

FROM THE DESK OF LAURA —

Carmilla,

Wild Carmilla, strange Carmilla. More than ten years have lapsed since those months where you came to me and my father, and when the grave of Countess Mircalla opened. More than a decade since I spent my days with you and had you as my dearest companion, and when men slew and dismembered the undead corpse of the lady vampire.

When spring came, my papa could not have run from Styria with me in tow more hastily. He took me to Italy and I for the first time lived among “polite society”. I was put before young women and men like we were never near enough to do in our schloss. What a far cry it was from those rare visits with General Spieldorf’s daughter that still lay nestled with affection in my memory. I felt that I was almost never alone for the number of visits and walks and teas and meals that abruptly filled my daily schedule. This is what my papa wanted, I think, for me to be in company every hour and for that company to be bright and young and, most crucially, social. It was reminiscent of those years when I was young. When after that strange dream, which truthfully was my first meeting with you, nurses slept with me each night.

Had it been the Laura who received that odious letter detailing the death of the General’s daughter, I daresay my time in Italy would have been like the unlocked gates of paradise, for it fulfilled that most precious and long-tended hope of mine to be in the company of those my own age. But the Laura of these past many years is drastically a different creature.

You should have no worry of having left me unmarked. My recall of those months is perfect and I remember those days into weeks where you and I became mirrors of each other, I languid and senseless and you with sudden new vitality, with the clarity of still water. That lugubriousness has not evacuated my senses in these longer intervening years, and neither did it

see fit to vanish while I convalesced in Italy. I spent those weeks playing among my socialite peers as does a hummingbird in a gale; that is to say, quite exhausted and buffeted by the whims of those with stronger constitutions than mine, even in its unassailed height, ever was.

I suppose I am glad for the chance to see how my counterparts in the more exuberant parts of the continent live. But I know my papa was disappointed with the perseverance of my melancholic condition. He supposed that my being among innocence and vitality would have a sanative effect on that which wilted in my time under your spell. At mentions of you, he becomes skulky and imperious, marching around the castle. I rather think on some level he claims responsibility. After all, was it not *his* authority that granted you entrance to *his* house to loom against *his* daughter? My heart beats rebelliously towards this sentiment. I was just as, even more, fervent in welcoming you. The hours I spent gayly in your embraces were my own. Sitting with you in moonlit woods, hands tenderly around one another, these were my castles that I opened to you.

You touched me years before. Supernatural ability admitted you to my childhood bedroom. No one was duped into opening those doors. Had we all the charms and knowledge of now, I doubt they could have prevented that forgone intrusion.

And now I am like a reflection of you. Perhaps I only wear a reflection of myself overtop a version of you. Where once I awaited your awakening, now my papa, Madame and Mademoiselle, and the servants await mine. Now I can barely stir myself earlier than a lazing cat! By the grace of the Lord, my condition does not degrade, but I am conscious of an enduring enervation. In the months following the horrible events I dare not name in this letter, I had to be reminded constantly to eat. Do not think it was some fit of lonely tragedy that inspired this; I simply could not be relied on to recall the human condition which urges all creatures to eat! It

was as a chore slipping a maid's mind. The aches of hunger so rarely stung me, and only weakly. Mademoiselle was enlisted to remind me, so I may reconstruct the habit. My appetite has never returned, not fully, but now I eat a little for each meal without reminder. Rich foods can no longer tempt me. Only revulsion greets me there. I am sure you will be delighted to hear that I have adopted yet another of your habits, that of taking coffee and chocolate only as aromatics.

With the great mercy of heaven, none of your other... alimentary habits have infested me.

I imagine you reading this, impatient that all I have written is an account of my life without you. To my imagination, perhaps you are irate that I have not recalled you fondly or given you words of forgiveness. Do you think yourself in want of forgiveness?

Recall that last time we saw one another. Do it, with whatever force gave you that life beyond death, because I will not be the only one who carries this burdensome memory. You shared that last moment with me and you will share it again!

Now you will listen to *my* awful recall of that time. Cold stone carved for the long dead leered grotesque around me in that forsaken chapel. Countess Mircalla's story in the anguished voice of the General floated in the grimy air around me, miasmatic. And I then I heard *your* voice. Silence, solemnity, the hauntings of dilapidated history oppressed my soul, so the resonance of your voice soothed my soul deeply enough that I fancied the tenebrous growth brightened.

You walked into the ruin, peculiarity and charm playing on your lips. What luxuries and prizes would I noy cast aside to suspend that final moment! The shadows on your face, cold air making gooseflesh rise on my arms. In my heart, buried and sacred, no thing that remains on this the Lord's earth is half as precious to me as you! Even your memory makes my heart stampede. Each second of my life before and since you, for one more warm kiss by your ruby lips, where I

can feel your embrace against my skin. Agony blights my days now without them. And that was the last time I saw you. From then the General told my father that you were the damned Mircalla, and the Millarca that slew his daughter,

The only guilt that registers from my feelings for you is in sweet Bertha's name. My dear friend, my only companion for so many years. I wish you had not done that brutality to her. Perhaps if you had not, if your brutality only extended to me, we would still be together. Carmilla, I hope you feel anguish for that.

Papa sent me home after your dramatic escape, having Madame and Mademoiselle and all the maids watch me for each hour. I knew nothing, so my mind concocted dreadful images. My father and the General chasing you through the twilight Karnstein ruins; your face distorted into a hungry, monstrous mask; all those who knew and loved me murdering one another all those miles away.

How was I to decide who I wished safety for more desperately? My prayers were scattered and tearstained. My heart splintered into spears when my father returned in victorious mein. It was a natal betrayal but all I wanted was to run back to you.

An imperial document! A file left carelessly on my father's desk! That is how I learned what became of you! All my father saw fit to tell me was that I no longer needed to fear your predation. I only discovered, *weeks* later, that they found your body floating in its casket. To read the manner in which they desecrated your body—conveyed in such emotionless and triumphant affect—was as if that violence was visited on my heart.

Then I read about the vampire. Its godless creation. The constraints upon its name. The way it consumes its victims. How occasionally it husbands a particular victim.

I suppose for your treatment of me it would be more accurate to say 'wives'.

My temper is that of any well-mannered young lady of high breeding. That day, I screamed and raged and swore. My fists near splintered the door to your chambers when I forced my way in. My vision blurred with tears as I tore apart the linens and tapestries and paintings decorating that cursed room. The pillows we once lay against, I shredded into feathery clouds. I gouged my fingers into the mattress upon which you kissed my neck, and flung it from the bed with hysterical strength. Finally, I went to the window, with its elegant frame and pretty stained glass. Did you flee out that window each night? Did you use it to leave me and return to your gore-filled coffin?

Your answer does not matter. I shattered it all the same.

Why did you lie to me, Carmilla? Was the Laura of all those years ago too much of a child? Did you mistrust me? Perhaps you only wanted to touch me and kiss me and pierce my neck while I slept innocently. Who am I to assume your promises of affection and devotion beyond death meant anything more than more docile prey?

You heightened the pain of deception with the sting of presumption, Carmilla. You did not tell me what you planned to do to me, what you did do to me many times over! Never did you ask me! Not once did you ask my permission to enter my bedchambers and touch me, to put your mouth upon my neck and enter my skin. How many times did you break the seal of my body against the world? How much of me coursed through you by that last day, Carmilla? And why were you so foolish as to not ask me?

I would have said yes, my dear Carmilla! Carmilla, Millarca, Mircalla. I would have called you by whatever name pleased you. I would have called you beloved. Even the crime of death which followed you I would have forgiven. The murder of innocent Bertha—forgiven! Though it may have taken time, I would have eventually forgiven you for feeding upon my blood

and vitality without my consent. It may be that you lied when you said I must go with you, lovingly or with hate, into death, but I was honest when I agreed. Certainty is the rhythm of my heartbeat in this: I would not have let your nature part us.

My strange, languid, sporadic beloved. What you did was to be like two vying halves of a suitor. In the conflict, though, you left me with no betrothed. Did you think so little of me to fear that I would turn away from your kisses if I learned that they kept you fed? Through all these years, all that has managed to make my heart stir is your phantom step at my door. It is the hope that I might once again feel your scarlet kiss upon my breast. You have made me so like you, precious one, but in this adoration—this effervescent intoxication which seized each of my instincts and responsibilities and casts them size in fidelity to you—I am wholly myself.

Damn the words of that vile report. So many times have I awoken to the fading echo of steps outside my bedchamber, and in them I feel the spirit of you, Carmilla. My father, that general, that baron and all those men of government and science and religion may say you are gone from this earth. They swore with lionlike glory that you would never again haunt a living soul. Well, you haunt me, dearest. So either I am no longer living, or they are wrong. The fevered pounding of my heart at midnight thoughts of you begs the latter. My rushing blood begs the latter. And all of my form yearns for you, ceaselessly, day and night in agonizing renditions of courtship and betrothal. Will you deny me now, at the hour where I come to you, embodying full knowledge and consent, asking for you to requite what was already yours?

You came to me as a child and as a freshly-blossomed maid. Now I am a woman in my full majesty. I will find you, Carmilla, letting nothing impede me. Please, do not make me wait another decade to see you once more. I would hold you in my arms this very night.

All my love,

Laura

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#### Works Cited

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