

Carmilla



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHERIDAN LE FANU

In 1814, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu was born into a family of literate Irish and English Protestants in Dublin. Throughout his childhood, he and his family moved frequently around the country, and he largely educated himself by reading books from his father's library. He attended Trinity College in Dublin, originally studying law, but ultimately dropping it for journalism. He contributed to various magazines during this time, publishing his first horror story in 1838. He married Susanna Bennett in 1844 and they had four children together. However, in 1856 she began to suffer from extreme anxiety and neurosis, dying in 1858. This brought great grief to Le Fanu, who refused to write fiction again until his mother died three years later in 1861. Afterwards, he resumed writing and publishing fiction, becoming the editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*. He continued writing until his death from a heart attack in Dublin at the age of 58. Although Le Fanu experimented with many different genres throughout his lifetime, he was and remains best known for his Gothic horror and mystery novels.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Carmilla is set in Austria during the late 1800s, and Le Fanu clearly draws upon contemporary issues of the Victorian era. This was a time that was noteworthy for its social and industrial reform, and for the formation and rise of the middle class. This middle class, to which Laura and her father belong, began to revolutionize society, while also furthering the gap between the wealthy and the poor. Additionally, the Victorian period placed a strong emphasis on domestic morality, tackling the prominence of prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases, which led to a greater emphasis on female purity and chastity, making the female sexuality portrayed in *Carmilla* particularly noteworthy.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

While people have increasingly begun to recognize *Carmilla* and the works of Le Fanu for their own literary merit, the book is perhaps still best known for the work it inspired. *Carmilla* is widely regarded as one of the main sources of inspiration for the most famous work of vampire fiction, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, which was published 26 years after *Carmilla*. *Carmilla* was one of the first books to portray a female vampire, one of the only earlier such works being "The Dead Woman in Love," a short story by French writer Théophile Gautier featuring the

female vampire Clarimonde. The vampire is a trope that still figures prominently in contemporary literature, including works such as Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (who has listed *Carmilla* as one of her sources of inspiration) and young adult series such as *Twilight* and *The Vampire Diaries*, which feature both male and female vampires as romanticized and heroic figures.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Carmilla*
- **When Written:** 1871-72
- **Where Written:** Isle of Man
- **When Published:** 1871-72 as a magazine serial, then reprinted in Le Fanu's collection of short stories *In a Glass Darkly* in 1872
- **Literary Period:** Victorian
- **Genre:** Gothic novella
- **Setting:** Styria, Austria
- **Climax:** Laura, along with her father, listen to General Spielsdorf's story and realize the truth about Carmilla as they hunt her down.
- **Antagonist:** Carmilla
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Illustrations. When *Carmilla* was first published as a serial in the literary magazine *The Dark Blue*, it was accompanied by illustrations by David Henry Friston, who is known for creating the first illustrations for Sherlock Holmes. These illustrations do not appear in modern editions of the book.

Carmilla in College. *Carmilla* has inspired many modern adaptations, including a web series of the same name, which is the story of Laura and her college roommate Carmilla. This series, while only loosely adapted from the original, takes the homosexual undertones of the text and brings them front and center, as Laura and Carmilla become romantically involved despite Carmilla's taste for blood.



PLOT SUMMARY

Carmilla opens by informing the reader that the events of the story—recollections from a young woman about her experiences with a vampire—will be presented from the casebook of Doctor Hesselius. This young woman, whose name will later be revealed as Laura, describes her picturesque

childhood living in a manor in Styria, Austria with her widowed father and her governesses, Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine. She leads a life of isolation, with the nearest village located miles away. Despite her father's caring nature and her tendency to get her way with everything, Laura feels lonely without any friends her age for companionship.

Laura recalls an event that occurred when she was six years old which has left a distinct impression on her, even years later. She dreamt one night of a girl's face watching her and then crawling into bed with her. Having been sheltered and kept largely in ignorance of things such as ghost stories, this is the first time she can remember being truly afraid.

Some time after, Laura's father receives a letter from his friend General Spielsdorf, and Laura is disheartened to learn that the General's niece Bertha Rheinfeldt, who was meant to come visit them, has died. However, shortly afterwards, they witness a carriage crash from which an injured young girl and the girl's mother emerge. Laura's father speaks to the mother, who informs him that her journey is urgent and she must continue on even without her daughter. Laura's father offers to keep the girl in his care until her mother can return in three month's time.

Laura's father sends for a doctor to examine the young girl, Carmilla, while the governesses comment on her beauty. Laura herself is struck by Carmilla, and when she goes to check on her, she soon recognizes her as the girl from her **dream**. Carmilla remembers Laura as well, and admires Laura's own beauty. Laura takes this as a sign that they were meant to be friends.

Laura and Carmilla continue to draw closer during the course of her stay, although there are some things about Carmilla that deeply trouble Laura. Laura pushes Carmilla for information about her life, but Carmilla remains secretive. Laura is also confused by the strong affection Carmilla displays for her. Carmilla sometimes makes romantic advances and is overly affectionate to Laura, which makes Laura wonder how Carmilla could hold such intense emotions when they have not known each other for very long.

One day, Carmilla and Laura witness the funeral procession of a young girl out in the woods. Laura pays her respects from afar, but Carmilla refuses and, overhearing the funeral hymns, goes into a fit. This puzzles Laura, who has never heard Carmilla pray or discuss religion. Carmilla and Laura return home and buy **charms** from a hunchback to ward off the evil dreams and spirits that have been plaguing them both. They discuss the illness that has invaded the area, striking a series of young girls with the same symptoms, although no one can determine the cause.

One day, a delivery of paintings to the house includes one from 1698 depicting Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, who looks exactly

like Carmilla. Laura and her father are struck by the **portrait**, but Carmilla seems unimpressed and asks Laura to go for a walk in the moonlight. There, she comments on her love for Laura, which further embarrasses and frightens Laura. That night while lying in bed, Laura witnesses a large animal resembling a black cat in her bedroom, followed by a sharp stinging sensation in her breasts. She then notices a female figure at the foot of the bed. She is terrified, but unable to leave her locked room.

The next day, Laura recounts what happened to Carmilla and her governesses. Carmilla explains that she was also frightened, but she was protected by the charm they purchased from the hunchback. Laura begins to use her own charm, but she still grows progressively weaker. Not wanting to worry her father, she insists that nothing's wrong. After dreaming one night of Carmilla drenched in **blood**, Laura discovers that Carmilla has gone missing. They search all night, and finally find her the next morning. Laura's father offers a rational explanation for the cause of her actions, saying she was likely sleepwalking.

Laura is examined by Doctor Spielsberg, who speaks with her father about her illness. Laura's father tells her not to trouble herself about it, but she remains worried. They receive a letter from General Spielsdorf, who arrives at their house shortly after. He has been greatly affected by the death of his niece, and insists that they are too stubborn and set in their ways to believe the true cause of her death. They travel together to the ruins of the estates of Karnstein, leaving a note for Carmilla to follow behind them once she wakes. On the journey, the General tells the story of what happened to Bertha.

The General and his niece had attended a masquerade full of wealthy aristocrats, at which they had been the poorest people present. There, he engaged in conversation with a beautiful young woman whose face was hidden by a mask. The girl, called Millarca, instantly took a liking to Bertha, and vice versa. The General conversed with the girl's mother, who asked that Millarca be allowed to stay with them for three weeks while she went off on a secret journey of great importance. The General agreed, but Bertha soon fell ill, and, listening, Laura recognizes the same symptoms in herself, and realizes that Millarca's secretive and private behavior resembles that of Carmilla.

They journey onward towards the ruins and encounter an old woodman who tells them how the village was attacked by vampires and fell to ruins. He informs them that Mircalla's tomb was moved by the hero who vanquished these vampires. After he departs, the General finishes his story. He recalls how he sent for a physician from Gratz to examine his niece, who told him he suspected Bertha had been bitten by a vampire. The General was skeptical of the existence of the supernatural and hesitant to believe the idea, but he decided to act out of desperation to save his niece. He hid in Bertha's room and watched as a large black creature crawled into her bed. When

he attacked, the creature took the form of Millarca and fled, never to be seen again. Bertha died immediately after. He has since vowed to find the creature responsible for her death and destroy it.

His story completed, the group enters a ruined chapel, where Carmilla appears. The General, shocked, moves to attack her, but she runs away. The General reveals that Carmilla and Millarca are the same, and that she is actually the Countess Mircalla, their names all anagrams of each other. At that moment, Baron Vordenburg, a descendant of the hero who defeated the vampires, arrives. Using his extensive knowledge of the creature, they are able to locate Mircalla's tomb.

Laura and her father return home, picking up a priest along the way. The priest performs rites, and Laura's symptoms disappear. The next day, the General and Laura's father open Mircalla's grave and, upon seeing that her body is bloodsoaked and faintly breathing, they realize the truth behind the vampire myth. The men drive a stake through her heart and then burn her body. Although Laura was not present for this, she describes the scene from a written report.

With Carmilla defeated, the territory is free from vampires and Laura recovers from her illness. However, she still strongly feels the ramifications of her experiences with Carmilla. She journeys with her father around Italy for a year, but she continues to see images of Carmilla as both the friend she believed her to be and the monster she really was. Despite her father's best efforts and although the threat of the vampire is gone, Laura feels the effects of her encounters with Carmilla for the rest of her life.

Laura, since she believes that true friends should be honest and open with one another. After repeated **dreams** of nighttime visitations, Laura begins to fall ill, and a visit from her father's friend General Spielsdorf reveals that the source of the illness is bites from Carmilla, who is a vampire from an extinct aristocratic family. Though the men vanquish Carmilla and Laura is mostly restored to health, her lingering illness and her new ability to contemplate darker aspects of life show that Carmilla's companionship had a lasting influence in ways that Laura does not wholly resent.

Carmilla – Carmilla, also known as Mircalla and Millarca, is the story's eponymous antagonist. A vampire from an old aristocratic family, she appears eternally as a beautiful young woman and preys on vulnerable young women to whom she is sexually attracted. Carmilla uses her beauty and youth to deceive those around her, and as a result they often fail to see her true nature until it's too late. This is the case when Carmilla comes to prey on the protagonist, Laura, by moving into Laura's family home after a carriage accident. Carmilla grows close to Laura, taking advantage of her loneliness and naivety and making sexual advances on Laura that Laura somewhat reciprocates. However, Laura always feels a mixture of attraction and fear towards Carmilla, as Carmilla will reveal nothing about her past, she has strange reactions to hearing hymns, and she can be uncomfortably affectionate, making Laura wonder how Carmilla can have such strong emotions after only knowing Laura for a short time. Laura's fear is well-founded, as Carmilla is secretly visiting Laura's bedroom at night to bite her, which is slowly weakening Laura and would have eventually killed her if General Spielsdorf, the father of one of Carmilla's previous victims, hadn't intervened. While there are moments in the book in which it seems as if Carmilla genuinely does love Laura, the erotic nature of her bites makes her love for Laura inseparable from her desire to kill her. In this way, Carmilla represents an ambivalence about the Victorian era's attitudes towards female sexuality. On the one hand, Carmilla's vampiric lesbianism implies that female sexuality is dangerous and pathological, but on the other hand, Laura doesn't wholly reject Carmilla, and she seems even to grow from their experiences together. Carmilla is forever defeated once General Spielsdorf, Laura's father, and Baron Vordenburg drive a stake through her heart.

Laura's Father – Laura's father is a widower who takes care of Laura in their schloss with the help of her two governesses and a handful of servants. He is English, but he served in the Austrian military and retired in Austria. He is extremely caring and protective of his daughter, making an effort to keep her ignorant of the harsh realities of the world—for instance, after a young Laura first sees Carmilla, he insists that it was only a **nightmare** and that nothing can hurt Laura. Laura's father longs to please his only daughter, as he seeks out companionship for her, first with the General's niece Bertha



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Laura – Laura is the book's protagonist and narrator, who retells as an adult her adolescent experiences with the vampire Carmilla. As a child, Laura lives a lonely and sheltered life with her father and governesses in a castle in Styria, Austria. Her most formative early memory—and her first experience with fear—happened when she was six years old and she woke in the night to find a strange woman caressing her. While the woman's affection first soothed Laura into sleep, she then awoke once more with two stabbing pains in her breast, the woman having vanished. As a child, Laura is used to getting what she wants and she enjoys her life of modest luxury, but she feels lonely and wishes for companionship. She is therefore excited when Carmilla—a girl her age—comes to stay with her family, but she soon finds herself both attracted to and repulsed by her new friend. Laura spends much of the book reconciling the complex emotions Carmilla inspires within her. The two become close friends and Laura is enthralled by Carmilla's physical affections, though Carmilla's secrecy and mysterious behavior trouble

and—upon learning of her death—by offering to watch over Carmilla. Laura's father then takes a similarly protective role with Carmilla, and insists that her strange nighttime behavior has a completely rational explanation. His protectiveness and rationality prevent them from discovering sooner the true cause of Laura's illness, as he asserts that the illness affecting the surrounding villages is nothing more than the superstitions of the poor, and he refuses to believe that they, as members of the middle class, may be at risk. He holds a strong faith in science and God, believing that everything has a natural explanation and that they need only trust in their creator to protect them. However, he clings to these values in spite of evidence to the contrary, refusing to accept the existence of the supernatural until it is almost too late. Ultimately, he accepts the truth about Carmilla and the existence of the supernatural, and he is able to save his daughter with the help of the General and Baron Vordenburg. However, he never completely comes to understand his daughter, as at the end of the novel he takes Laura on a trip around Italy in an effort to get her back to normal, not understanding that such a thing is not truly possible.

General Spielsdorf – Bertha Reinfeldt's devoted uncle and guardian, and a friend of Laura's father. Though General Spielsdorf once refused to believe in the supernatural and relied wholly on scientific and rational explanation to understand the world, his niece's illness and subsequent death was diagnosed by a physician as being due to a vampire bite. In his devastation over Bertha's death at the hands of Carmilla, General Spielsdorf abandons his skepticism of vampires and the supernatural, devoting himself to defeating the monster that killed his beloved niece. General Spielsdorf comes to Laura's house to convince her father of Carmilla's true identity, and the three of them travel to Carmilla's family tomb to see evidence that Carmilla is undead. He aids Laura's father and enlists the help of Baron Vordenburg to locate Carmilla's tomb and drive a stake through her heart, successfully enacting his revenge.

Baron Vordenburg – A descendant of the hero who vanquished vampires from the region around the ruined Karnstein estate. He is a strange looking man: tall, narrow-chested, and stooping, with long hair and a pair of gold glasses. He helps Laura's father and General Spielsdorf locate Carmilla's tomb and defeat the vampire. He stays with Laura and her father for a few weeks after Carmilla's defeat and explains that his ancestor dedicated his life to tracking and understanding the vampire.

Bertha Reinfeldt – The General's niece, who develops a brief infatuation with Carmilla after they meet at a masquerade. She is bitten and killed by the vampire before the events of the main text, which makes her unable to come and stay with Laura and her father as she was meant to. Although Laura never meets Bertha, Laura is greatly upset by her death and saddened that

she will not visit them at the schloss, believing that they would have become friends.

Carmilla's Mother – After surviving a carriage accident outside of Laura's home, Carmilla's mother leaves her daughter in the care of Laura's father, claiming that she must continue on an urgent journey and will return for her daughter in three months time. Suspiciously, she emphasizes that Carmilla will give no information about her past or her family. It's suggested that the carriage accident and urgent journey are both ruses to get Carmilla into Laura's home.

Madame Perrodon – Laura's governess who lives with Laura and her father at their schloss. She takes on a motherly role in Laura's life, as her good nature fills the gap left by the death of Laura's mother. She comes from Berne in Switzerland, and speaks French and limited English. Laura describes her as fat, middle-aged, and romantic. She cares a great deal for Laura and is enamored of Carmilla, commenting on her exceptional beauty.

Doctor Hesselius – The doctor whose casebook is the source of the story. After becoming interested in Laura's case, the doctor began a correspondence with Laura about her experiences, on which he based a medical essay. The unnamed narrator stresses that the narration of the book is Laura's (sourced from her letters and prompted by the doctor's questioning), and was not written by the doctor himself.

Hunchback – A deformed hunchback with a pointed black beard who sells Carmilla and Laura charms to ward off vampires, as well as evil **dreams** and spirits. He is dressed in black and scarlet and he carries a wide variety of objects that Laura's father would often laugh at. He is accompanied by a dog. He also offers to blunt Carmilla's sharp teeth, which greatly offends her.

Doctor – Another doctor, an old man of around sixty with a shaved pale face, whom Laura's father calls to ask about the illness that has been infecting the peasant girls in the nearby villages. They speak for a while in private, and Laura's father laughs at his suggestions. Although Laura is unaware at the time of what they were discussing, she comes to realize they were likely talking about the existence of vampires.

Moravian Nobleman – A nobleman who originally vanquished the vampire in the village near the Karnstein estate by cutting off its head. He is the ancestor of the Baron Vordenburg, and a lover of the Countess Mircalla/Carmilla. Upon her early death, he moved her tomb so that her body would not be exhumed to see if she was a vampire.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mademoiselle De Lafontaine – Laura's finishing governess who also lives with them. She speaks French and English, and she is in charge of Laura's education. Like Madame Perrodon, she is also taken with Carmilla.

Doctor Spielsberg – The doctor who examines Laura and warns her father of the true cause of her illness.

Son of the picture cleaner – The man who delivers the **portrait** of Mircalla Karnstein. He presents the portraits to Laura, her father, and Carmilla.

Woodman – Old man who takes care of the lands surrounding the old Karnstein mansion. He informs them about the vampires that had attacked the villages before being defeated by a Moravian nobleman. He later returns to help them unearth Carmilla's tomb.

First Physician – The first doctor who examines Bertha. He laughs at the suggestion of supernatural causes for her illness.

Physician from Gratz – Physician who examines Bertha and tells the General she has been bitten by a vampire. Although the General is skeptical of the existence of the supernatural, he decides to listen to the physician out of a desperate desire to save his niece.

Physician – Another physician whom Laura's father calls to check Carmilla when she first comes to stay with them.

Servants – Various servants who attend the schloss and work in service of Laura and her father.

Priest – A priest enlisted by Laura's father to rid Laura of the sickness caused by the vampire bite.

Old clergyman – Old man who visits Laura and prays with her after she **dreams** of Carmilla for the first time.

Laura's Mother – Laura's mother was a Styrian woman who died in Laura's infancy. She never appears in the text.

Servants in the carriage – Strange looking men who attended Carmilla and her mother in their carriage, but did not themselves get out. Madame Perrodon, Mademoiselle De Lafontaine, and Laura's father comment on their grotesque appearance, with their lean, dark, and sullen faces.

Hideous woman – An ugly woman with dark skin whom Mademoiselle De Lafontaine saw in the carriage. She claims the woman had a colored turban on her head, gleaming eyes, and large white eyeballs.

Young peasant girl – A pretty young peasant girl whose funeral procession Laura and Carmilla witness passing them by in the forest. She was the daughter of one of the rangers of the forest, and the funeral hymns cause Carmilla to enter into a hysterical fit.



WOMEN AND SEXUALITY

Carmilla, a tale of a female vampire who preys on young women, centers on the anxieties associated with female sexuality. Le Fanu was one of the first

writers to depict a female vampire, and he consistently associates vampirism with eroticism. The disguised vampire Carmilla's longing for Laura is primarily sexual, and her craving for the **blood** of young women suggests that female sexual desire—particularly homosexual desire—is inherently threatening. Despite that *Carmilla* frames female sexuality as negative, the mere fact that Le Fanu acknowledges the existence of female sexuality is a divergence from the traditional gender roles of the time period, which often prevented women from demonstrating any sort of sexual desire.

Le Fanu emphasizes the sexual nature of Carmilla's attraction to Laura even more than the vampire's violent nature, as it is her "looks" that "won" Laura over. This asks the reader to see an intimate connection between vampirism and sexuality. Laura's first encounter with Carmilla, which occurs twelve years before the main plot, sets this relationship up. Laura **dreams** of a young woman who crawls into bed with her, who "caressed" her, an act that soothed rather than frightened her. Years later, Carmilla engages in similar behavior, crawling into bed with Laura and treating Laura like her possession. Carmilla's behavior resembles that of a passionate lover, though she never outright says that she sees Laura as anything more than a friend. While Laura has conflicting emotions for Carmilla, she can't deny that she is fascinated by Carmilla and wishes to be close to her, feeling an intense physical response to Carmilla that certainly indicates an attraction.

Laura's simultaneous attraction to and fear of Carmilla relates to the fact that Carmilla is free from the control of men. While she is with Carmilla, Laura is allowed to exist within a world that is not entirely controlled by men, which causes her to respond both physically and emotionally to Carmilla's temptation. When Carmilla first arrives, Laura, confused by her guest's displays of affection, wonders if perhaps Carmilla is a male suitor in disguise. The only way she can understand Carmilla's desire is by believing that she might be a man, which shows the extent to which female sexuality was repressed. Not only does Carmilla experience sexual freedom, but she also has earned physical freedom from men by consistently escaping capture by the men who seek to destroy her. As a result, she never needs to conform to typical expectations—her permanent youth, and the presence of only her mother, ensures that she never needs to marry or rely on any man.

Laura's feelings for Carmilla grow into both "adoration" and "abhorrence," a "paradox" which reflects the uncertainty she feels towards sexual freedom. Le Fanu is explicit that Laura's escalating illness is sexual in nature, and that Laura can only be "cured" once the source of her illness, Carmilla (and, specifically,



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

the attraction they both feel for one another) has been eliminated. The illness comes to Laura in a female form, and she is overcome with “strange” sensations that both frighten and fascinate her. The result of these sexual encounters is shown to be deadly. Despite that Le Fanu defies gender norms by depicting female desire, he ultimately restores traditional norms by showing female desire as dangerous, and by making men—who are otherwise pushed to the fringes of the story—defeat Carmilla. Thus, as is traditional, men are the heroes who defeat the dangerous, erotic woman. At the end of the book, Laura’s father travels with her around Italy in an attempt to “cure” her, thereby placing her back within the norms that she escaped through her relationship with Carmilla. However, Laura is not wholly cured; it seems that she no longer wishes to be placed within a masculine narrative now that she has experienced the freedom that Carmilla gave her.

This complicated ending embodies the ambiguity about gender norms at the heart of *Carmilla*. On the one hand, it seems that Le Fanu is advocating for a degree of gender equality, implying that women have the potential to be just as evil and sexual as men. Furthermore, Le Fanu doesn’t wholeheartedly condemn lesbianism, despite the prejudices of the time. Since Laura doesn’t want to escape the consequences of her relationship with Carmilla, it seems that the relationship has been, in some way, freeing and liberating to her. However, Carmilla’s sexuality is still shown to be dangerous (as shown by Laura’s illness) and worthy of punishment, evident in Carmilla’s eventual defeat. Overall, then, the book takes no simple moralistic attitude towards gender and sexuality, challenging some norms and beliefs while upholding others.



LOSS OF INNOCENCE

Carmilla as a character is evocative of female sexuality, but her vampire bite has a broader meaning, as it brings about a loss of innocence, and the transformation from girl to woman. Laura begins the novel leading a largely sheltered life, protected from the harsh realities of the world. She lives in comfort and privilege, and she’s accustomed to getting whatever she wants. The only time Laura can remember being truly afraid is her first encounter with Carmilla as a young girl, but afterwards she continues to live a sheltered life with her father and governesses away from any inhabited town, and she does not have much contact with the world beyond her manor. This innocence is presented as both beautiful and dangerous, as Laura’s naivety is what attracts Carmilla, and Laura’s lack of knowledge of the world allows Carmilla to so easily exploit Laura’s inexperience.

Laura’s experiences with Carmilla permanently transform her from an innocent girl into an adult woman in ways both physical and emotional, and both positive and negative. Her complicated relationship with Carmilla comes to its culmination after she is bitten and falls ill—at this point, Laura begins to refer to herself

as a “changed girl” who starts to contemplate death in a manner that she doesn’t entirely dislike. These darker thoughts that were previously unknown to her indicate a more mature way of thinking, a change that she doesn’t quite understand but also doesn’t reject. Additionally, the vampire bite and resulting flow of **blood** is suggestive of menstruation, the traditional mark of becoming a woman. Like the vampire bite, menstruation has both beneficial and dangerous effects, particularly for the time period: it allows a woman to bear children, but also awakens her sexuality, which was considered dangerous during the Victorian era.

When she witnesses Carmilla lying dead in her grave, Laura understands the frightening things that she has been protected from her entire life. This is terrifying and also essential, since knowing Carmilla’s nature saves Laura’s life. Part of Carmilla’s effect on Laura has been to allow Laura to think about complex and dark aspects of life, and this complexity of thought persists throughout her life. As an adult, Laura continues to see Carmilla in “ambiguous alterations,” sometimes as the “playful” and “beautiful” girl she considered a friend, and other times as the “writhing fiend” she turned out to be. She now understands the intertwining of love and hate, and she recognizes that love does not always lead to happiness.

By contrast, Carmilla herself—although she is hundreds of years old, and brings about this loss of innocence in her victims—is stuck in perpetual childhood. She uses her innocent appearance to deceive her victims, as she appears frail and weak, with the energy of a “child of three years old.” Because of this, her mental state is likewise stuck in an eternal adolescence. She never comes to know complexity or regret, as her actions are always driven by selfishness. Her only understanding and experience of sexuality is the vampire bite, a result of this selfish “love” that only seeks to destroy. As she tells Laura, she perceives all girls as “caterpillars” who have not fully grown, when in reality she is the one who is always stuck as such a caterpillar, with no chance of ever growing up. While Laura’s maturation may be complicated, it is Carmilla’s failure to grow, this inability to connect with other people, that is truly monstrous.

Laura’s growth over the course of the story is also embedded in the very structure of the book itself. Her experiences with Carmilla are presented as a recollection, in which the adult Laura looks back on this life-changing event from her youth. This narrative framing, which creates a distinctive gap between the more knowledgeable adult Laura and the naïve younger Laura, emphasizes just how much she has grown, for good and for bad, from the events she narrates.



LOVE AND LUST

Carmilla frequently questions the distinction between love and lust, and condemns the failure to tell the difference between the two. Love is a

powerful emotion throughout, but it is lust that often proves most dangerous and all-consuming, and therefore destructive. Through the relationship between Laura and Carmilla, the two emotions become increasingly tangled and difficult to distinguish, suggesting that it is not only lust that can be dangerous, but also the inability to differentiate between physical attraction and pure, honest love. Carmilla, in particular, uses the confusing nature of love and lust for her own advantage. After meeting Laura, Carmilla tells her that she loves her, and that she has been in love with no one “unless it should be with you.” She adopts the language of the typical seducer, male or female, who uses promises of love to trick a person into physical intimacy. At the same time, through this desire, Carmilla seems to fall into a certain kind of love. As General Spielsdorf explains, when recalling his niece’s fatal encounter with Carmilla, the vampire can on occasion become fascinated with its victims in a manner that “resembles the passion of love” and will then enact a form of courtship.

While Carmilla is driven primarily by lust and this warped and twisted version of love, Laura experiences the opposite kind of confusion. She does not understand Carmilla’s interest in her, and tries to rationalize it by wondering if Carmilla is actually a male suitor in disguise. She considers that young people like herself and Camilla “like, and even love, on impulse,” again trying to rationalize the intense emotions Carmilla expresses. Despite this, Laura does come to love Carmilla, a love that is pure, but also contains aspects of lust. This is seen in her reaction to the vampire bite, which serves as a kind of consummation, as she begins to feel “certain vague and strange sensations” that she finds “rather agreeable.” There are clear sexual undertones, and it seems that Laura enjoys these feelings of lust as her feelings for her “beautiful” friend become increasingly confused.

While the novel presents love and lust as intermingled, confusing, and dangerous, there is one relationship that is presented as entirely pure and loving: the relationship between Laura and her father. Thus, in the novel the ultimate expression of true love remains within the socially acceptable sphere of father and daughter, a love that is not sexual and isn’t shared between two women. Laura’s father is portrayed in contrast to Carmilla, as he is driven by a genuine, selfless love for his daughter. He searches for a way to cure her of her illness, and strives to protect her from the truth so as not to worry her. Similarly, the General is driven by his own love and grief over the death of his niece Bertha. Although he is motivated by a “passion” to take revenge on the vampire that killed his family, it is the love he feels for his niece that inspires these strong emotions. The novel therefore shows his passion as a “righteous passion,” as opposed to the physical lust that motivates Carmilla.

Through Carmilla, the novel portrays the evils of feminine lust, which can hide behind the false appearance of love or can even

produce a kind of warped, obsessive love. In general, *Carmilla* seems to suggest there is an inherent problem with the expression of any kind of female love or sexuality. This is consistent with the beliefs of the Victorian era, where it was generally thought that female desire and anything that inspired it was sinful. Because romantic love is shown as leading to sexual activity, then it too must be dangerous, and Le Fanu projects this danger into the figure of the female **blood**-sucking vampire. The novel tries to suggest that the solution to this dangerous love is the entirely non-sexual, platonic love between father and daughter. It is this love that overpowers and defeats Carmilla, but even so, the fact that Laura never entirely recovers from her encounter with Carmilla suggests that the novel isn’t all that confident that anything can entirely defeat romantic love, and female romantic love in particular.



CLASS AND CLASS WARFARE

Carmilla is a story that is preoccupied with money and the benefits of wealth. The fairly well-off Laura and her father believe they are immune to the troubles that plague the lower-class, and the aristocratic Carmilla is particularly harsh in her views of the poor. While on the surface the language of the book seems to indicate a largely negative view of those that are less wealthy, Carmilla’s villainy combined with her hatred of the poor ultimately paints a picture of the poor being victims of an aristocracy that, literally and metaphorically, feeds off their misfortune. Despite this, the poor never find any true power within the text, and are never truly taken seriously by any of the characters.

Laura, while she may not be rich, is firmly within the middle class. She lives with her father in a “schloss” (or castle) that is richly decorated and furnished with items like rich “Utrecht velvet.” As a result, while both Laura and her father pity the situation of the lower class, they also see their wealth as a good thing to be enjoyed. Laura frequently describes the objects in her house and she is preoccupied with the luxury in which she lives. Although she claims that she and her father are not magnificently wealthy (in their small town, a little wealth goes a “great way”), she expresses a great interest in material objects and would not consider herself a member of the lower-class. Because of her wealth, she is unafraid of being attacked “as those poor people were,” and although she feels sympathetic towards the girl whose funeral she witnesses, she does not think that she herself is at risk due to her higher class. Laura’s father similarly writes off the news of the disease circulating in the villages as being no more than the result of the poor “infecting” one another with their superstitions. Both Laura and her father, while they may pity the poor, see them as distant and unconnected.

Carmilla takes this to an extreme; she comes from an aristocratic background and, unlike Laura, is outright unkind and unsympathetic to the poor. Upon witnessing the passing

funeral with Laura, she comments that she doesn't "trouble" herself over "peasants." At the same time, she primarily chooses girls of the lower-class as her victims. This image of the vampire aristocrat feeding off the poor is symbolic, and suggests that the aristocracy has a vampiric relationship with the poor, as they prey upon the poor financially.

However, *Carmilla* breaks the pattern when she takes an interest in the General's niece, Bertha, and then again with Laura, since both girls are higher class than Carmilla's typical victims. Bertha met Carmilla (who went by the name Millarca) at a "regal" masquerade, the very definition of wealth. The General, in telling his story, explains that he was the only "nobody" at the event, and so he was surprised when "Millarca" instantly took a liking to his niece, singling out perhaps the poorest girl there. Even so, while Bertha was certainly not rich, she was not poor. Then, when Carmilla targets Laura, she finds more than simply a girl on whom to feed, as she gets to stay in one of the "handsomest" rooms of the schloss. The implication here is that, when she targets poor girls, Carmilla kills them quickly because they don't have much to offer. Laura, by contrast, offers more interest and comfort for Carmilla because of her own modest wealth. Furthermore, Laura's somewhat wealthy family has connections and resources that the poor do not. Laura's father is able to team up with the General and the vampire hunter Baron Vordenburg (himself once extremely wealthy before his family's estates were taken from him) in order to defeat Carmilla. Only the wealthy (or the formerly wealthy) have the knowledge and capability to defeat the aristocracy, and so the fate of the poor remains in the hands of those who profit from their misfortune.

When the story is read as a tale of class warfare, Carmilla, as the clear villain of the novel, is a warning against what happens when the wealthy are given too much power and influence. The aristocratic vampire sucking the **blood** of the underprivileged represents the "parasitic" nature of the relationship between the aristocracy and the lower class, as they "suck dry" those below them. They are able to use their influence and wealth to put on false appearances, as Carmilla does with both Bertha and Laura. Yet while the novel shows these tactics working on the poor, who have neither the connections, resources, nor credibility to respond to Carmilla—when she attacks the middle class she is ultimately overpowered. It is this middle class that defeats the aristocrat, which is particularly interesting when considering that the novel was written in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, a period that saw not only the rise of new technologies but also the emergence of a stronger middle class. The middle class, whose wealth was based on expertise and skill, is represented by Laura's father, the General, and the Baron in the book, and *Carmilla* suggests that it is this developing middle class that will ultimately defeat the aristocracy, not the poor.



SCIENCE, RELIGION, NATURE, AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Like many other books of its era, *Carmilla* explores the relationship between science, religion, nature, and the supernatural. The Victorian era was a time in which science and technology were rapidly advancing. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (published 13 years before the publication of *Carmilla*) had begun to destabilize Christian ideas about the place of God in the universe, and the machinery of the industrial revolution was upending life in Europe for all social classes. This created a pervasive anxiety about the relationship between nature, religion, and the supernatural, an anxiety palpable in other works of the time period, such as [Frankenstein](#) and [Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde](#). While other works responded to the changes of the Victorian era by moving away from the supremacy of God, however, as the characters in *Carmilla* react to the vampire Carmilla and the illness that her bite induces in Laura, they insist on maintaining their faith in God. From this perspective, then, *Carmilla* seems to take a conservative position, insisting that God still stands at the center of everything and must be called upon so that god may triumph over evil.

Laura's father sees himself as both a man of science and of God, since he sees nature and God as being aligned. In his mind, therefore, God is a part of nature rather than a supernatural force. This is clear in his attribution of the illness affecting the young girls in the surrounding villages to "natural causes" and his belief that they are "in God's hands." He also uses natural causes to explain Carmilla's strange nighttime behavior, offering sleepwalking as the "most natural explanation." Later, after Laura falls ill, he laughs at the doctor who tries to suggest that the true cause of her illness is a vampire. While Laura's father's perspective might seem normal and wise to modern readers, the novel portrays his worldview—the idea that God is a part of the scientific world, and therefore the supernatural cannot exist—as naïve at best and dangerous at worst. After all, it is this continued insistence on rational, scientific ideas that almost leads to Laura's death.

Laura's father's worldview is contrasted with Carmilla who, being a vampire, is herself evidence of the supernatural. She hides her true identity by proclaiming a strong belief in science and the natural world, but unlike Laura's father, she rejects religion and the idea that it's associated with nature. When Laura's father tries to reassure them that the illness infecting the neighboring villages is natural and in the hands of God, Carmilla laughs and says, "Creator? *Nature!*" She separates the idea of a creator from the idea of nature, and insists that the explanation for the sickness is based in nature, not God. She then continues to say that "All things proceed from Nature." Her rejection of religion can be seen as the result of two things. First, like most vampires, she is harmed by religious activities, a point driven home when she utters a "low convulsive cry of

suffering” at the sound of the funeral hymn. In denying God, she attacks an enemy who she feels is trying to hurt her. Second, by insisting that all things proceed from nature, she implicitly suggests that she too is the product of nature. She thus frames herself as being no more evil than any other predator, and her actions become natural rather than supernaturally evil.

However, both of these perspectives are portrayed as dangerous, since conflating nature with the supernatural justifies Carmilla’s evil, and conflating God with nature leaves Laura’s father unable to reckon with the supernatural evil in their midst. Whereas Laura’s father scoffs at the idea of the supernatural, the General scolds him for his stubbornness, arguing that it is foolish to deny the reality of the supernatural. While the General previously shared Laura’s father’s beliefs, once he is confronted with evidence of something “marvelous” (the vampire Carmilla), he comes to accept the existence of the supernatural. Despite this, the General never loses his faith in God. In fact, he seems to become even more closely connected to his faith after his brush with Carmilla, saying that he hopes “by God’s blessing, to accomplish a pious sacrilege” and defeat the vampire. That he *does* succeed in defeating the vampire seems to confirm his worldview, in which the existence of God is perfectly consistent with both nature and the supernatural.

In the end, the General’s example suggests that the correct way to view the relationship between God and the world is that God is a true higher power—the creator of nature and all within it, including things that can’t be explained by science. This view of the world is what allows the General to even conceive of the possibility of something like vampires (which Laura’s father initially can’t). This view, furthermore, negates Carmilla’s seeming suggestion that her own behavior and existence are simply “natural” and therefore not evil. The book suggests that only by seeing God as the true, ultimate creator can mankind recognize the difference between good and evil, and act on the side of good.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



DREAMS

Laura’s most formative memory was waking in the night as a young child to find a pretty lady caressing her in bed. Once she had fallen asleep once more, Laura awoke terrified with two stabbing pains in her breast. Though Laura’s father tries to convince her that this was all a dream, Laura is certain that her experience was real. In fact, all of Laura’s “dreams” in the book turn out to be somewhat real. Thus, her dreams symbolize repression—both the repression of female and homosexual desire (since her dreams are often sexual in

nature), as well as repression in the form of denial (as the other characters refuse to acknowledge that Laura’s horrifying experiences are real). Laura’s initial “dream” begins with the soothing and pleasant experience of a pretty woman caressing her in her bed, which suggests a repressed sexual nature that Laura cannot reveal in her everyday life. However, once Carmilla gives her an outlet for this desire, Laura’s dreams turn more sinister, as large cats prowl her bedroom at night, ominous female figures appear and disappear, and she experiences more nighttime stabbing pains. Everyone tries to convince Laura that these are dreams, rather than sinister experiences. Carmilla herself comments that she “used to think evil spirits” caused dreams, but was told by the doctor “it was no such thing.” Laura’s father continually insists that Laura’s dreams are not supernatural, and Laura’s governesses try to manufacture rational explanations for her experiences. As it turns out, though, these nighttime pains and presences are Laura’s supernatural experiences of being bitten by Carmilla, and everyone’s refusal to believe Laura nearly leads to her death. Once Carmilla is exposed, these characters are no longer in denial about Laura’s dreams, but Laura’s sexuality remains unresolved. Even with Carmilla vanquished, Laura still exhibits some symptoms of the illness contracted from Carmilla’s bites, which suggests that her repressed sexuality lingers. In this way, the book suggests that dreams—and therefore repressions—are real presences in peoples’ lives, and they affect people in ways that are undeniable, whether or not they’re acknowledged as real.



BLOOD

One night Laura imagines that she sees Carmilla “drenched in blood,” which is appropriate, since blood is the physical manifestation of Laura’s anxiety about Carmilla’s dangerous sexuality. In other words, Laura **dreams** of Carmilla covered in blood because she has worked so hard to repress her attraction to Carmilla, and blood is the symbol of female desire, specifically female homosexual desire. When Carmilla describes her perception of love to Laura, she swears that love must include sacrifices, and that there is “no sacrifice without blood.” Carmilla’s understanding of love is therefore presented as dangerous, which proves true, as her “love” leads to the illness and death of her victims. Baron Vordenburg says that blood “supplies the vigor” of the vampire, and Carmilla feeds off the blood of those to whom she is sexually attracted, simultaneously killing them and sexually satisfying them. Because the blood is evocative of menstruation—of girls becoming women and discovering their own sexuality—blood is the very thing that fuels Carmilla’s illicit desire. In Carmilla’s tomb, Laura’s father, General Spielsdorf, and the Baron find Carmilla’s body in a pool of blood—Carmilla literally needs to bathe herself in the blood of her victims to re-charge, as she draws energy and strength from the young girls she has bitten.

Once Carmilla's head is cut off, a "torrent of blood" flows from her neck. In this moment, Carmilla is finally defeated, not so much because the men have destroyed her body, but more because they have drained it of blood, which is her life force, representing the lust and sexuality that drives her.



THE PORTRAIT OF COUNTESS MIRCALLA

The son of the picture cleaner delivers a number of restored portraits to the schloss one evening, and among them is the portrait of Countess Mircalla, which bears an uncanny resemblance to Carmilla. Previously smudged and damaged beyond recognition, it has now been restored so that every last detail may be observed. Laura is struck by the portrait and its likeness to Carmilla, asking if she can hang it in her room. The portrait represents the version of Carmilla to which Laura is attracted—the young, beautiful, and innocent aristocrat—while hiding the darker side of Carmilla that frightens her. At the same time, the portrait gestures towards Carmilla's true nature—the portrait has no frame, for instance, which is indicative of the inability to truly restrain Carmilla. So, as Laura attempts to control the image of Carmilla by hanging the portrait in her room and reducing her to an object on her wall, she is actually holding onto the proof of Carmilla's wickedness.

their moderate wealth. Although they aren't particularly rich by the standards of England, they live in a part of the world where a little goes a long way, which means that they are able to live as though they were quite wealthy. Although they are able to live a life of luxury and comfort, this passage establishes Laura's family as members of the middle class, since they are not members of the aristocracy or the nobility. This sets up one of the major themes of the book, the conflict between the upper and lower class and the emergence of the growing middle class in a position of power. This passage also begins to show how sheltered Laura is. She lives so luxuriously that she believes that having more money wouldn't improve her life at all, which hints at how little she has struggled in her life. While Laura will later express her belief that the poor are more vulnerable to danger than she is, Laura's sheltered existence makes her unable to identify and protect against danger, which shows that the upper classes may be vulnerable to danger in different ways than the poor.

“The first occurrence in my existence, which produced a terrible impression upon my mind, which, in fact, never has been effaced, was one of the very earliest incidents of my life which I can recollect....I saw a solemn, but very pretty face looking at me from the side of the bed. It was that of a young lady who was kneeling, with her hands under the coverlet. I looked at her with a kind of pleased wonder, and ceased whimpering. She caressed me with her hands, and lay down beside me on the bed, and drew me towards her....I was now for the first time frightened.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Wildside Press edition of *Carmilla* published in 2000.

Chapter 1 Quotes

“In Styria, we, though by no means magnificent people, inhabit a castle, or schloss. A small income, in that part of the world, goes a great way. Eight or nine hundred a year does wonders. Scantily enough ours would have answered among wealthy people at home. My father is English, and I bear an English name, although I never saw England. But here, in this lonely and primitive place, where everything is so marvelously cheap, I really don't see how ever so much more money would at all materially add to our comforts, or even luxuries.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Laura's Father

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

Laura introduces her life at the schloss by commenting on

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Carmilla

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Laura recalls an incident that occurred when she was a young child, which has continued to impact her many years later. Although she claims to have been dreaming, the effects of the dream—as they often do—are real and lasting and inspire complicated emotions within her. Laura has previously led a very sheltered and protected life, ignorant of the harsh realities of the world, but her first encounter with something that scares her leaves a lasting impression. Laura's conflicting feelings for the girl are apparent even

here. The girl lays down in bed with Laura and caresses her, an affectionate and perhaps even erotic act, which makes Laura feel a “pleased wonder” that calms her upon seeing the girl’s face. She also comments on the girl’s beauty. However, she notes that she was nonetheless “for the first time frightened” and that the experience left a strong mark on her as the first moment in which she was truly afraid. This blend of fear and arousal will characterize Laura’s relationship to Carmilla throughout the book.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ “Before then I had no idea of her danger. I have lost her, and now learn all, too late. She died in the peace of innocence, and in the glorious hope of a blessed futurity. The fiend who betrayed our infatuated hospitality has done it all. I thought I was receiving into my house gaiety, a charming companion for my lost Bertha. Heavens! what a fool have I been!”

Related Characters: General Spielsdorf (speaker), Bertha Rheinfeldt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

General Spielsdorf’s letter conveys his rage and anger at the fate that befell his niece Bertha. The General didn’t realize the truth about her mysterious illness until it was too late to save her, and although he is glad that she died in the “peace of innocence,” in reality, if he had been able to see the real cause of her illness sooner, he might have been able to save her life. Thus, it was his stubbornness and unwillingness to see the true nature of his house guest, the “charming companion,” that truly cost Bertha her life. This passage foreshadows the danger that lies ahead for Laura and her father, and it specifically warns readers of the danger that will result from Laura’s father’s ignorance and his refusal to acknowledge the truth.

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ I saw the very face which had visited me in my childhood at night, which remained so fixed in my memory, and on which I had for so many years often ruminated with horror, when no one suspected of what I was thinking.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Carmilla

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

This is the moment in which Laura recognizes her new companion as the one she saw a child, in the dream incident that frightened her for the first time. Her inability to forget Carmilla’s face is indicative of the profound effect the girl has on her, even before they officially meet. Laura’s initial reaction to Carmilla is one of horror, as she Carmilla has haunted Laura for years after she first dreamt about the girl. Nonetheless, Laura is drawn to Carmilla for reasons she can’t entirely understand. This recognition is one of the first signs that Carmilla is not who she says she is, and that not everything can be explained through natural reasoning.

☝☝ “If you were less pretty I think I should be very afraid of you, but being as you are, and you and I both so young, I feel only that I have made your acquaintance twelve years ago, and have already a right to your intimacy; at all events it does seem as if we were destined, from our earliest childhood, to be friends. I wonder whether you feel as strangely drawn towards me as I do to you...”

Related Characters: Carmilla (speaker), Laura

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the first instances in which Carmilla expresses the connection and attraction she feels towards Laura. Carmilla is constantly open and candid about her feelings for Laura, even though they have, in this passage, only just met. Unlike Laura, Carmilla is not afraid to express her emotions, even when they are so intense as to be socially alienating. While Carmilla suggests that their meeting has been destined, she will later insist that she doesn’t believe in things like fate or destiny. Carmilla is a supernatural being, though, so her later denials of the supernatural (as well as her love-inflected avowal of it here) should all be seen as manipulation. Carmilla knows exactly what is going on, and she’s trying to frame a moment in which she scared young Laura as evidence that the two are meant for one another.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☞ In these mysterious moods I did not like her. I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thought about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Carmilla

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

It is clear that Laura does not fully understand her feelings for Carmilla, particularly when Carmilla enters into one of her “mysterious moods” in which she becomes overly affectionate and loving. As in her frightening dream, Laura experiences a certain pleasure mixed with a fear and disgust that perhaps stem from her failure to acknowledge or accept her own long-repressed feelings.

Laura is afraid of Carmilla, but more than that she is afraid of the emotions that Carmilla inspires within her, particularly homoerotic desire. Carmilla's openness about her love for Laura frightens Laura because she refuses to understand how women can express their emotions and desires freely, particularly homoerotic desire.

Laura's resulting paradoxical feelings—love turning into both “adoration” and “abhorrence”—are a reflection of her fear and hatred at feeling homoerotic desire within herself, as well as seeing that dreaded desire in Carmilla's words and behaviors. Even years later, Laura can't properly express what she was feeling towards Carmilla.

☞ Sometimes after an hour of apathy, my strange and beautiful companion would take my hand and hold it with a fond pressure, renewed again and again; blushing softly, gazing in my face with languid and burning eyes, and breathing so fast that her dress rose and fell with the tumultuous respiration. It was like the ardor of a lover; it embarrassed me; it was hateful and yet over-powering; and with gloating eyes she drew me to her...” You are mine, you *shall* be mine, you and I are one forever.”

Related Characters: Carmilla, Laura (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

This passage again expresses Carmilla's odd behavior and Laura's inability to understand or fully comprehend her friend's actions. She compares Carmilla's behavior—her “burning eyes” and “tumultuous respiration”—to that of a lover, which is fitting since Carmilla is looking at Laura and holding her hand. It frightens and embarrasses Laura to believe that Carmilla is overly affectionate towards her, behaving in a way that is inappropriate for a woman, and particularly for a woman towards another woman. Carmilla's words, then, reflect her possessiveness of Laura, telling her that she belongs to her, establishing a connection that once again Laura can't fully accept. Although Laura finds Carmilla's words and actions in these instances “hateful,” they are also “overpowering” and Laura's inability to distance herself from Carmilla is evidence of both her innocence as well as her own secret, repressed desires.

☞ “You pierce my ears,” said Carmilla, almost angrily, and stopping her ears with her tiny fingers. “Besides, how can you tell that your religion and mine are the same; your forms wound me, and I hate funerals. What a fuss! Why you must die—*everyone*—must die; and all are happier when they do... I don't trouble my head about peasants.”

Related Characters: Carmilla (speaker), Young peasant girl, Laura

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Overhearing the funeral hymns of the dead peasant girl sends Carmilla into a fit of hysterics, and this is one of the only instances in which Carmilla ever mentions religion. Religion has a physical effect on Carmilla, causing her physical pain, which likely accounts for her rejection of faith and hints at her supernatural nature. Her attitude towards death—her belief that, since all people die, there is no reason to waste time with mourning or other religious rituals—is particularly rational and unemotional, which gestures towards the fact that Carmilla herself is dead, so obviously she is less reverent towards death than the living.

Further, Carmilla's disdain of the poor is apparent here, as she claims that she doesn't "trouble" herself over the lives of peasants, refusing to express any sympathy for the girl's fate. Of course, this is also because the girl is actually one of Carmilla's victims, but it reflects the aristocracy's disregard of (and even contempt for) the poor, as they use the poor for their own gains and then discard them with no thought.

“We are in God's hands: nothing can happen without his permission, and all will end well for those who love him. He is our faithful creator; He has made us all, and will take care of us.”
 “Creator? *Nature!*” said the young lady in answer to my gentle father. “And this disease that invades the country is natural.”

Related Characters: Carmilla, Laura's Father (speaker), Laura

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Laura's father, in contrast to Carmilla, holds a strong belief in God alongside his belief in science. While Carmilla rejects religion altogether, Laura's father sees God as part of the natural world, and he believes that God controls nature, including all human fates. His perspective is common and might even seem rational to some, but in the novel his stubborn and unwavering belief that God protects those who believe is shown to be incredibly naïve.

Though it seems that these two characters are arguing about the source of a mysterious illness, their argument has much larger significance for the story. Laura's father is, against all evidence, trying to feel safe and in control by asserting that faith in God will conquer adversity. Carmilla, meanwhile, is attempting to manipulate the family into believing that nothing supernatural (including God or vampires) exists, thereby suggesting that she has nothing to do with the mysterious illness that her bites are, in fact, causing. Both of these characters, then, are speaking in bad faith: Carmilla is openly deceiving, while Laura's father is clinging to a dangerous belief in spite of clear evidence to the contrary.

Chapter 5 Quotes

“And you asked for the picture you think like me, to hang in your room,” she murmured with a sigh, and let her pretty head sink upon my shoulder. “How romantic you are, Carmilla,” I said. “Whenever you tell me your story, it will be made up chiefly of some one great romance.”

Related Characters: Laura, Carmilla (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

The portrait of the Countess Mircalla that Laura hangs in her room shows her desire to both love and control Carmilla—to keep the beautiful parts of her while eliminating the qualities that frighten her. Carmilla understands the importance of Laura's wish to hang the portrait in her room, and she uses it as proof of Laura's own secret desire that she tries to conceal. Laura's comment that Carmilla is a “romantic” is clearly not the whole truth, since Laura is frightened by Carmilla's affections. It's a rosy framing of Carmilla's strange behavior, but one that seems more like what Laura wishes were true than what Laura actually believes. She secretly longs for the romanticized and beautiful parts of Carmilla, without the behaviors that so frequently frighten and embarrass her.

“I have been in love with no one, and never shall,” she whispered, “unless it should be with you.” ... I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so.”

Related Characters: Laura, Carmilla (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 45-46

Explanation and Analysis

This quote once again exemplifies the strength and intensity of Carmilla's feelings for Laura, as well as her own lack of understanding of what love truly is. She confesses her love for Laura despite the short amount of time they've known each other, and despite their young age. Carmilla also assumes that she knows Laura's own emotions, claiming that Laura would die for her, despite the fact that Laura has never vocally reciprocated Carmilla's interest or love, and

frequently insists that she sees Carmilla as nothing more than a friend. Carmilla's version of love—and her assumption that Laura shares it—is really nothing more than a dangerous, even deadly and possessive lust, one which she consistently tries to impose on Laura in her efforts to obtain her.

Chapter 6 Quotes

☞ “The time is very near when you shall know everything. You will think me cruel, very selfish, but love is always selfish; the more ardent the more selfish. How jealous I am you cannot know. You must come with me, loving me, to death; or else hate me and still come with me, and *hating* me through death and after. There is no such word as indifference in my apathetic nature.”

Related Characters: Laura, Carmilla (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 49-50

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Carmilla demonstrates her emotional immaturity; although she is thousands of years old, her emotions have never fully matured and she fails to understand that love must not be selfish. Her insistence that “love is always selfish” comes only from her own experiences of “love,” which was actually physically-violent lust that killed her lovers. If Carmilla believes that all love is selfish, and her self-interest requires her to kill young women, then Carmilla's love is, by definition, deadly. While Carmilla is honest about this, stating that Laura will “come with me, loving me, to death,” she is surprisingly unable to comprehend that Laura might have different views on the nature of love. Carmilla has shown herself to be a master manipulator, so this frightening passage seems like something of a mistake on her part—one might think that she would better manipulate Laura by pretending to show her a healthier, more recognizable form of love, instead of essentially threatening her.

☞ “Love will have its sacrifices. No sacrifice without blood.”

Related Characters: Laura, Carmilla (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Again, Carmilla shares her destructive and toxic perspective on love, an emotion which she clearly does not really understand and likely can't properly feel. In her twisted version of love, love is about forcing another person to make a sacrifice, rather than making sacrifices on behalf of someone beloved. The latter form of selflessness—real love—is apparent in the actions of Laura's father and the General Spielsdorf, but for Carmilla, any expression of love is meant to hide her true intentions of taking everything from her beloved, including life itself. Here, Carmilla connects love to sacrifice, and sacrifice to blood, thereby connecting love and blood; blood, in fact, is the very thing that inspires her lust. She is motivated by her desire for the blood of her victims, but by substituting love for blood in her conversations with Laura, she attempts to disguise her true motivation. Laura, because she hasn't been exposed to these emotions and actively tries to reject them, is unable to really tell the difference.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ It would be vain my attempting to tell you the horror with which, even now, I recall the occurrence of that night. It was no such transitory terror as a dream leaves behind it. It seemed to deepen by time, and communicated itself to the room and the very furniture that had encompassed the apparition.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 53

Explanation and Analysis

Laura's reaction to her dreams shows the important and lasting effects they have on her. Although she is consistently told that these nightmares are not real, and her father tries to protect her by insisting that she has nothing to be afraid of, the fear and horror that she experiences are a part of the transformation she experiences. Even years later as an adult, as she is recalling these events with greater distance and clarity, she is unable to properly convey what happened

to her or what she felt. These dreams, regardless of whether they are “real,” show the very real desires that Laura tries to hide and deny, and that therefore leave a deep impression.

☞ For some nights I slept profoundly; but still every morning I felt the same lassitude, and a languor weighed upon me all day. I felt myself a changed girl. A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted. Dim thoughts of death began to open, and an idea that I was slowly sinking took gentle, and, somehow, not unwelcome, possession of me...Whatever it might be, my soul acquiesced to it.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 55-56

Explanation and Analysis

This passage marks the culmination of Laura’s transformation, her maturation from child to adult that she undergoes somewhat unwillingly. Although she, once again, does not understand what she is experiencing, she would “not have interrupted” these changes. For the first time, she begins to think about death and these dark thoughts that she had previously been sheltered and protected from. Although these thoughts frightened her, they were also “not unwelcome.” Like much of Laura’s character, she fails to truly comprehend what is happening to her, or what she is feeling, but she allows it to happen, and in this case, even welcomes it. Growing up and losing one’s innocence is both scary and exciting, and Laura’s reaction to these changes is reflective of that complexity.

☞ ...and of having spoken to people whom I could not see; and especially of one clear voice, of a female’s, very deep, that spoke as if at a distance, slowly, and producing always the same sensation of indescribable solemnity and fear...Sometimes it was as if warm lips kissed me, and longer and longer and more lovingly as they reached my throat, but there the caress fixed itself.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Laura’s dreams frequently express both her fear of Carmilla and her homoerotic desire for Carmilla. The female voice that warns her is both a manifestation of her desire and a warning against it that foreshadows the danger that female sexuality can bring, particularly when it is allowed to be expressed and vocalized. Further, Laura imagines lips kissing her and caressing her, not unlike her visions and encounters with Carmilla. The sexualized imagery is something that Laura both welcomes and is afraid of, but ultimately the expression of that sexuality is going to hurt her.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ “I wish all mysteries were as easily and innocently explained as yours, Carmilla,” he said laughing. “And so we may congratulate ourselves on the certainty that the most natural explanation of the occurrence is the one that involves no drugging, no tampering with locks, no burglars, or poisoners, or witches—nothing that need alarm Carmilla, or anyone else, for our safety.”

Related Characters: Laura’s Father (speaker), Laura, Carmilla

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Laura’s father’s need to explain Carmilla’s strange behavior in the simplest and most rational way possible is a reflection of both his unwavering belief in the natural, as well as his need to protect both Laura and, in this instance, Carmilla from unpleasant possibilities. Without listening to any other possible explanation, he quickly provides the easiest and least worrisome reasoning as he asserts that Carmilla was sleepwalking. Although there is clearly something odd going on, and his argument appears weak and his logic faulty, he insists that there is no reason to worry. He does not see the true danger that stands right in front of him.

Chapter 10 Quotes

☞ “Because,” he answered testily, “you believe in nothing but what consists with your own prejudices and illusions. I remember when I was like you, but I have learned better.”

Related Characters: General Spielsdorf (speaker), Laura's Father

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

General Spielsdorf was once similar to Laura's father in his rejection of the existence of the supernatural, including any sort of mythical creature such as the vampire. However, the General now condemns Laura's father for his stubbornness and unwillingness to save his daughter by looking beyond his own "prejudices and illusions" which keep him from accepting the truth. Laura's father's unwavering faith in science and trust in God are naïve and almost fatal, and the General is trying to warn him against making the same mistake the General did. General Spielsdorf was only able to see past these "illusions" after it was already too late, and his warnings express the danger of such ignorance and refusal to see beyond one's own world views.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ "At another time I should have told her to wait a little, until, at least, we knew who they were. But I had not a moment to think in. The two ladies assailed me together, and I must confess the refined and beautiful face of the young lady, about which there was something extremely engaging, as well as the elegance and fire of high birth, determined me; and, quite overpowered, I submitted, and undertook, too easily, the care of the young lady, whom her mother called Millarca."

Related Characters: General Spielsdorf (speaker), Bertha Rheinfeldt, Carmilla's Mother, Carmilla

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Laura is not the only character who is tricked by Carmilla; although she perhaps has the most personal and intimate relationship with the girl, Carmilla is able to fool everyone around her. The General, who claims that he is usually a more cautious man, was easily swayed to allow Carmilla to stay with them, due largely to his wish to satisfy Bertha's desire for a companion. He was also taken with Carmilla's "beautiful face" and the "elegance and fire of high birth." He was convinced not only by her beauty, but also by her wealth and nobility, at a party at which he and his niece

were the only non-aristocrats present. The less wealthy characters are frequently tricked by the false appearances of the upper class, who hide ulterior motives.

Chapter 15 Quotes

☞ If human testimony, taken with every care and solemnity, judicially, before commissions innumerable, each consisting of many members, all chosen for integrity and intelligence...it is difficult to deny, or even to doubt the existence of such a phenomenon as the Vampire. For my part I have heard no theory by which to explain what I myself have witnessed and experienced, other than that supplied by the ancient and well-attested belief of the country.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

This quote shows Laura's newfound belief in the vampire, as well as her nascent understanding the darker aspects of the world. Whereas before she was ignorant of the entire world outside of her schloss, she now understands that there are some things that can only be explained supernaturally. Monsters such as the vampire can't be denied, and she can no longer be protected by her father from the outside world. Although there is still a lot she doesn't understand, she has become less ignorant of the "beliefs of the country" and she has thus transformed into someone who is part of the world at large.

☞ Here then, were all the admitted signs and proofs of vampirism. The body, therefore, in accordance with the ancient practice, was raised, and a sharp stake driven through the heart of the vampire, who uttered a piercing shriek at the moment, in all respects such as might escape from a living person in the last agony. Then the head was struck off, and a torrent of blood flowed from the severed neck....and that territory has never since been plagued by the visits of a vampire.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Carmilla

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

The vampire is finally defeated by the men, and Laura is not actually able to be part of Carmilla's ultimate destruction. Although Laura had the most intimate relationship with Carmilla, it is only the men who are able to destroy her, giving the men the final power in a text that has contemplated female power and agency. While the text considers female sexuality in a manner that was progressive for the time, in the it is patriarchal power that proves the strongest, destroying Carmilla and the female sexuality that she represented. To further the point, the blood that flows from Carmilla's severed head symbolizes the complete elimination of the dangerous female sexuality that she expressed.

Chapter 16 Quotes

☹☹ I write all this you suppose with composure. But far from it; I cannot think of it without agitation. Nothing but your earnest desire so repeatedly expressed, could have induced me to sit down to a task that has unstrung my nerves for months to come, and reinduced a shadow of the unspeakable horror which years after my deliverance continued to make my days and nights dreadful, and solitude insupportably terrific.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 104

Explanation and Analysis

Even years after her encounters with Carmilla, Laura is still unable to discuss Carmilla without remembering the fear and horror, which still impact her as an adult. Having to reflect on the events of her childhood revive these emotions, which she can still recall as if they happened only yesterday. It is clear throughout the text that Carmilla had a profound effect on Laura as a girl, and she spurred Laura's maturation and growth from child to adult. Here, we get further proof that Laura never outgrows Carmilla nor the new thoughts and feelings that she experienced as a result of their relationship. She now rejects the company of other people, whereas as a girl she longed for friendship; this is potentially due to both the danger of Carmilla's friendship, as well as the complex feelings and emotions that Laura felt for the girl and never fully reconciled within herself.

☹☹ Its horrible lust for living blood supplies the vigor of its waking existence. The vampire is prone to become fascinated with an engrossing vehemence, resembling the passion of love, by particular persons. In pursuit of these it will exercise inexhaustible patience and stratagem, for access to a particular object may be obstructed in a hundred different ways. It will never desist until it has satiated its passion, and drained the very life of its coveted victims.... In these cases it seems to yearn for something like sympathy and consent.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Carmilla

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

This passage summarizes the nature of Carmilla's actions throughout the story and her feelings towards Laura. The vampire is driven by lust for blood, but every once in a while this lust is disguised as some sort of love, and a form of courtship. The fact that sometimes, in these instances in which they become particularly obsessed with their victims, vampires seem to long for "sympathy and consent" adds a deeper dimension to Carmilla's character, and particularly to her relationship with Laura. It is unclear whether Carmilla ever felt anything even remotely real towards Laura, if she cared about her at all, or whether it was entirely an obsession that merely resembled the "passion of love" as far as Carmilla was able to experience it.

☹☹ The following Spring my father took me a tour through Italy. We remained away for more than a year. It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alternations—sometimes the playful, languid, beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have started, fancying I heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing room door.

Related Characters: Laura (speaker), Carmilla

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 107-108

Explanation and Analysis

The novel ends with Laura summarizing what happens to her in the wake of her experiences with Carmilla, and stating definitively that she never truly recovers from what happened to her. Her father is unable to really understand

what she went through or the depth of her relationship with Carmilla, as he believes that she will be able to heal. Although he wants the best for her and did all he could to protect her, he never truly understands Laura, and perhaps that is part of the reason she never really grapples with what happened to her or what she felt.

Laura's conflicting emotions towards Carmilla never disappear; even years later, in the wake of everything that

happened between them, she still sometimes sees Carmilla as the beautiful friend that she desperately wanted her to be. Although she knows Carmilla's true nature, she still in some ways wants to remember her as she originally saw her. The "ambiguous alternations" she imagines shows that while she may have escaped Carmilla, she never escaped the emotions that she inspired within her, nor did she ever properly deal with them.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

An unnamed narrator explains that the following story is a case study from the collected papers of Doctor Hesselius, who has written an essay on the condition of the young woman at the center of the story. Since the audience for this case, however, is the “laity” (or the non-scientific public), the narrator announces that he or she will publish just the woman’s version of the narrative, gleaned from her correspondence with the doctor, rather than publishing the doctor’s scientific essay about the case. The young woman, who will become the narrator of the story, has since died and is therefore unable to provide any further contribution than has already been made, though the narrator remarks that her story seems thoroughly and intelligently told.

The story is told from Laura’s recollections, relayed by her correspondence with the doctor. Since the story is told from memory, rather than as the events are happening, Laura has more clarity about how the events of the story affected her. While one might expect the passage of time to muddy Laura’s memories, the observation that her story is “thoroughly told” hints at how great an impact her experiences had on her. The reader is also only hearing the parts of the story that Laura decides to tell, and the account is therefore a subjective one.



CHAPTER 1

The young woman, Laura, lives in a “schloss” (or castle) in Styria, Austria. There, a little wealth goes a long way, so the family’s modest means afford them a life of luxury that they could not have in their native England. Laura remarks that her life there is so comfortable that she can’t imagine that having more money would add to its luxury.

Although Laura is not part of the upper class, she clearly has enough to afford her a comfortable life. She establishes herself as firmly within the newly emerging middle class, a class built on work rather than nobility and inherited wealth. This wealth, and the disparity between those with money and those without, becomes a major recurring theme.



Laura describes the region in which she lives, which is incredibly picturesque, but also quite “lonely” and isolated, as the nearest inhabited town is seven miles away. Three miles from her schloss is a ruined village, whose now-roofless church holds the “moldering tombs of the proud family of Karnstein, now extinct.” The Karnstein family had once owned a nearby chateau, and Laura notes that its desertion is the subject of a legend she will later relate.

Although Laura lives a life of relative luxury, the isolation of the schloss is something that clearly affects her negatively. She comments on her loneliness frequently, and it seems that this weighs on her and leaves her open to outside influence. The nearby Karnstein estates will become important later in the text.



Laura was nineteen at the time of the events she's describing, and eight years have passed between then and her present retelling. In introducing the people in her life, Laura notes "how very small is the party who constitute the inhabitants of our castle." Laura's mother died when she was a child, so she lives with her widowed father and her two governesses, Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine. Her father is loving and kind, but her existence is solitary and she lacks true friendship from girls her own age. Besides companionship, however, Laura has everything she wants, and has lived a spoiled, sheltered, and protected life.

The ease of Laura's life means that she remembers clearly her first moment of true fear. It left a "terrible impression" on her, which has "never been effaced," despite that it happened so long ago and some people might think the incident "trifling." She was no more than six years old when she awoke one night completely alone. Feeling neglected by her nurses, she began to cry when she noticed a pretty face kneeling by her bed, watching her with her hands under the covers. Seeing this lady, Laura felt "pleased wonder," and the woman got into bed with her and caressed her, comforting her.

Soothed into sleep, Laura woke to the feeling of two needles digging into her breast. Opening her eyes, she saw the lady again, who immediately disappeared. Laura screamed, and her nursery maids arrived, examining her breast and the room but finding nothing. The maids seemed troubled, however—one whispered to the other that the spot on the bed next to Laura was still warm.

The incident terrified Laura and left her nervous for a long time. For years afterwards, a servant would sit up all night to watch Laura sleep, and a doctor came every couple of days to give her medicine. The morning after the incident, Laura's father tried to reassure her that everything was alright, but she didn't believe him. He told her it was just a **dream**, but she says she knew that what happened had been real. That day, a kind old clergyman visited the house and he took Laura's hand and prayed with her. Laura comments how she remembers that old man—and that entire experience—vividly, even years later.

Again, the distance the now-adult Laura has from the events she is re-telling gives her greater understanding of just how these experiences changed and shaped her. She recognizes that although she was given everything she wanted, her lack of companionship and true friendship left her feeling unsatisfied. Although she has the love of her father and her governesses, she longs for the love shared between friends and, having never experienced it, she is susceptible to the influence of others.



Laura's first experience with fear had a profound and lasting effect, staying with her for years after the event. The ease and comfort of her life up until then meant that the fear had a particularly pronounced impact. It is Laura's innocence and naivety that makes these occurrences so important and significant. It's notable, too, that the beautiful face comforted Laura while also frightening her, suggesting that leaving the safe and protected space created by her father and being confronted with the dangers of the world invokes complex and contradictory emotions in Laura. This will be true throughout the book.



That Laura feels the sensation of two needles digging into her breast is the first evidence of the sexual nature of the attacks (confirmed by the fear/desire that Laura experiences). Additionally, the ambiguity about whether the dream was actually a dream suggests a slippage between fact and fiction. Characters will struggle to differentiate reality from fiction for the remainder of the book.



One of Laura's father's main character traits is his desire to protect his daughter at all costs and keep her in ignorance of all the harsh realities of the world. His protectiveness comes from a place of love, but by keeping her unfamiliar with the truth of the world he ends up putting her at risk. He himself also refuses to entertain that Laura's dream might be real, which suggests his stubborn insistence on clinging to his beliefs in the face of contradictory evidence.



CHAPTER 2

Laura re-tells an event that she says would be almost impossible to believe, had she not witnessed it herself. She goes for a walk with her father on a summer evening along the beautiful forest which lies in front of their schloss. On this walk, he informs her that General Spielsdorf will not be coming to visit them as planned. Spielsdorf was meant to come with his niece Bertha, a girl Laura's age whom Laura had never met, and Laura is immensely disappointed, as she had been excited about this visit for weeks, hoping that Bertha would abate her loneliness.

Laura's father tells her that the General won't be arriving for another two months, and that he is glad she never met Bertha because Bertha has died. Laura is shocked by the news, as she knew Bertha was ill but did not suspect it was deadly. Laura's father gives her the letter written by the General informing them of the tragic news. Laura reads the letter and is shocked by the grief and anger expressed by the General. It details how Bertha died in peace and innocence without ever knowing the true cause of her illness, but that he should have seen the danger in their houseguest, whom he does not name or describe. Spielsdorf states his intention to go off on a journey of discovery, and notes that he will return in two months time.

Laura and her father meet up with Laura's governesses Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine. As the governesses converse behind them, Laura and her father admire the beautiful scene. Saddened by the General's news and moved by the evening, Laura's father quotes Shakespeare to convey his sense of not understanding why he is so sad, and his feeling that "some great misfortune [is] hanging over us." Suddenly, they are interrupted by the sound of a carriage approaching.

Laura notes that the carriage seems to belong to a person of rank. It begins to speed up and eventually crashes into a lime tree right by the schloss. Laura averts her eyes, but when she dares to look she sees a lady with a commanding air leaving the carriage, and a young lady being lifted out. Laura's father runs to aid the girl and he assures the woman, who says she's the girl's mother, that the girl is alive.

Laura's disappointment at the fact that Bertha won't be visiting further demonstrates her loneliness and the negative effects of her father's protectiveness. Although the schloss and the surrounding area is beautiful and idyllic, Laura's sadness and feelings of isolation showcase that over-protection is not necessarily the best way to parent. It is a sign of Laura's vulnerability and weakness that she knows nothing of the world outside her schloss.



Here, the reader gets an indication that General Spielsdorf is similar to Laura's father in how he raised and cared for Bertha. Although Bertha was not his biological daughter, he treated her as though she were, and like Laura's father he worked hard to protect his niece from the dangers of the world. However, this protection came at a cost, and Bertha paid with her life. Although she died without knowing the true nature of her sufferings, in denying the truth the General was unable to figure out how to help her.



In quoting Shakespeare, Laura's father not only demonstrates that his education sets him apart from poorer classes, but he also foreshadows the danger that lies ahead. His failure to understand the nature of his sadness is similarly indicative of his failure to recognize the truth beyond his own narrow perception of the world. At that moment, the approaching carriage is an undeniable omen to the reader, if not to the characters themselves.



Laura takes notice of the carriage and the type of person it likely belongs to, demonstrating her preoccupation with wealth and status. She also notices the stately manner of the woman who emerges from the carriage, although she is unable to look at the actual scene unfolding. When she is confronted with something potentially dangerous, she turns away to avoid the situation.



The girl's mother laments her misfortune, claiming that she is on a journey of life or death, and that she must leave her daughter behind, as she can't delay her trip. She has the idea to leave her daughter in the nearest village, but Laura begs her father to let the girl stay with them, since she longs for a companion after the loss of Bertha. Laura's father offers to take the girl, promising that they will treat her with the care and devotion that she deserves. He insists that this would be good for him and Laura, as Laura has just been disappointed by the news about Bertha and it would satisfy her desire for a friend.

Once more, Laura expresses her desperate desire for companionship, believing that this stranger can fill the void left by Bertha's death. Laura's father, in his efforts to please her, does not think twice about offering the girl a place to stay. Both Laura and her father display a sense of naivety, willing to trust people whom they know nothing about. It is both a sign of their good-nature and their ignorance. In many ways, Laura's father is no less oblivious than his daughter.



The girl's mother, who Laura notes has an extremely distinguished appearance, speaks to Laura's father separately. She suddenly appears stern, and Laura wonders about the change and why her father doesn't notice. They talk for a few minutes, after which the mother approaches her daughter, who is being watched over by Madame Perrodon. She whispers in the girl's ear, then kisses her before returning to her carriage and departing.

This instance shows how Laura, as the narrator of the story, does not have all the information—even years later she never fully gets it. This is a result of her father's desire to protect her, as well as the secretive nature of the woman and her daughter.



CHAPTER 3

Laura and her companions watch the carriage drive away. The young girl asks where she is and where her mother has gone, and Madame Perrodon reassures her. The girl is glad that no one was hurt, but she cries that her mother has left her. Laura moves to comfort her, but Mademoiselle De Lafontaine advises her not to overwhelm the girl. Meanwhile, Laura's father sends for a physician.

From the moment they meet, Laura is drawn to the girl and looks to protect and comfort her. She feels a connection towards her and longs for contact.



The girl is brought to her room by servants, and Laura waits in their sitting room. Laura describes the room, which is richly furnished but still feels homely. Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine leave the girl to sleep, and upon returning they comment on her extreme beauty. They also reference the strange-looking servants and the hideous woman that had been present in the carriage, watching them but not emerging. They assume the girl will tell them everything once she has recovered, but Laura's father returns and says he doesn't think that is the case.

Laura once more takes note of her surroundings, making a point of the luxury in which she lives. She takes the time to note and remember her material possessions, even breaking off from the main narrative to provide detail. The odd-looking servants and the woman indicate that there is more than meets the eye with regards to the girl they have just taken in, and Laura's father's insistence that they will not get any information is further proof of that.



After the others have left, Laura asks her father what he meant by his comment. He tells her that the girl's mother had informed him her daughter was weak and prone to seizures, but perfectly sane. She also told him her journey was of great importance, and that she would return in three months time. In the meantime, she noted that her daughter would not reveal who they were, or anything about themselves at all. Laura's father wonders if he has done the right thing in taking in the girl, but Laura is delighted at her new companion and is anxious to speak with her.

Just as Laura's father withholds information from Laura, their new houseguest withholds information from Laura and her father. Her father is willing to accept this, although he briefly wonders if he should have agreed to watch over the girl, but Laura's happiness ensures that he doesn't overly doubt his decision. Again, it is his need to please and protect his daughter that creates the trouble and danger.



The doctor doesn't arrive until one o'clock in the morning, but Laura is so excited she can't sleep. The doctor reports that the girl has suffered no injuries, and seems perfectly fine. He agrees that it would be fine for Laura to see her, and a servant reports that the girl would very much like to see Laura, as well. Laura enters the girl's room, noting that it is one of the nicest rooms of the schloss. It contains a somber tapestry depicting Cleopatra, but this is contrasted by gold carving and rich color.

Upon approaching the girl, Laura is shocked to find that she recognizes the girl as the face that she saw as a child in her bed—the one that terrified her so greatly and which she still remembers so vividly. The girl also recognizes Laura, saying that her face has similarly haunted her since she first saw it and she has never forgotten her. Laura feels reassured by the girl's words and, although she is overcome with shyness, she takes the girl's hand to comfort her. The girl explains her side of the events, how she awoke one night in an unfamiliar room and heard someone crying. She saw Laura and was struck and drawn in by her beauty, so much so she crawled into bed and put her arms around Laura. They both fell asleep, but she was roused by Laura screaming and, frightened, fell out of bed and awoke again back in her own nursery. Like Laura, she has never forgotten that experience.

Laura relates her own recollection, and the girl wonders if they should be afraid of each other. However, Laura's beauty reassures her and she instead thinks it is merely a sign that they were meant to be friends. The girl feels drawn towards Laura and wonders if she might have found her first ever friend. Laura admits she feels drawn towards the stranger as well, although this is mixed with feelings of repulsion that she is unable to explain. Although she wrestles with these emotions, her attraction wins out, as she is intrigued and engaged by her new companion.

Laura notices that the girl appears tired and she tells the girl that her the doctor thinks she should have a maid sleep in her room, but the girl insists she can only sleep alone. She hugs Laura, and after Laura leaves, she wonders about the fondness the girl has already shown her. She attributes it to the impulsive nature of young people who fall into like and love extremely quickly.

The next day they meet up again. For the most part Laura is extremely happy with her new companion. She once again praises the girl's beauty and, now that the initial shock of recognition has worn off, they laugh at the fact that they were once frightened of each other.

Once more, Laura is distracted from a crucial moment in the narrative by describing the luxurious room in which the girl is staying. The tapestry of Cleopatra, a strong Queen of Ancient Egypt who committed suicide, is a figure of female power but also destruction.



Laura's recognition of the girl as being the visitor from her dreams instantly suggests that there is more to the girl than what she appears to be: a beautiful, innocent young girl abandoned by her mother. Laura's willingness to accept the girl's explanation and to not question the strange nature of their shared dreams is further evidence of her innocence and naivety. Laura's failure to see the potential danger is part of the innocence that attracts the girl, and it puts Laura at risk. Additionally, Laura does not acknowledge the supernatural possibilities of their dreams, which seems a result of her father's insistence that the dream was perfectly normal.



From their first encounter, the girl expresses intense attraction to and emotion for Laura, commenting on her beauty. She appeals to Laura's own desire for a friend, as she professes her own loneliness. Laura also begins to feel complex emotions about her new companion, a repulsion that she is unable to explain because she has never experienced such emotions.



For the first time, Laura wonders about the intense emotions expressed by the girl she barely knows. These emotions, which are unknown to Laura, cause her to for the first time to question things that she doesn't understand.



Laura's desire for a friend finally feels satisfied, so much so that she chooses to ignore the odd circumstances surrounding the girl, including the girl's appearance in Laura's dream. All seems to have ended well, but it is clear that there is more to this girl than Laura wants to see.



CHAPTER 4

Laura continues to wonder about the nature of the girl, whose name is Carmilla. She describes Carmilla as graceful but extremely slow, with beautiful features, dark eyes, and thick, long hair. However, while Laura is, for the most, part charmed by Carmilla, there are also things about Carmilla that trouble Laura. She is annoyed by her refusal to offer any details about her life, which Laura sees as a sign that Carmilla doesn't trust her. All Laura knows about her is her name, the fact that she comes from a noble family, and that she lives somewhere to the west. No matter how hard Laura pushes, Carmilla coldly refuses to offer up any more information. She tells Laura that it hurts her to hurt Laura, and that she would never want to upset her, but still says nothing more about herself.

Carmilla occasionally embraces Laura and whispers in her ear, which makes Laura uncomfortable. It arouses within her a pleasurable excitement along with a sense of fear and disgust. She can sense her feelings growing paradoxically into both intense love and hatred.

Laura comments that she is now writing after years have passed, and that there are certain moments she remembers distinctly and others which she hardly remembers at all. She recalls how Carmilla would sometimes take her hand and gaze at her intensely before kissing her on the cheek. She had all the intensity of a lover, which greatly troubled Laura. She insists that Carmilla can't love her, as they haven't known each other long enough to hold such strong feelings.

Laura tries to understand Carmilla's behavior, wondering if she is insane or perhaps a male suitor in disguise, but she dismisses this idea. For the most part, Carmilla barely notices Laura—it is only in these brief moments of passion that she expresses such intense emotion. Laura also notes the strangeness of Carmilla's habits. She would never appear until late in the day, and she could barely move without becoming exhausted.

Laura notices and focuses on Carmilla's extreme beauty, emphasizing her physical attraction to the girl without explicitly stating it. Carmilla and Laura become fast friends, but Laura remains concerned with the parts of Carmilla's behavior that worry her. As Laura has desired a friend for so long, it hurts her that Carmilla does not open up to her completely, a lack of trust suggesting that their friendship is not as strong as she would hope. Carmilla's insistence that she would never want to hurt or upset Laura is contrasted with her refusal to open up about her life.



These emotions are characteristic of Laura's muddled feelings for Carmilla throughout the book. She is both attracted to and repulsed by the girl, although she doesn't understand where this repulsion comes from. These emotions show that Laura is maturing, as she previously did not experience such intricate and multifaceted feelings.



Once again, the distance between Laura as a child and Laura as the adult narrator is emphasized. The grown-up Laura specifically chooses which events she will tell and which moments she deems important, as they are the ones she remembers best. This narrative distance reinforces the importance not just of her relationship with Carmilla, but also the significance of the feelings Carmilla inspired within her. These are the things that she remembers best.



Laura's attempts to explain Carmilla's strange behavior by wondering if she is a male suitor in disguise suggests her need to rationalize her own rising desires. She resists any notion of homosexual love or desire, trying to confine Carmilla's supposed love to the "safe" and socially acceptable sphere of heterosexual romantic love. She cannot understand Carmilla's intense emotions, nor where such strong homoerotic desire comes from.



One day, Laura and Carmilla are sitting under the trees when they witness the funeral procession of a young peasant girl. The girl's father walks behind the coffin, looking heartbroken over the death of his only child. A number of peasants also follow along, singing a funeral hymn. Laura pays her respects and joins in the hymn from afar but Carmilla begs her to stop, telling her that the sound of the hymns pierces her ears. She says that she hates funerals and doesn't understand why people are upset over death, since everyone dies eventually. Further, Carmilla doesn't trouble herself over the lives of peasants. She suddenly begins to experience a fit, emitting a cry of suffering that she claims is a result of the hymns. After a while the sound passes away, and she begins to return to normal.

Laura and Carmilla return home, and Laura thinks about Carmilla's strange behavior, as it is the first time she has ever seen Carmilla get deeply upset. She recalls that the only other time Carmilla was upset was when they were visited by a deformed hunchback carrying a wide variety of objects intended to ward off monsters. He stood under the window and asked if they would like to buy a charm to fight against the vampire that is roaming through the woods. Laura and Carmilla both purchased one, and the hunchback then commented on Carmilla's sharp teeth, saying that he could blunt them to fit the rest of her face. This greatly angered Carmilla, who demanded that he be punished. However, after stepping back from the window, Carmilla seemed to forget the encounter and the hunchback entirely.

Laura's father returns that evening out of sorts, informing Laura and Carmilla that another young peasant girl has fallen ill, and that her illness resembles that of the other girls who recently died. However, he believes that the illness can be explained through natural causes, and that poor people are simply infecting each other with their superstitions. Carmilla expresses her fear, and Laura's father tells her that they are in God's hand and that as long as they trust in him, everything will work out for the best. This irritates Carmilla, who laughs at the idea of the creator and insists that everything, including the disease, is at the mercy of nature, and not God.

Carmilla's extreme reaction to the funeral hymns shows the physical effect that religion has on her. Of course, this is because, as a supernatural being, she rejects the very thing that hurts and destroys her. Her view of death, that everyone eventually dies and therefore there is no reason to mourn the deceased, is a clear indication of her inability to care for anyone beyond how they can satisfy her own desires. She also expresses her strong disdain of the lower class.



The charms that Laura and Carmilla purchase to keep away bad spirits seem like supernatural objects, though both girls at least superficially reject the possibility of the supernatural. The hunchback's comments on Carmilla's sharp teeth, and her resulting anger, is a further sign of her true nature, which Laura fails to see.



Laura's father once again expresses his strong belief in both God and science, seeing God as part of the natural world. Carmilla, on the other hand, professes a belief in nature but not in God, rejecting the idea that religion can be part of the natural world. Laura's father, while he has good intentions, demonstrates his stubbornness and ignorance by placing blind faith in God over something that, in reality, goes beyond either science or religion.



There is a silence, before Laura's father changes the subject and informs them that he has sent for the doctor for his advice on the illness. Carmilla insists that doctors have never helped her, and that she once suffered from the same illness that is now infecting the peasant girls. Laura wants to know more, but Carmilla does not wish to discuss it in detail. She instead asks Laura if she is frightened, and Laura answers that she would be if she thought there was any chance they would be attacked like the peasants. She says she is afraid to die, and Carmilla responds that girls are caterpillars while they are alive, only to become butterflies after death and that death is therefore not something to be feared.

Later that day, the doctor arrives and speaks with Laura's father in private. When they emerge, Laura's father is laughing at the doctor's suggestions. They walk away, and Laura wonders what they were discussing. Years later, she thinks she now understands.

CHAPTER 5

One evening, the son of the picture cleaner from Gratz arrives with cases of paintings. After eating dinner, Laura, her father, and the servants (other than Carmilla who sits back apathetically) crowd around as he unpacks the paintings, which are mostly old portraits that have been restored. The paintings have been sent to them by Laura's mother's family, and Laura's father focuses on one painting, a **portrait** of a woman whom he believes is Marcia Karnstein, an aristocrat. The portrait is small, without a frame, and Laura is shocked to see that the woman in the portrait is identical to Carmilla down to the very last detail.

Laura comments on the striking resemblance, but Laura's father appears fairly unimpressed and uninterested, continuing to talk with the son of the picture cleaner. Laura continues to gaze upon the **portrait** in wonder, and she asks if she can hang it in her room. Carmilla, meanwhile, does not even acknowledge the portrait, merely smiling at Laura instead.

Upon closer examination, Laura and her father realize that they're not looking at a **portrait** of Marcia Karnstein, but of Mircalla, Countess Karnstein. Carmilla reveals that she is descended from the Karnsteins and that there are no longer any living Karnsteins, although the ruins of their castle lie only about three miles away. Carmilla still appears fairly unenthusiastic, and she asks Laura if she wants to take a walk in the moonlight. Laura comments that the evening reminds her of the night Carmilla first came to them.

Laura again shows her own prejudice with regards to wealth and status; although she is not nearly as scornful towards the poor as Carmilla, she clearly sees herself as superior and protected due to her position in the middle class. She sees the illness as something that can affect only the poor, who (in her consideration) perhaps do not have the resources or the intelligence to fight against it.



Laura's failure to understand what was happening as it was happening is one clear example of her father's over-protectiveness, and it mirrors his adamant refusal to accept the truth about the illness.



The Karnstein family plays a major role in the narrative, and this is the first major clue that Carmilla is not who she claims to be. Laura and her father once again show their naivety when they fail to question why the aristocratic woman in the portrait looks exactly like Carmilla; instead, they're merely intrigued by the similarity and (in Laura's case) fascinated with the portrait.



Laura's fascination with the portrait reflects her fascination and captivation with Carmilla, but the portrait is something she is able to control, unlike the girl herself. Laura's wish to hang the portrait in her room, the most intimate setting, allows her to keep Carmilla's aesthetic beauty without the dangerous and frightening parts of her.



Like Carmilla herself, Laura and her father cannot properly read the portrait, mistaking who is actually represented. Just as they can't properly read the portrait, they are unable to see Carmilla's true nature.



The two girls depart with their arms around each other's waists. Carmilla asks Laura if she's happy that she came to stay with them, and Laura tells her she's delighted by her company. Carmilla draws her closer, happy that Laura asked to hang the **portrait** that resembles her in her room. Laura tells Carmilla that she is sure that Carmilla has been in love before from the way she speaks, and Carmilla tells her that she has never loved anyone but Laura. Carmilla says that she lives in Laura, and that Laura would die for her.

This scares Laura, who pushes herself off of Carmilla. Suddenly, Carmilla once more becomes apathetic and asks if she's been **dreaming**. Laura tells Carmilla that she looks ill, and they return to the schloss. Laura worries that Carmilla has caught the illness that has been infecting the surrounding villages. This would upset her father greatly, who would immediately send for the physician. Carmilla insists that she is fine, that she is simply weak and incapable of much exertion. They pass the remainder of the evening talking, without any more of the incidents and behavior that frighten Laura.

CHAPTER 6

Laura and Carmilla return to the schloss, Carmilla seeming to have returned to her normal self. They are joined by Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine to play cards. Laura's father also joins them. He asks Carmilla if she's heard from her mother, and she tells him she hasn't. However, she has been thinking about leaving the schloss to follow after her mother, as she has already caused them too much trouble.

To Laura's relief, her father insists that he won't allow Carmilla to leave, as he has promised to take care of her until her mother returns. He wishes to protect her and she thanks him for his hospitality, telling them that she has never been so happy as she has been living with him and Laura.

Laura accompanies Carmilla to her room, and they talk as she prepares for bed. Laura asks if she will ever fully confide in her, but Carmilla doesn't answer. When pushed, she tells Laura that she is not ready to tell her story yet, as when she does Laura will realize how cruel and selfish Carmilla is. Selfishness and self-interest she remarks, is the true nature of love. Carmilla does tell Laura about a ball she attended when she was younger, and how that night she had been wounded in her breast and nearly died. She calls it the result of a cruel love, and says that love must have sacrifices.

Carmilla once again expresses her intense feelings for Laura, claiming that she has never loved anyone but Laura, and insisting that Laura would die for her as well. Her words reflect their mutual failure to truly understand love; Carmilla's view of love is extremely selfish, and Laura believes Carmilla because she has no previous experience with such emotions.



Again, Laura is unable to handle Carmilla's extreme professions of love, but she continues to worry about her and care for her nonetheless. She can't accept Carmilla's love because she is unable to accept (or even recognize) her own attraction. Carmilla inquires about Laura's dreams, the one place where Laura manifests these secret desires.



Carmilla continues to deceive both Laura and her father, pretending to be worried about imposing on their hospitality. She easily fools them into thinking she genuinely doesn't want to cause any more trouble.



Laura's father demonstrates his caring nature, as he not only looks after Laura, but has taken on Carmilla, as well. It is this over-protectiveness that consistently puts his daughter in danger.



Carmilla bluntly conveys her destructive and dangerous perception of love, an emotion that she does not understand and can't distinguish from the lust that drives her. She considers love to be cruel and believes that it demands sacrifice. This selfish and harsh view of love suggests that there is a danger to love, although in reality Carmilla can only feel lust and merely masks her blood lust as love.



Carmilla grows tired, and Laura bids her goodnight. Once she has left, Laura wonders if Carmilla ever says her prayers, as she has never seen her do so and she has never joined in the family prayers. She would have doubted that Carmilla was religious if she hadn't once revealed that she had been baptized.

Carmilla has consistently demonstrated a rejection of religion and God, instead arguing that everything comes from nature. Still, Laura wonders at Carmilla's lack of faith, as it is so different from what she is accustomed to.



Laura returns to her room, where she has adopted Carmilla's practice of locking her door at night. That night she **dreams** that she is lying in bed in her room when a sooty-black animal resembling a cat appears. It paces around her room before jumping onto her bed, and Laura feels a stinging pain like two needles digging into her breast. She wakes up, screaming, and sees a female figure standing at the foot of the bed. The figure is wearing a dark loose dress with hair past the shoulders. Laura watches the figure, terrified, as it, without moving, inches closer to the door before exiting the room. Once the figure is gone, Laura is able to breathe, and she thinks it might have been Carmilla playing a trick on her. Upon inspecting the door, however, she finds that it's still locked. Horrified, she returns to bed and lays there frozen until morning.

This moment marks a turning point in the narrative, and for Laura's character. The attack is deliberately coded as sexual, as Laura feels the pain digging into her breast and then sees a female figure watching her. As with all of Laura's dreams, this symbolizes the hidden desires and impulses that Laura has tried to repress within herself, and specifically in her interactions with Carmilla. It is only in these supposed "dreams" that these desires can be expressed, but their real effects show that it is impossible to genuinely hide one's true desires.



CHAPTER 7

Recalling the experience of her **dream**, Laura knows that she couldn't properly convey how terrified she had been. It was not a passing horror, like some nightmares, but a fear that seemed to deepen over time and grow more real. She doesn't tell her father because she is afraid he will either laugh at her or think that she has been attacked by the illness that has been spreading through the surrounding villages. Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine are able to tell that something is wrong, and so Laura confides in them about what happened. Mademoiselle laughs, but Madame Perrodon appears anxious. Mademoiselle comments that the lime tree behind Carmilla's bedroom is haunted, and Laura tells them not to inform Carmilla of what has happened, for she is even more of a coward than Laura.

While Laura has previously been told by her father that her dreams are not real and not something to be feared, they have very real and lasting effects, which Laura still has not recovered from even as an adult. Her hesitation to confide in her father for fear he would laugh at her is further evidence of his own stubbornness and his failure to see the danger until it's almost too late. These dreams begin Laura's transformation, one that impacts her for years to come.



Carmilla comes down from her room late in the day, saying that she had been frightened last night, and was certain something terrible would have happened if she hadn't been protected by her charm. She claims she **dreamt** that something black surrounded her, and imagined she saw a dark figure in her room that only disappeared when she touched her charm. This convinces Laura to tell her of her own dream, from which she did not use her own charm to protect herself. That night, she pins the charm to her pillow and her sleep is undisturbed.

Carmilla claims that she also experienced frightening dreams, although she seems far less affected than Laura. Her insistence on the effectiveness of the charm seems to suggest some sort of supernatural element, but Carmilla's rejection of such things contradicts this.



Laura relates to Carmilla the effectiveness of the charm, which Carmilla tells her is because **dreams** are nothing more than the result of a sickness, and not evil spirits as she had once believed. The charm, she insists, is entirely natural and scientific, an antidote to an infection. Laura pretends to agree with her, although she isn't entirely convinced.

Laura continues to sleep soundly, although she feels tired and lazy in the morning. She feels that something has changed within her, as she begins to contemplate death in a way that is not entirely undesirable. She embraces these changes, as she imagines she is slowly sinking. She refuses to tell her father she is ill, but Carmilla becomes increasingly devoted to her.

Although Laura did not know it at the time, she was in the advanced stages of an incredibly serious illness. Initially, she welcomes the symptoms, beginning to feel strange but pleasant sensations in her sleep along with **dreams** that she can't remember but which leave a lasting impression. All she is able to remember of these dreams is the sense of a dark place, and of a deep female voice that made her afraid. She sometimes imagines a hand drawing along her cheek and warm lips kissing her.

Three weeks after the beginning of Laura's illness, the effects begin to take a toll on her appearance as she grows pale and her eyes darken. Her father frequently asks her if she's ill, but she insists that she's fine. She doesn't think it's the illness affecting the peasants, as their sickness never lasted more than three days. Carmilla too complains about **dreams** and sensations, but they're not as worrisome as Laura's.

One night, Laura **dreams** that she hears a sweet female voice which tells her "Your mother warns you to beware of the assassin," as Carmilla appears bathed in a pool of **blood**. Laura awakens, fearful that Carmilla has been murdered. She runs out and cries for help, as Madame Perrodon and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine appear, and the three of them knock at Carmilla's door. When she doesn't answer, they start to panic and call for servants who force open the lock on her door. The room is entirely undisturbed, but Carmilla has disappeared.

Carmilla insists that the charms, which seem to have magical properties, are entirely scientific, once again showing her adamant refusal of the non-natural.



Laura begins to undergo a transformation, one that she will never recover from. Her contemplation of dark thoughts such as death is in stark contrast to the young child who was shielded from such things and barely knew what it felt like to be afraid. The fact that she embraces these changes shows that maturing, and facing the darker realities of the world, is important.



Once again, Laura's dreams make clear all the desires and longings she is afraid to express, which she both craves and fears. The "sensations" which she feels in these dreams are purposefully erotic, and the appearance of the female voice that frightens her and caresses her is similarly sexual.



Laura continues to hide the truth from her father, afraid that he won't believe her or that he will laugh at her and convince her that there is a rational explanation. Laura, while she might not want to admit it, is slowly beginning to acknowledge that there might not be a scientific explanation for what is happening to her.



Laura sees Carmilla drenched in a pool of blood, symbolizing the blood that motivates Carmilla and fuels her lust. Although Laura sees this as a warning that Carmilla might be in danger (and perhaps that Carmilla herself is the danger), it can also be read as a sign of Laura's secret, repressed homosexual attraction and her own secret lust for Carmilla.



CHAPTER 8

Laura and her governesses calm down slightly seeing that there is no sign of an attack, and they send the servants away. The three of them search for Carmilla, wondering if she had been frightened or was playing a trick, but she is nowhere to be found. Laura wonders how Carmilla could have escaped her room without unlocking the door.

Laura spends the rest of the evening in Madame Perrodon's room, and the next morning she informs her father of Carmilla's disappearance. The entire household resumes the search but there is no sign of Carmilla. Laura's father is distraught, and Laura is also extremely worried, though she feels that her grief is of a different kind. At one o'clock, she finds Carmilla in her room as though nothing has happened. She embraces the girl and notifies the others.

Carmilla tells Laura what happened to her the previous evening. She had gone to sleep in her own bed and awoke to find herself on the sofa in the dressing room, with the door between the rooms open. Laura's father, the governesses, and a handful of servants enter the room and are relieved to see that she is alright. She recounts her story, confused as to how any of it is possible.

After sending the servants away, Laura's father speculates on what happened. He predicts that Carmilla was sleepwalking, and that she unlocked the door in her sleep and put the key somewhere in the house where it was unlikely to ever be found. She then went into the dressing room where she awoke. He laughs at the innocent and natural explanation for Carmilla's actions and insists that there is no reason to be alarmed. Turning to Laura, he sighs and says he wishes she were looking more like herself, but they are relieved that Carmilla has been found safe and sound.

CHAPTER 9

Despite her experience, Carmilla refuses to allow an attendant to sleep in her room. The next morning, a doctor—for whom Laura's father had sent without informing her—arrives to examine Laura. Laura meets the doctor in the library with Madame Perrodon and tells him her symptoms, which appears to worry him. He asks to see Laura's father in private. Laura and Madame Perrodon watch from afar, curious as to what they are discussing. Laura's father appears agitated and concerned.

Carmilla's behavior and disappearance seem to defy natural explanation, and neither Laura nor her governesses are able to come up with any sort of logical explanation for what happened.



Laura distinguishes the grief she feels over Carmilla's disappearance from her father's, although she doesn't specify how they are different. This is one of the only times she ever truly comes close to admitting the depth of her feelings for Carmilla, ones which certainly seem to go beyond friendship. While her father is distraught because he has vowed to protect Carmilla, Laura's grief is about something deeper which she still refuses to properly identify.



Even Carmilla, who has been shown to hold a strong belief in natural and logical explanations (presumably in an effort to hide her true supernatural identity), is unable to come up with any sort of excuse to rationalize what has occurred.



Laura's father once again insists that the scientific explanation is the only possible one, refusing to entertain any contradictions or flaws in his argument. Although his rationale of sleepwalking is weak and full of holes, he does not waver in his determination to believe it. He doesn't want to alarm either Laura or Carmilla, but in doing so he continues to put his daughter in danger.



Laura's father finally takes action and sends for a doctor to examine Laura, but then he only discusses the matter in private, once again keeping his daughter in the dark. Laura, meanwhile, is increasingly curious as to the truth about her illness.



Laura's father asks her to come closer, and for the first time Laura is truly alarmed about her illness. The doctor asks about the feeling of the needles piercing her skin after her first **dream**. She shows him the place where the sensation had occurred, revealing a small blue spot. He assures her she is not in any danger and should soon recover. He asks to see Madame Perrodon, and instructs her that she should not leave Laura alone, even for a moment. Laura's father requests that the doctor return later that evening to examine Carmilla, who has been exhibiting similar symptoms but to a much lesser degree. The doctor agrees and then departs, her father walking out with him in earnest conversation.

Laura and Madame Perrodon discuss the reasoning behind the doctor's strange directions. While Madame Perrodon thinks Laura might be at risk of a stroke, Laura believes it was merely a precaution. Laura's father returns with a letter from the General Spielsdorf, who will be arriving at the schloss shortly. Laura's father does not appear happy at the news, and wishes the General had chosen another time to visit. Laura asks her father if the doctor thinks she is very sick, but he reassures her that if the proper precautions are taken, she will be fine. He refuses to tell her what the doctor believes is wrong with her, and appears annoyed at her questions, telling her not to worry about it.

Laura's father leaves the room briefly before returning to announce that he is traveling to Karnstein and that Laura and Madame Perrodon will accompany him. He intends to visit a priest who lives near the grounds, and Carmilla and Mademoiselle De Lafontaine will follow behind once Carmilla wakes up.

Laura, her father, and Madame Perrodon depart for their journey at noon, heading towards the deserted town and destroyed castle of Karnstein. During their journey, they run into General Spielsdorf, who is riding towards them. They persuade him to join them in their carriage and send his own carriage back to the schloss.

After the doctor examines her, Laura finally becomes afraid and realizes that there might be something seriously wrong with her. Despite her fear, both her father and the doctor assure her that everything is going to be alright. However, by this point Laura begins to doubt the truth of this. She no longer fully trusts her father's word or his assurances, instead wondering about the exact nature of her illness.



Laura becomes more persistent with questioning her father about the things he refuses to tell her. Her father, although he continues to insist that everything will be fine, is annoyed at her questions and upset that she is no longer merely taking him at his word.



Rather than allow Laura to know his motivations, her father merely tells her where they'll be going and once more keeps her in the dark. He continues to believe he is acting out of love and protection for his daughter.



The introduction of General Spielsdorf, who had previously only been mentioned, is a major turning point in the narrative, and begins the climax of the story.



CHAPTER 10

The General has changed drastically since Laura has last seen him, about ten months ago. He appears thinner and more stern, changes that don't seem to be the result of typical grief, but something much darker and angrier. As they continue on their journey, he begins to tell Laura, her father, and Madame Perrodon about the death of his niece Bertha. Laura's father asks him to recount the story of her death, and he agrees, although he claims Laura's father will not believe him because he is too set in his own beliefs and prejudices. While the General himself was once like Laura's father, he has experienced something incredible that has forced him to abandon his stubbornness and accept the existence of the supernatural.

The General says he is also traveling to the Ruins of Karnstein to inspect an object that is located there. He hopes to undertake a sacrifice that will cleanse the earth of certain monsters and bring safety to the people. This intrigues Laura's father, who notes that the house of Karnstein has been extinct for years, and the village is deserted. The General says he is right, but that there is more to the story, which he will relate to them in the order the events occurred.

The General begins to tear up about the death of Bertha, for whom he cared as if she were his own child, himself having no children of his own. Since her death, he has lost the thing that brought light into his life, and all he has left to live for is to enact revenge on the monster that killed her. Laura's father asks to hear the story from the beginning before they reach the ruins.

The General begins to tell his story of the death of his niece, an event that greatly transformed him. He calls Laura's father out on his prejudice and stubbornness, his inability to accept any truth other than what he is comfortable with. Although he scolds Laura's father, he was also once exactly like him, believing in science and the natural world until it was too late. In recounting his story, he can serve as a warning to Laura's father to accept the truth.



The General demonstrates just how much he's changed following the death of his niece. His only goal is to get revenge for Bertha's death, and to get rid of the monster that hurt her. His words show his new-found belief in the supernatural, although he does not yet say exactly what he is hunting.



The General is driven by his love for his niece, whom he cared for as if she were his own child. This love, in contrast to the so-called "love" Carmilla claimed to feel, is the honest and true love between family, free from any sort of dangerous (specifically female) sexuality.



CHAPTER 11

The General begins his story. It all started when they were invited to a masquerade by a wealthy Count. The masquerade was extravagant, with fireworks and fine music. The General was the only non-aristocrat present, along with Bertha, who wore no mask. She caught the attention of a young masked woman who was dressed magnificently, and was accompanied by an older lady who was also richly dressed.

The two women approached and the older woman spoke to the General. She claimed to know him, referring to memories that the General could only vaguely recall, but refused to tell him who she was. Meanwhile, the younger girl, to whom her mother referred as Millarca, started up conversation with Bertha. She complimented Bertha, commenting on her beauty and mocking the others present. Eventually she removed her mask and Bertha was struck by her extreme beauty. The stranger was similarly taken with Bertha.

The party was thrown by a wealthy nobleman, and the General makes the point that he and Bertha were the only non-aristocrats present. It is therefore particularly notable that the young woman focuses her interest on Bertha, showing that she prefers girls of the lower-class.



The young girl comments specifically on Bertha's beauty, and the physical attraction between the two is evident. The girl is not shy about expressing her feelings for Bertha, whom she has only just met. Millarca/Carmilla once again shows her desire for young women of the lower-class, despite (or perhaps because of) her previously-expressed disdain for them.



General Spielsdorf continued to push the girl's mother, to whom he referred as Madame la Comtesse, to remove her mask and reveal her true identity, but she refused. They were interrupted by a man dressed in black with a pale face who asked to speak with the woman. The General contemplated the woman's identity and how she remembered him. He was about to join in conversation with Bertha and the woman's daughter when her mother returned.

The mysterious nature of the woman and her daughter is emphasized, as it was with Carmilla and her mother after their carriage crashed. Like her daughter, the woman uses her sexuality and wealth to further her own agenda.



CHAPTER 12

The girl's mother, "Madame la Comtesse" continued to insist that they were older and better friends than the General realized. She claimed she would visit his schloss in three weeks time and reveal herself. However, in the meantime, she asked that her daughter be allowed to stay with the General and Bertha as she was still weak from a hunting accident. Meanwhile, she said she must undertake a journey of life and death that she would be able to explain when she returned. At the same time, Bertha appeared and asked if the girl called Millarca could come and visit them. While the General typically would have waited until he knew more about them, in that moment he was also taken with the beauty and elegance of the young girl and he easily agreed to the request.

The General, with hindsight, admits that he should have waited to learn more about the girl and her mother before offering to watch over the girl while her mother was away. However, even he was persuaded by her beauty and charm, as well as the elegance of her wealth, to allow her to live with them. It was also his desire to satisfy his niece's wish for companionship, out of love for his family.



The girl's mother informed her that she would be leaving her in the General's care. She then instructed him not to try to learn anything more about her or her daughter. She kissed her daughter goodbye and then departed. The girl appeared sad to see her mother go, and the General immediately felt guilty that he had been skeptical of allowing her to stay with them. He subconsciously vowed to make it up to her.

The General and Bertha (as well as Laura and her father) are completely deceived by Carmilla's beauty and false appearance of innocence. They are unable to discern her true malicious and deadly intentions.



After watching the girl's mother disappear, they rejoined the party, and Millarca entertained them with stories of the other guests. The party lasted until the morning, and as Bertha and the General walked through the room they noticed that Millarca had disappeared. He searched for her but was unable to find her. In that moment, the General once more realized how foolish it was to have agreed to watch a girl he knew nothing about.

The General continues to switch back and forth about whether or not he should trust Millarca, but he understands that Bertha already cares deeply for the girl, and he thinks only of his love for his niece.



He kept searching until the afternoon. Around two o'clock a servant told Bertha that she had been summoned by a young lady who was searching for her and the General Spielsdorf. They were relieved to see Millarca, who told them she had fallen asleep in the housekeeper's bedroom while searching for them. She returned home with them and, despite his reservations, the General was happy to have found a companion for his niece.

Again, it's emphasized that it was the General's love for his niece that led him to take Millarca in. Although he is, unlike Carmilla, driven by an honest love for the girl he sees as a daughter, his blind need to make her happy ends up putting her in extreme danger and ultimately bringing about her death.



CHAPTER 13

The General continues his story. He says that he quickly began to notice some drawbacks of Millarca living with them. She often complained of fatigue and would not emerge from her room until late in the afternoon. She would also disappear from her room and be seen walking as though in a trance. He had thought perhaps she was sleepwalking, but that did not explain how she left her room without unlocking the door.

At the same time, Bertha began to grow ill and weak. She experienced frightening **dreams**, followed by hallucinations of both Millarca and a large black beast. One night she felt the sensation of cold water against her breast and the piercing of needles. In the present, Laura—who is listening intently to the General's story—is shocked to hear the similarities between Bertha's symptoms and her own, as well as the resemblance between Millarca and Carmilla.

The General's story is interrupted as the carriage approaches the ruined village of Karnstein. The General comments on the bad nature of the Karnstein family, and points out the chapel. He hears a woodman, whom he hopes to ask for the location of the grave of Mircalla, Countess of Karnstein. Recognizing the name, Laura's father asks the General if he would like to see the **portrait** they have of her back at the schloss. The General replies that he has seen the original portrait, and it is what inspired him to explore the chapel. Laura's father is confused, as the Countess has been dead for years, but the General claims he must enact his vengeance against her. He intends to cut off her head, which only further confuses Laura's father.

Laura, who has grown fatigued, takes a seat as the General calls for the woodman. The woodman is unable to tell them anything useful, but he informs them that there is a ranger of the forest who knows the location of all the monuments of the Karnstein family and offers to go find him. The General asks why the village is so deserted, and the woodman tells them the village was attacked by a vampire. They were only saved by the arrival of a passing nobleman who defeated the vampire by cutting off its head. The nobleman then reportedly removed the tomb and body of Mircalla Karnstein, the location of which is now unknown. He then departs, and the General prepares to finish his story.

The similarities between Millarca and Carmilla become increasingly apparent, making it obvious that the two are the same. The General, unlike Laura's father, does not accept the scientific explanation of sleep-walking as a reason for her strange behavior.



Bertha similarly experienced strange, sexual sensations and dreams expressing repressed desires. But even in this moment, when Laura realizes the similarities between Carmilla and Millarca, she doesn't suspect that she is in danger. Her innocence has still not been completely lost, and she still wants to believe in Carmilla.



Laura's father mentions the portrait of the Countess Mircalla, which General Spielsdorf has already seen. The fact that the portrait was the very thing that led him to suspect Carmilla's true identity shows that, although Laura used the portrait as a method to control Carmilla, it also served as evidence of her true nature. The portrait represents both sides of Carmilla—that which she hides and the beautiful appearance she puts on.



The nobleman is another male character of status and at least moderate wealth, the only type of figure who ultimately possesses the power to destroy the vampires. Neither women nor those of the lower class are shown as having the power or the intelligence with which to do so, which shows an inherent deference to the status quo, despite the story's explosive homosexual subject matter.



CHAPTER 14

The General says that Bertha grew more ill, and the doctor was unable to figure out what was wrong with her. He suggested the General send for a physician from Gratz, who arrived and examined Bertha. However, the other doctor, upon hearing the physician's diagnosis, scorned his ideas. The General is disappointed, but the physician insisted that there was no natural explanation for Bertha's illness, and that she was very near death. However, he suggested that there may be hope if another attack were avoided. The General inquired what he believed the nature of the illness was, and the physician handed him a letter and told him not to open it until he was in the presence of a clergyman.

The General disregarded his advice and read the doctor's letter on his own. Under any other circumstance he would have laughed at the doctor's words, but his desperation persuaded him to take it seriously. The letter claimed that Bertha was being visited and attacked by a vampire. He was skeptical of the existence of such a creature, but was willing to act upon the doctor's instructions.

That night, he hid himself in Bertha's dressing room as she fell asleep. Around one in the morning, he witnessed a large black object crawl into Bertha's bed and attack her throat. The General leapt at the creature with his sword, and the creature suddenly transformed into Millarca. He struck her with his sword but she was unaffected and she disappeared. Bertha died by the morning.

With the General's story completed, Laura and her father are unsure of what to say. Her father enters a chapel while the General dries his tears. Laura is relieved to hear Carmilla and Madame Perrodon, although they don't appear. Laura contemplates the story she has just heard, observing her decayed and destroyed surroundings, and a feeling of horror settles within her. She is worried that her friends are about to walk into danger.

Carmilla enters the chapel. Laura rises to greet her but is interrupted by a cry from the General, who rushes at her with a hatchet. Carmilla avoids his attack, catching his wrist and forcing him to release the weapon. By the time he recovers, Carmilla has disappeared. Madame Perrodon appears and asks where Carmilla has gone, as she had been standing by the door and had not seen Carmilla exit. She goes to search for Carmilla, while the General informs Laura that Carmilla and Mircalla are the same person. He orders Laura to leave the grounds and depart for the clergyman's house until they fetch her. He says that she will never see Carmilla again.

The two doctors disagree over the validity of a non-natural explanation for Bertha's illness. When the first doctor hears the diagnosis of the physician from Gratz, he immediately laughs and rejects his ideas, and likewise the General does not trust the validity of the argument, as he himself did not believe in the supernatural.



It is only his desperation to save his niece that convinces the General to listen to the physician's advice. Although he did not believe in the existence of the vampire, he was convinced to act out of love for Bertha. Pure, familial love is therefore the motivator for defeating the evil and supernatural Carmilla.



Although the General does realize the truth about Millarca/Carmilla, he is unable to save Bertha in time. Carmilla succeeds in stealing Bertha's innocence, and she kills the General's beloved niece.



After hearing the General's story, Laura and her father still don't suspect the truth about Carmilla. Nonetheless, Laura begins to truly become afraid that her friends are in real danger, even though she can't conceive that Carmilla is the reason for that danger.



This is the moment in which Carmilla's true identity becomes clear, as the General finally sees her and tells Laura that Carmilla and Mircalla are the same person. Now confronted with the reality of her friend, Laura must face the true nature of the world and the girl she thought she knew.



CHAPTER 15

As the General is speaking, a strange-looking man enters the chapel. He is tall and dressed in black, wearing a hat and gold spectacles. The General is pleased to see him, introducing him as the Baron Vordenburg. The Baron quickly draws up a floor plan of the chapel and begins measuring distances with the General's help. Finally, they pull back the ivy on a section of the wall and scrape at it with their canes. With the help of the woodman, they reveal the tomb of the Countess Mircalla.

The General thanks the Baron for his help, telling him that he has saved the region from the plague of the vampire. Laura's father speaks to the General and the Baron away from Laura, who guesses that they are discussing her illness. Her father returns, and tells her they are going home and picking up a priest along the way to accompany them back to the schloss.

They return home with the priest, and Laura is disappointed to discover that Carmilla is not there nor is there any trace of her. Laura's father does not explain what happened back at the chapel, and Laura knows he does not intend to. That night, Madame Perrodon and two servants sleep in Laura's room with her after the priest performs rites. Laura does not understand any of these precautions.

However, everything becomes clear to Laura a few days later. She relates to the reader the myth of the vampire, which—considering the number of reports of vampires in the countryside—is almost impossible to continue to deny. Laura can think of no other way to explain what she has witnessed and experienced other than the existence of the supernatural creature. She now understands the truth about Carmilla: that she is a vampire.

The next day, Carmilla's grave is opened, accompanied by a medical examiner, and Laura's father and the General both immediately recognize the girl. Her eyes are open and there is life in her body, as she is still breathing faintly although she has been dead a hundred and fifty years. The coffin is filled with **blood** upon which her body floats. They are faced with the unmistakable proof of the vampire, and they drive a sharp stake through her heart. They then cut off her head, from which a stream of blood flows. The body is then burned and thrown into the river, successfully ridding the area of vampires. Although Laura herself was not present for any of this, she summarizes the events from what she heard from those who were there.

The introduction of Baron Vordenburg is late in the text, but he plays a very important role in Carmilla's ultimate downfall and defeat. Like the General Spielsdorf and Laura's father, he is a middle-class male who ultimately possesses the knowledge necessary to defeat Carmilla and, by extension, her threatening femininity.



Even now, Laura's father still refuses to discuss her illness with her, continuing to try and protect her. This love, while it ultimately saves Laura, is also dangerous and it suggests that Laura's father has not developed much as a character.



Despite the General's warning about Carmilla's true identity, and his comment that Laura will never see Carmilla again, Laura is still upset that her friend is nowhere to be found. She still wants to believe in Carmilla, and still does not understand why she is being protected.



In recounting to the reader the legend of the vampire and commenting on its undeniable existence, Laura finally accepts and understands the truth about Carmilla, and shows that she has lost much of the ignorance and naivety she possessed as a young girl. Her experiences with Carmilla have transformed her and caused her to grow up in ways both positive and negative.



In the end, Carmilla can only be defeated by men, and specifically men of the middle class. This shows that, although the text has presented female sexuality through Carmilla, ultimately she can't overcome the patriarchal values represented by Laura's father, General Spielsdorf, and Baron Vordenburg. In ridding Carmilla's body of blood, they deprive her of her of the very thing that drove her, and by extension her lust. In addition, the middle class defeat the aristocracy, showing the new and growing power of the emerging middle class.



CHAPTER 16

In conclusion, having finished re-telling her story, Laura recalls that she still thinks of the events with anxiety. If it had not been for the earnest requests from Doctor Hesselius, she would not have discussed the experience that still terrifies her and causes her to seek out solitude.

Laura comments on Baron Vordenburg, who devoted his life to the investigation of the vampire and collected all the books and knowledge on the subject that he could. She mentions in passing that, even today, nobody knows how vampires manage to escape from their graves and then return to them for a few hours without disturbing the coffin. The vampire recharges in the grave, and its waking existence is driven by its lust for blood. Occasionally, the vampire becomes fascinated with one of its victims, displaying feelings that can resemble the passion of love. In these instances, the vampire will patiently wait until it can satisfy its passion and it almost seems to desire sympathy and love. However, in most cases the vampire doesn't wait to attack—it simply overpowers and kills its victim.

After Carmilla was defeated, Baron Vordenburg stayed with Laura and her father for a few weeks. Laura's father recounted the story of the Moravian nobleman who had defeated the vampire and asked the Baron how the nobleman knew the location of the Countess' tomb. The Baron, who reveals himself to be a descendant of the nobleman explains that he found his ancestor's notes and learned that the nobleman had been Mircalla's lover before she died young.

The Baron further reveals that vampires come into existence when a person commits suicide, and the people whom they visit also die and become vampires. The nobleman discovered these truths about vampires and vowed to learn more. The nobleman realized that Mircalla, whom he loved, would likely be suspected of being a vampire. Wanting to save her, he pretended to move her remains so that her body would not be examined, and destroyed her monument so her body could not be found. Looking back on his actions years later he was ashamed of himself for protecting Mircalla, and to set things right he made notes that led the Baron to rediscover the tomb years later.

Laura clearly never recovers from the events of her story, even as an adult. She still hesitates to recall her experiences and lives a solitary life, perhaps afraid to get close to people for fear of getting hurt, but also in an effort to avoid the complex emotions that Carmilla inspired within her.



Laura shares her knowledge of the vampire, once again demonstrating her growth and the harsher realities of the world that she has been forced to face, as well as a strong belief in the supernatural. She now understands that Carmilla's expressions of love and devotion were likely nothing more than a cover for her blood lust. Occasionally, as was the case with Laura, the vampire is able to skillfully deceive their victims and enact a form of courtship, which can masquerade as genuine and honest love.



That the nobleman who defeated Millarca centuries ago was first her lover shows that Carmilla's love invites destruction. Indeed, it was Carmilla's "love" of Bertha and Laura that alerted the men who will defeat her to her vampiric nature.



The nobleman eventually realizes that he was blinded by love for Mircalla, which led him to act foolishly in an effort to protect her. Love, in this case (the only example of heterosexual love in the novel), is presented as foolish and naïve. The text seems to suggest, then, that any kind of romantic love inevitably leads to trouble. It is only with distance that the nobleman is able to see the error of his ways and set things right.



Laura ends her story by saying that after the events with Carmilla, her father took her on a trip around Italy for more than a year to try to heal her. It took Laura a long time to recover from the horror of what had happened, and she never fully did. She still imagines Carmilla, sometimes as the beautiful girl she thought she knew and sometimes as the monster she saw in the church when Carmilla attacked General Spielsdorf. She is still haunted by the memory of the girl, and often imagines she hears Carmilla's footsteps approaching her door.

Laura ends her story by reinforcing the long-term and lasting impact that Carmilla had on her life. Although Laura's father tried to "heal" her, she knew that such a thing was not possible. She was forever changed by her friendship with the girl and the feelings she stimulated. The fact that Laura still imagines Carmilla as both a monster and her friend, shows that she continues to wrestle with these conflicting feelings: the desire to express her own sexuality, and the fear of doing so.





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