

CARMILLA

A play

written by David MacDowell Blue

Based on the novella "Carmilla" (1872)

by Joseph Sheridan LeFanu

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

(5f, 4m)

LAURA FONTAINE	Intelligent young woman raised in isolation with her father. (19-26)
CAPTAIN MARTIN	Polite, determined attorney with the British Army in the wake of WWII.* (30s-50s)
FONTAINE	Comfortable, lame, has passive-aggressive relationship with Laura. (60s)
MADAME PERRADON	Governess. Business-like but with a strong romantic streak. (40s-70s)
CARMILLA	Very mysterious young woman of noble family. Hiding a great deal. (20s)
THE COUNTESS	Glamorous older woman. (40s-50s)
CARLSBERG	Wandering door-to-door salesman, charming but subservient. (50s-70s)
SPIELSDORF	Former army officer, increasingly ruthless and now furious with grief. (60s)
INGRID	Radio announcer in Gratz. (20s)

* It remains possible this character might be cast as female.

SETTING

Play takes place in a small apartment in the city of Gratz, Austria. During the course of the story, the apartment fills in and/or transforms into the area in and around an old mansion in the Austrian countryside.

TIME

The present in the play is 1945, in the months after the end of World War II. Flashbacks go back to the summer of 1938.

The play is intended to play with no intermission.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Ahnenerbe = AH-nen-AIR-beh (the last syllable is breathed)

Krystalnacht = kriss-tahl-NAHKT

Mein Kampf = mine kahmf

Jozef = YO-zeff

Styria = STEER-ee-ah

Upir = OO-peer

Strigoi = strih-GOY (the 'r' is trilled)

Berthe = BARE-teh

Perradon = PARE-ah-dawn (the last syllable is breathed)

Standartenfuhrer = stand-ART-en-FEUR-hur

Anschluss = AHN-shloose

Escutcheon = ess-KUTCH-yon

Lebensborn = LEE-benz-BORN

Vaugr = VAW-gur

(A one-bedroom apartment in the Austrian city of Gratz, Austria, 1945. Late afternoon. We see LAURA, a young woman in her twenties, sitting and waiting and listening to music on the radio. We see the Radio announcer, INGRID.)

INGRID (Radio)

In local news British Occupational Forces re-issued a caution for all citizens of Gratz to refrain from travelling alone, as city services including law enforcement and emergency medical care, while much improved, have yet to return to prewar standards. Refugees from the surrounding countryside continue to put a drain on local resources. However a further 500 internees expect to be repatriated within the next ten days. Trains containing emergency rations continue to arrive daily and remain available at designated distribution centers.

(A knock on the door. LAURA turns the radio off then goes and allows CAPTAIN MARTIN into the apartment. He wears a British Army uniform and carries a large stack of files.)

MARTIN

Fraulein Fontaine?

LAURA

(Correcting him)

Miss Fontaine. You are Captain Martin?

MARTIN

Yes. Thanks for having me in your home. Honestly, standard procedure is to conduct interviews at Occupation headquarters. But things are rather crowded there right now as you can imagine. Another dreadful thing about war. Breakdown of law and order. You wouldn't believe how many young women have gone missing in the last month alone! Imagine how worse the situation must be in Vienna. Or Berlin! Anyway, I've gathered what documentation I could find. *(Looks around)* I'm sorry. Don't you have a roommate?

LAURA

She is gone.

MARTIN

As I was saying, been gathering what official documents I could about your case. Not as complete as we'd like of course. Bomber Command did its work at tad too well I'm afraid. However, I should like very much to hear the reason for your petition.

LAURA

Am I under suspicion, Captain?

MARTIN

Standard procedure. Just tell me what makes you want to leave Austria, the only home you've ever had after all.

LAURA

(A beat)

Would you like some tea?

MARTIN

What? No, thank you. But don't let me stop you.

LAURA

This is not a short story. I presume you know my father served in the first War?

MARTIN

Oh yes, his records are all quite intact back in England. Rather an advanced age for someone demanding to be sent to the front. One wonders why?

LAURA

I believe he felt swept up in the passions of those days. And he paid for it. Never walked again without the help of a cane. And afterwards, he felt he no longer fit at all into his own life.

MARTIN

How did he come to live abroad?

LAURA

When a student at Eton, my father became good friends with an Austrian of good family. They corresponded regularly, at least until 1914. This friend became an officer in the Imperial Army. After Versailles, they began writing to one another again. Eventually this friend invited my father to visit.

MARTIN

And your father stayed?

LAURA

He fell in love, with a woman half his age.

MARTIN

Your mother, presumably.

LAURA

She left so little mark on this world. Barely survived my birth more than a few months. The Colonel found a *schloss* that could be rented for a pittance. Do you know this word? Schloss?

MARTIN

Castle isn't it?

LAURA

The word *chateau* conveys its nature a little better. I think it must have once been a castle, but most of the structure had gone to ruin. One whole wing was nothing but foundation. Mostly it was a small mansion in the middle of nowhere. Not a village for miles and miles.

MARTIN

You mentioned a Colonel. Would this be your father's friend from Eton? Colonel Spielsdorf.

LAURA

He and my mother were cousins, distant ones.

MARTIN

And he himself had a home nearby.

LAURA

Relatively. A hunting lodge about ten miles distance. Our schloss was quite isolated. Mountains on all sides. Forests everywhere one looked. We had a lake, with actual swans. Of course what we didn't have were any other children. My father and I and a French governess named Madame Perradon, we lived almost by ourselves save for a handful of servants and the very occasional visitor.

*(Enter FONTAINE and MADAME
PERRADON. Lights change to*

suggest evening outdoors, under a full moon in the year 1938.)

MADAME PERRADON

Look at the castle windows! How the moon shines against them! Nights like this summon all kinds of strange powers and manifestations.

FONTAINE

(Laughing)
Oh really?

MADAME PERRADON

True! Years ago, a cousin of mine travelled to America, to the Caribbean Islands, and foolishly fell asleep out on deck of his freighter, on just such a night as this. He dreamed, my cousin. Dreamed about a horrible hag-like woman who grabbed at his face with her terrible claws! He woke screaming! And that wasn't the worst of it. From that night on, his face was never the same. The side where the Hag had grabbed at him was distorted! Twisted! Forever!

FONTAINE

In other words, he had a stroke.

(He notices LAURA as she approaches, and his manner changes.)

Silence now. You'll frighten Laura with all these strange tales.

LAURA

I am not frightened Papa.

FONTAINE

(dismissive)
Hush.

MARTIN

Were you lonely?

LAURA

(to MARTIN)
I didn't think in those terms. I had my books, my music, Madame Perradon, my father and the estate which as I've said was beautiful. Sometimes I got to chat with the locals, farmers mostly, but not often. Honestly, they were afraid of the place. Insisted it was haunted.

FONTAINE

I have got into one of my moping moods tonight.

(Quoting)

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

LAURA

(finishing the quote)

"What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
I am to learn.
And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
That I have much ado to know myself." The Merchant of Venice.

MADAME PERRADON

Brava!

FONTAINE

Yes, well—well done.

MADAME PERRADON

I think Monsieur will cheer up once our guests arrive!

LAURA

(to MARTIN)

Colonel Spielsdorf and his niece. They were to come visit.

MARTIN

One moment. I don't recall reading that Spielsdorf had a niece.
Wasn't he an only child?

LAURA

Everyone just called her that. I never met Berthe myself but
I'd seen pictures. A little younger than myself. Very pretty.
Well, of course she would be.

MARTIN

(recognizing the name)

Berthe? Berthe Rheinfeldt?

LAURA

But this is all prologue.

MARTIN

To what?

MADAME PERRADON

(Pointing)
Monsieur! Do you see?

FONTAINE

What? Oh my!

MADAME PERRADON

That car, it turns much too fast! Much much too fast!

LAURA

They will crash! Papa!

*(All three react as a car crash
does indeed happen off-stage.)*

MADAME PERRADON

Mon dieu! Oh mon dieu!

FONTAINE

Laura! Remain where you are!

LAURA

(Stopping)
But, Papa— Someone might be hurt.

FONTAINE

Madame Perradon! Fetch the servants!

(MADAME PERRADON exits.)

LAURA

(to MARTIN)
The accident proved not at all serious. The car itself needed only to be pulled from the ditch. The work of thirty minutes or so. I tried to approach and watch but Papa forbade that. Please try and understand Captain, trivial as it may seem, this accident was the most exciting event any of us had known. Well, that I had known. No doubt such seems extraordinary to you. Given all that has happened since, I will confess that to be my own opinion now.

COUNTESS

(Off stage)
Help me! Please! My child, my child!

(The COUNTESS, an older woman in elegant clothes and wearing a veiled hat, enters.)

COUNTESS

Please—my child. She remains in the automobile. Help her!

FONTAINE

My dear lady, help is even now on its way! Please, calm yourself. Come, sit down and rest.

COUNTESS

If only you knew my mission, you would understand. To lose an hour is to perhaps lose all. Yet my child! She cannot come with me! Not now!

LAURA

(To MARTIN)

She said she was a Countess, traveling on some terribly serious business of state. That's why she refused to give her name.

MARTIN

And her child? The one in the car?

LAURA

A daughter.

COUNTESS

This forces upon me to make a desperate plea, sir. To beg of you a tremendous favor. My daughter, she cannot go on! Not with her health already in such a fragile state, recovering from a long illness. Now the shock of this accident! I implore you, good sir—allow her to stay with you. For one month only! By that time I shall be able to return. More, I shall be in a position to reward you lavishly for such a great kindness.

LAURA

(To FONTAINE)

Oh please, Papa! Do let her stay!

FONTAINE

(To LAURA)

Quiet now.

COUNTESS

Herr Fontaine, I would never ask this if only some hotel or even village inn lay anywhere near. But as we both know, there is nothing. In you, good sir, lies my last and only hope.

FONTAINE

(To COUNTESS)

Well, I suppose...my objections, that is, any objections I might have...well...no matter. Yes. Your daughter shall be my honored guest.

COUNTESS

You shall not have cause to regret this. I have long known you as a scholar sir. A pleasure to have my belief you are also a gentleman so admirably confirmed.

FONTAINE

Do we know each other Madame? I am sorry, Countess?

COUNTESS

You do not remember me? Perhaps that is just as well. But soon, soon you shall know all. My word of honor upon that. But for now, I must leave. Until then, please understand—my child is of very delicate health, weak even. Yet for all that she is prone to no kind of seizure, you understand? She is in fact entirely sane. She will, I fear, reveal no more than I myself have done—for she also understand what is at stake. Again, I thank you. And you shall see me soon. (*Exits*)

MARTIN

And the daughter's name?

LAURA

Carmilla.

(*Enter MADAME PERRADON.*)

MADAME PERRADON

Oh, has the young lady's mother gone?

FONTAINE

Indeed.

MADAME PERRADON

Did you notice her driver?

FONTAINE

I don't think I even saw him. Laura?

LAURA

No, sir.

FONTAINE

No, of course not.

MADAME PERRADON

Such a strange person! I mean, strange to look upon. Small, almost a dwarf really, and very dark of skin. Like an old dried up apple. He had such long, dirty nails as well.

MARTIN

(Reading from one of his files.)

"A long narrow nose, short forehead, a tuft of beard growing from a chin that was only barely there, and ears that looked almost pointed in the moonlight." Spielsdorf took quite a long affidavit from your Madame Perradon.

MADAME PERRADON

But on the other hand, such a beautiful car. Truly! Long and black with a hood ornament that looked like a silver griffin.

FONTAINE

Fantastical creatures do attract your attention, Madame.

LAURA

And the Countess' daughter?

FONTAINE

Yes how is the young lady?

MADAME PERRADON

Oh exhausted, quite exhausted as you can imagine. The poor dear seemed distracted at first, asking where she was, demanding to see her mother. Just a tiny bit delirious poor thing.

FONTAINE

I shall go speak with her.

LAURA

May I please come Papa?

FONTAINE

Not yet. Give the young lady some time to be settled. Patience. You hear me?

LAURA

As you wish.

*(Exit FONTAINE and MADAME
PERRADON. Lights change.)*

MARTIN

(much of this is news to him)
Do you mind if I smoke?

LAURA

Not at all.

*(During much of what follows,
Martin periodically smokes a
cigarette or pipe.)*

MARTIN

Will your roommate be back soon? *(Silence.)* I'm astonished your father accepted a total stranger into his home.

LAURA

What are these files?

MARTIN

Official reports

LAURA

Then you already know what happened. Or at least what the Colonel said happened.

MARTIN

Continue, please.

LAURA

The Colonel is not long for the world, correct? That is what I've heard.

MARTIN

So his doctors say.

LAURA

My father did not allow me to see our guest until late the next morning. Almost noon. I did not at all know what to expect. You are quite right.

MARTIN

Right? About what?

(Lights shift. CARMILLA enters. LAURA turns, and both register shock!)

LAURA

Impossible!

CARMILLA

(Entranced)

How wonderful! Twelve years ago I saw your face in a dream! It has haunted me ever since! Beyond doubt, you, even as you are now. Hair of gold, eyes of sapphire. How can this be?

LAURA

One night when I was seven years old, I woke up and saw a beautiful stranger standing beside my bed. That stranger, she had your face!

CARMILLA

The girl I saw was in a room I'd never been, an empty place with only a single candelabra for light. At first I hid under the bed, then I heard someone crying. When I looked, it was you—Seated in a large chair, tears falling down your face. So unhappy.

LAURA

You smiled at me. Although I was a child and you an adult.

CARMILLA

So I climbed into your lap.

LAURA

You—or she—slipped under the covers. She hugged me.

CARMILLA

I think then I fell asleep.

LAURA

She kissed me. I screamed. Because I felt pain! As if someone drove a needle into my breast above the heart.

CARMILLA

And I woke, full of sorrow for that beautiful stranger.

LAURA

My father heard my screams and came to my room. With him came Madame Perradon and others. They did not, would not leave me again the whole night. Father summoned a doctor for me the next day.

CARMILLA

The next evening I longed to experience the same dream once more. But I never again saw my sad and beautiful stranger.

LAURA

For years I slept with my light on.

CARMILLA

Until this moment.

LAURA

My father—

CARMILLA

What?

LAURA

He says I should not tire you. Especially so soon after your accident.

CARMILLA

I should not mind if you did. Stay with me? What is your name?

LAURA

Laura.

(Lights shift in some way to suggest a passage of time.)

MARTIN

When precisely was this?

LAURA

June 14, in the year of our Lord 1938.

MARTIN

You're quite sure?

LAURA

Have you noticed one can be thirsty or hungry and remain totally unaware of that fact? Until one smells food. Or sips a little water?

(CARMILLA turns the radio on.)

INGRID (RADIO)

(cont'd)

...as part of the Greater German Reich, the following decree shall have the force of law beginning on June 21, 1938: The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor. This defines precisely what shall constitute racial pollution and blood defilement.

(Carmilla turns the dial to a different station. A tango plays on the radio. She goes up to Laura.)

CARMILLA

You lead.

LAURA

I don't know how. Truly.

CARMILLA

Come. Hold your hand up so, and let mine rest within it. Even so. The other hand goes below and against my shoulder or back, or sometimes my waist even.

LAURA

The steps.

CARMILLA

Lift one foot, cross in like this. Yes.

LAURA

What next?

CARMILLA

Do it again, and I follow. Slowly. Yes! No need to rush. The tango is meant to be slow, to be savored. And then we turn the other way!

(As they dance, Laura experiments. She enjoys this, and as the dance becomes more flirtatious, her pleasure grows. Their dancing becomes increasingly intimate.)

CARMILLA

Brava!

LAURA

Would you like to lead for a time?

CARMILLA

No. You!

LAURA

It really isn't very much like a waltz is it? Something like, but not.

CARMILLA

Have you waltzed much?

LAURA

Papa taught me. Then I sometimes danced with Madame Perradon. Not recently.

CARMILLA

Let me show you something. Put your right leg behind me, and hold on to my waist. Firm! Yes - now I'll lean back and you lean forward ... thus. *(They dip.)* And again. Don't let me fall?

LAURA

I won't.

CARMILLA

I think, I might almost be afraid of you.

FONTAINE

(Off)
All very pretty, no doubt, but also rather foreign.

(Enter FONTAINE with MADAME. The two girls immediately part and LAURA turns the radio off.)

FONTAINE

Ah, my dear young guest. Good morning. Or should I say good afternoon?

CARMILLA

My apologies, sir. The fact is, I've always slept very late in the day, and since I was ill this has only grown more true.

FONTAINE

I understand. But kindly refrain from playing the radio quite so loud, please.

LAURA

(To MARTIN)

She hardly ever rose before noon. Never before eleven. Her appetite proved to be that of a bird. Each day she drank a little chocolate, nibbled at her food, walked with me in the grounds or played cards. Sometimes we listened to music together. Sometimes.

MARTIN

What did your father say, when he learned Carmilla had been the girl of your childhood nightmare?

FONTAINE

And I think I must insist for the time being neither one of you leave the estate proper.

LAURA

Papa? Whatever for?

FONTAINE

Let us simply say, I prefer a policy of caution. Some local girls have gone ill. Two even died, with a third likely any moment. Obviously some disease or other and I prefer you both avoid any chance of contagion.

MADAME PERRADON

The peasants tell the most amazing stories.

FONTAINE

Yes, well they do, don't they?

MADAME PERRADON

They say a ghost is stalking the local girls, entering into their homes at night and strangling them!

FONTAINE

Madame Perradon, please.

MADAME PERRADON

But it is true! Each one of them tells the same story, about a pale white woman who comes and lies across their chest, seems to draw the life out of their bodies!

FONTAINE

(Impatient)

Of course they say that. Quite simple, really. The first girl began to feel sick and her worry naturally enough gave rise to a dream, a nightmare. And once she mentioned that dream to others the power of suggestion did the rest.

CARMILLA

I shall obey your instructions to the letter, Herr Fontaine.

FONTAINE

Thank you, my dear. Laura, I trust you shall follow our delightful guest's lead?

LAURA

Of course Papa.

MARTIN

Did you ever talk about current events? What had just happened to Austria for example?

LAURA

Do you think there will be another war?

MADAME PERRADON

I so hope not.

FONTAINE

Impossible. Circumstances preclude any such thing.

CARMILLA

There is always another war. Always.

LAURA

How very sad.

FONTAINE

You lack experience of the world, young lady. Believe however those who do possess such. Now if you will excuse me? I have a few letters to write, and then, a nap. Yes.

(FONTAINE exits. MADAME PERRADON follows.)

MARTIN

(polite, insistent)

I am curious, Miss Fontaine - Had either of you read Mein Kampf?

LAURA

Newspapers related events, but they might as well have happened upon the moon.

MARTIN

The country you called home had just ceased to exist, absorbed into another nation.

LAURA

No.

MARTIN

Forgive me, Miss Fontaine, but—

LAURA

Our world, Captain, was a dozen or so acres surrounded by forest. The remains of a castle where we lived. Local farmers who sold things to us and sometimes their children came and did jobs. Reluctantly.

(The lights shift to suggest out of doors, day. LAURA goes to CARMILLA. They resume a conversation.)

CARMILLA

To the west. I can say no more.

LAURA

But what about your family's coat of arms? Is there an animal on the shield? An owl? Some kind of cat? An eagle? What about the colors - surely you can share that? Red? Gold? Silver? Blue? Not even one?

CARMILLA

Dearest, think me not cruel.

LAURA

Not even your last name!

CARMILLA

If your dear heart is wounded, my wild heart bleeds with yours.

LAURA

Easy to say. Too easy.

CARMILLA

A time shall come when you shall learn all. Trust me?

LAURA

(Yes)

Look here. I call it the Grand Old Tree.

CARMILLA

Do you?

LAURA

I think it must be older than the schloss itself, by many years.

CARMILLA

Yes. Very many.

LAURA

When I was younger, this was my favorite place for Madame Perradon to give my lessons. Beneath these ancient branches, so close to the old road. The road that brought you here to us.

CARMILLA

Such a tree, might make a fine place for a birthday party don't you think? Chinese lanterns hanging from the boughs. A string quartet over there. A table laid out here.

LAURA

Near the line of lime trees?

CARMILLA

Do you like the idea?

LAURA

With fireworks after sunset?

CARMILLA

Exactly right! Perfect!

LAURA

When shall we have it then? There won't be very many guests, just Papa and Madame and myself. Hopefully the Colonel and Berthe will be here by then.

CARMILLA

Excuse me?

LAURA

But it all depends. When shall we have it? The party to celebrate your birthday?

CARMILLA

But--what of your birthday? When is that?

MADAME

(off)

Laura! Laura?

MARTIN

I don't mean to be rude, Miss Fontaine, but--

(Enter MADAME, and with her a shabbily dressed PEDDLER with a smile, a large suitcase and on the sleeve of his coat is a makeshift Nazi armband.)

MADAME PERRADON

Laura, look who has come!

PEDDLER

An honor, as ever, good Miss.

LAURA

(to MARTIN)

He was a peddler, not quite a door-to-door salesman but more of a gypsy. Or something like that. He roamed the countryside all round selling trinkets, toys, all kinds of knick-knacks, as well as cutlery, fabrics, herbs.

MADAME PERRADON

Your father is having his nap.

LAURA

(To MADAME)

Oh good!

PEDDLER

No need to trouble the distinguished professor. And may I welcome your lovely guest? How good to see Miss Laura with a friend her own age! Such a good thing, that. Such a very good thing.

CARMILLA

Thank you.

MADAME PERRADON

This is Miss Carmilla.

PEDDLER

An honor!

MADAME PERRADON

And what have brought us today?

PEDDLER

Something perfectly suited to the times!

LAURA

What is that you're wearing? On your arm?

PEDDLER

Something else suited to the times. Tis a hard world young miss. Full of dangers. A family I know, used to know...never mind. We must do what we can. Which is why I have...this! Behold! A charm most perfectly designed to protect the innocent and pure of heart. You will have heard, yes, about how the region is yet again beset by a vampire?

LAURA

I don't think I know this word.

MADAME PERRADON

The farmers, they talk of little else. Remember—the ghost girl who preys on young women?

PEDDLER

Not a ghost! Or at least, not quite a ghost. You see, Miss Laura, Miss Carmilla, a vampire is a soul damned to walk the earth without peace -- doomed to survive by drinking blood.

They never die. But they do kill. Over and over and over again. No one is safe—unless they bear some kind of protection! Hence my charms!

LAURA

What is in them?

PEDDLER

Herbs that ward off the monster. Tiny scrolls bearing holy prayers. All tied up with a ribbon blessed by a priest.

CARMILLA

I want one. (*Brings out some coins*) Is this enough for two?

PEDDLER

Indeed yes!

CARMILLA

You must have such a charm, Laura.

LAURA

Papa would not approve.

CARMILLA

Then do not tell him.

MADAME PERRADON

Wear it at night when you go to bed. He'll never know.

CARMILLA

Please?

LAURA

(*after a pause, while all three watch her*)
Very well.

CARMILLA

Thank you.

PEDDLER

A wise choice, Miss Laura. Here, keep it beside you to ward away the hunger without end, the darkness that devours. And another for you, Miss Carmilla. Your kindness is as great as your wisdom but not if I may say so as great as your beauty. (*He stares at CARMILLA*) Do I - have we met?

CARMILLA

No.

PEDDLER

I am sorry, but my memory, it must be playing tricks on me. I was very young indeed then! Perhaps, yes perhaps it was your mother I saw. Or your grandmother even! It was long ago.

CARMILLA

How dare you.

PEDDLER

A thousand apologies -

CARMILLA

Do you know what would happen if my father heard you so speak to me? Flogging. That is how it would begin. Hour after hour, until no flesh remained from your back! Then he would release the dogs. My father always kept them hungry. Said it made them more keen for the hunt. My whole family would all take bets on how long your screams would last.

PEDDLER

I will go.

CARMILLA

Good!

PEDDLER

I apologize! Please! Forgive! I - I - I should have said nothing! I -

*(He exits, as fast as he can.
MADAME PERRADON, shocked,
follows.)*

LAURA

(to CARMILLA)

He meant no harm. Truly. He did not.

MARTIN

This peddler. What was his name?

LAURA

(to MARTIN)

Carlsberg. I think.

MARTIN

Common enough. Seems unlikely I could track him. If he even survived the war.

CARMILLA

I should not allow myself to lose control so. (*silence*) Laura?

LAURA

No harm. None at all.

CARMILLA

(Uncomfortable)

You wanted a hint of my home? Here, alas, you see one. This place is gentler than where I usually dwell. Gentler and kinder by far, where the impulses of my native country simply do not fit. Is it any wonder I am so pleased to visit this wonderful and alien land? How happy I am to walk in the company of she who to me is like onto an angel?

LAURA

Are you then some sort of devil?

(In the distance, the sound of people singing hymns, slowly growing more distinct.)

CARMILLA

(In pain)

What is that discordance?

LAURA

A funeral procession. Papa mentioned the daughter of one of the forest rangers had died.

CARMILLA

I hate funerals! It pierces my ears!

LAURA

She is the poor girl who fancied she saw a ghost.

CARMILLA

Everyone dies - and all are happier when they do!

(Silence, save for the singing of the hymns. CARMILLA moans.)

LAURA

I hope Papa is wrong and that no fever or plague is coming.

CARMILLA

Come close to me ... hold my hand? Please? I beg of you! Please! Please!

(LAURA hesitates then takes CARMILLA by the hand, who almost collapses in pain.)

CARMILLA

Press it hard. Hard! Harder!

LAURA

(To MARTIN)

She could hardly eat most food. Even allowing a maid to come into her room at night would be enough to prevent her falling asleep. She kept the door locked.

CARMILLA

Don't let go.

MARTIN

Delicate. Even, perhaps, an hysteric?

LAURA

Strangely fragile. I believe she hated that fact about herself.

CARMILLA

Never let me go?

LAURA

Sh.

(Enter FONTAINE, letter in hand.)

FONTAINE

Oh, good. I thought to find you here.

LAURA

Papa, Carmilla has had some kind of attack!

CARMILLA

It is passing. Please, do not worry yourself.

FONTAINE

But my dear...! We should fetch a doctor.

CARMILLA

Doctors have never done me any good. As I said, it is passing. Almost gone.

FONTAINE

Did something happen? A trigger of some kind?

LAURA

Nothing. No. Nothing at all.

FONTAINE

Well, if you are quite sure? I have had some news. Some bad news I'm afraid. From Spielsdorf.

LAURA

(To FONTAINE)

Are they delayed?

FONTAINE

Worse than that, I'm afraid. Young Berthe, she's dead. Weeks ago, it seems.

(He reads part of the letter aloud)

"I have lost my darling daughter, for as such I loved her. My heart's companion, she who was to have enjoyed the fruit of all my labors. During the last days of her illness I was unable to write, and in the horrible days since then I have been like onto a man possessed. For now, too late, I understand the fullness of what until now I only read on and did not believe. The fiend did all. My mission is clear. In two months hence maybe, you shall see me, if I live. Then I shall tell you all. Until then, pray for me." Such a tragedy. His only family in the whole world!

LAURA

Almost.

FONTAINE

By the by, he's no longer signing himself Colonel.

LAURA

He has been promoted? But isn't he retired?

