Then, perhaps we should sign a contract,” I said.

“Yes,” she said, and her lips touched my cheek, soft and light. “The ancient Romans had three types of kisses. That was osculum.” She moved to my lips. “This is basium.” A lingering close-lipped kiss, the touch a drop of ice on a burning ember. “And the third...”

I shivered. “Yes?”

”Savolium.”

Her lips met mine again, like pressed flowers in an old book first. Her mouth parted and her tongue stroked me, winding it around mine. I was drowning, drowning in her essence. Her taste coated my mouth. Bittersweet. I craved more of it. An eternity of it.

From the altar, she picked up a silver goblet, its surface reflecting the candles. Inside, a crimson liquid shimmered, and pang clawed through my stomach. Carmilla tilted the goblet, offering it to me first. I brought the cup to my lips, the cold metal biting into my skin. The liquid, metallic and sweet, flooded my senses.

As I lowered the goblet, I saw Carmilla take a deep draught, her crimson lips staining the silver. Our eyes met again, understanding flickering within them. This wasn't just a vow, it was a binding. A pledge whispered in moonlight, sealed with us.

We didn't need a priest, or witnesses. We had each other, and the weight of eternity stretching before us.

The kiss that followed was a mutual surrender. In that moonlit embrace, a new chapter in our story unfolded, one written not in ink, but in blood.

In love.

The End?