

EXT. DESOLATE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A hot summer wind blows across a lonely highway. Gnarled, ancient trees hug the sides of the road and reach above it, encircling it, choking it.

The cement highway is cracking where the earth meets it. Roots are growing up under the paved surface, pushing through, refusing to stay buried.

Just beyond the trees a wrought iron fence rises out of the hillside perimeter of a picturesque graveyard.

The summer cicadas hum incessantly, getting louder as we approach a newly filled grave. Fresh foot-prints and flowers indicate a recent burial.

A discarded program, half covered in dirt, shows a full color photo of a beautiful woman. She is creased, and grubby fingerprints smudge her mouth.

A lush red rose, apparently blown from a nearby arrangement, lies abandoned on the trampled earth.

The flower is abruptly crushed by a bare, dirty foot.

The moon casts long, creeping shadows from the grave stones. The shadows stretch toward a sweeping Gothic mansion just beyond the small cemetery.

In the corner of a crude stone gazebo, a black widow spider wraps a recent kill in sticky tendrils of web. Turning it over, and over, and over.

INT. MANSION - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Moonlight streams in through the beveled window panes, casting shadows of the lattice-work on the floor.

The decorative knife set gleams.

The digital clock on the microwave glows red in the shadowy darkness: 3:33.

The air conditioner kicks on with a hum and the curtains are blown open by the stream of air, exposing that the sliding glass door has been left slightly ajar.

In the foyer, a grand, spiraling staircase takes us up to the top floor.

Expensive prints line the walls: The Nightmare by Henry Fuseli; Dante et Virgile au Enfers by William-Adolphe Bouguereau; Sleep by Gustave Courbet.

The floorboards shriek as an unseen weight presses them down.

INT. MANSION - LAURA'S BEDROOM - AT THAT EXACT MOMENT

YOUNG LAURA SHERIDAN(6), a pretty child in a pale nightgown, has heard the noise.

She pulls has the voluminous lacy curtains of her overstuffed bed all the way up to her chin sharply.

The latch on her door rattles as it is lifted from the outside. She stares at it in abject horror. The door creaks inward.

Tears fill her wide eyes, but do not fall. She is terrified, but pissed about it.

The hallway and all it contains are a black, gaping void in the middle of the wall.

For a long awful moment, Laura is frozen. Nothing moves to stir the depths of the darkness.

Suddenly she throws off the comforter. Her dark hair tossing as she jumps to her feet, ready to fight. She looks terribly small, centered on that giant bed.

She inches toward the edge of the mattress. She climbs down quickly, never taking her eyes from the shadowy rectangle of the door.

Slowly, ever so slowly, she approaches. Her eyes strain to see something anything that might have pushed her door open. Nothing. A frightened tear spills out.

She wipes the water from her cheeks resentfully, grabs the door, and slams it shut. She sprints back to her bed and stops short.

CARMILLA KARNSTEIN(15) Impossibly lovely, with a lush, full mouth, a dated flowing white shirt, and a leather vest, sits on the edge of her bed.

Laura is too stunned to move or cry out. Her tiny mouth drops

open.

CARMILLA

Your mother used to sit with you?

The teenager nods toward a chair by the bedside table.

Laura's head droops. Her bottom lip trembles and she bites down on it, hard, as though punishing it. She savagely wipes away the tear track on her pale cheek.

YOUNG LAURA

Before... She's dead now.

CARMILLA

She was weak. You're not though.

Carmilla pulls the covers down and pats the bed. Laura doesn't move.

CARMILLA

I could sit with you tonight.

Wind rattles the window in its frame. Crows caw outside. Laura startles and peers out at the tree. Crows cover every inch of it. The branches sag under their weight.

Laura gasps. Carmilla's eyes glitter dangerously.

CARMILLA

Careful, you'll hurt my feelings.

Laura turns, the hairs on the back her neck standing straight up.

Laura climbs back into the bed, eyeing Carmilla nervously. Carmilla bends and kisses her forehead. She lingers.

A pulse thumps in the delicate veins that trace Laura's chest. Carmilla's eyes lock onto that delicate, blue line, throbbing just above the little girl's heart.

CARMILLA

You are so lovely...

Carmilla's face fills Laura's field of vision. Laura closes her eyes. The world goes dark.

In the blackness, the child lets out a painful, blood curdling scream. It echoes.

Insert Title Card: Ten Years Later

INT. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON/EARLY EVENING

LAURA SHERIDAN (16), in a leather jacket, lacy top, jean shorts over ripped tights, and a metric ton of eyeliner, is curled up like a contortionist in the passenger seat.

JOSEPH SHERIDAN (45) A writer, disheveled and unshaven, a condition at odds with his impressively expensive car and designer clothing, drives.

Laura gazes morosely out the window at the scenery, unimpressed by it. She absentmindedly rubs her thumb across a snake bite shaped scar over her heart.

She looks at Joseph and narrows her eyes. Then with an audible sigh, kicks her feet up on the dash, drawing as much attention to the act as is humanly possible.

JOSEPH

Please don't do that.

LAURA

Do what?

JOSEPH

It's a nice car. Don't, put your shoes on the interior, you'll ruin it.

LAURA

You can afford to detail it.

JOSEPH

It's the principle, Laura! The principle of it. It's a nice car, and it never did anything to you, so I don't see why you feel the need to stamp your filthy feet all over it and ruin it!

LAURA

Whatever! Fine! God!

Laura pulls her feet down but pushes herself out, making herself bigger, straining against the seat belt, like a bird in a trap trying to fly away.

She looks at her father.

Joseph stares straight ahead.

She sighs again, dragging it out. Joseph is pointedly non-responsive.

LAURA

So, do you want to talk about it?

JOSEPH

I wouldn't even know what to say.

LAURA

Well you're obviously pissed.

JOSEPH

No, I'm... stunned. I'm disappointed
and I'm stunned.

Laura yanks on her seat belt and presses her head against the window. Longest car ride ever.

We see the tunnel of trees that lead up to Joseph's Southern Gothic mansion from her skewed perspective, distorted by the curved glass.

JOSEPH

Your mother would have known what to
say, here, kiddo. But I am at a loss.

LAURA

And there it is.

JOSEPH

There WHAT is?

LAURA

You know what.

They pass the cemetery. The years have not been kind. The fence sinks into the ground at a tilt, choked by ivy. Headstones are crumbling.

The birds have taken over.

JOSEPH

You're lucky they didn't kick you out
too, you know. Damn lucky.

LAURA

What do you want me to say?

JOSEPH

Nothing. Don't say anything.

She waits. He tries not to say more.

JOSEPH

Well, you know you might try showing a tiny bit of remorse, some human fucking compassion might be nice.

A small smile he can't see creeps onto Laura's lips.

LAURA

I'll make it up to her when she gets here.

Joseph shifts uncomfortably and scratches his head.

JOSEPH

Yeah.

Laura looks at him schrewdly.

LAURA

What?

He squirms.

JOSEPH

Nothing. We'll talk about it later.

LAURA

Don't do that.

JOSEPH

We will discuss this later.

LAURA

I want to discuss it now.

JOSEPH

No, Laura. I don't thing this is the... I'm not ready to-

LAURA

Ready to what?

He presses his mouth into a thin line.

LAURA

The General's not going to let her come, is he?

Joseph looks ill. Laura crosses her arms huffily.

LAURA

So we got in a little trouble. So what!? We're teenagers, we're supposed to get in trouble!

They turn up a long decrepit driveway, the tires skid over the edges of it and chunks of concrete crack and crumble, and jagged triangles stab into the bald tires.

LAURA

Bertie always spends the summer with me. Now he what? He just forbids her to come here, so I get it, she gets kicked out of Drunstall but I get punished.

JOSEPH

This may have escaped you, but you didn't get punished.

Joseph wraps his hand around his throat, scratching his stubble in a motion more like choking himself than itching.

LAURA

Oh, I see. You approve. This is my penance. I thought you liked having Bertie here. Said you did.

JOSEPH

I did.

LAURA

So. Talk to him. He'll listen to you.

They've reached the house. Joseph pulls the sleek black sedan into a cobbled drive. He puts it into park.

JOSEPH

Bertie... Bertie died sweetheart. She just, she... it was very fast.

Laura waits for the punchline, it doesn't come.

LAURA

Shut the fuck up.

He can't look at her.

Her exterior cracks. Suddenly we can see how very young she is under all that makeup.

LAURA

When?

JOSEPH

Yesterday.

LAURA

How?

Joseph does not answer. Laura closes her eyes. They are silent a while.

Crows caw in the distance. The sun, behind the moving clouds is brightened and dimmed and finally darkened as a grey mass settles before it.

JOSEPH

The General's a wreck. He loved that girl like a daughter. He blames himself. He was nearly unintelligible on the phone.

LAURA

I was gonna make it up to her.

JOSEPH

Well, now you can't.

She glares at him, stung. Then masters her face. Removing any trace of an expression.

LAURA

I should never have come back.

She opens the car door and gets out slamming the door.

Joseph, now alone in the car, rubs his face with both hands. Then he unbuckles his seatbelt; aggression and weariness warring with each other in each movement.

JOSEPH

Yeah, well, we've both made mistakes.

He gets out too.

EXT. MANSION - FRONT LAWN - MOMENTS LATER

Joseph pulls bags from the back seat. Laura grabs a suitcase and follows him toward the mansion's expansive entryway.

Suddenly, Laura sets her bags down.

LAURA

Let's go away for the summer. Get away from this shit show. Jamaica or Hawaii or something, somewhere with beaches.

Joseph stops too and turns to face her.

JOSEPH

I have a deadline.

LAURA

You're a writer, you can work anywhere with wifi.

JOSEPH

My agent is here. And speaking of wifi, you are grounded, Dumpling. Cut off. Your cell service disconnects tomorrow. I've hidden the router. The only internet for miles is going directly to my office through an Ethernet cable. And if you want to attend the Masquerade in August, you'll find a way to prove to me that you have found some perspective.

LAURA

What the hell am I supposed to do all summer?

Joseph turns back toward the house and continues up the walk. Laura stamps her foot. She gestures wildly at the cemetery.

LAURA

With only CORPSES for company?

A crow flutters to a headstone and caws shrilly.

LAURA

I'm already bored to death.

Her father goes into the house, calling over his shoulder:

JOSEPH

Boredom is good for you. Makes you creative.

The crow caws again, seemingly at her. She narrows her eyes and grabs a rock from the ground. She rights herself, swinging her arm up to throw. Her face is pure malice.

The crow is gone. Laura looks around, startled. In the distance there is a faint chiming sound.

LAURA

I never lacked creativity.

She hesitatingly lowers her arm and drops the rock. It clatters when it hits the paving stones. She takes hold of her suitcase and heads inside.

INT. MANSION - KITCHEN - DUSK

The sounds of a bubbling pot and hissing steam fill the kitchen.

Laura enters and sees MRS. PERRODON (57), a soft, round, woman who talks and sighs in deep, warm tones with a lilting poetic cadence, as she prepares a lavish meal.

MS. DE LAFONTAINE (33), a wispy maid with a long neck dripping with too many necklaces and fingers laden with silver rings, leans over the counter conspiratorially.

Her skirt isn't too short but it seems to be caught on the counter or something because we can see a bit more leg than is strictly appropriate. And her knickers.

Laura leans against the door frame, smiling at these women she hadn't realized she'd missed.

MRS. PERRODON

-that poor girl languished for weeks
and no one could tell what the devil
was ailing her.

She slices strawberries rhythmically, periodically waving the sharp knife for dramatic effect. Red droplets stain her fingers and fly off the serrated blade.

MRS. PERRODON

The doctor came had no clue, it was
practically supernatur-

Mrs. Perrodon interrupts herself with a slight shriek. Laura jumps a little.

MRS. PERRODON

LAURA! Oh come here, child! Let me
look at you!

Mrs. Perrodon shuffles toward Laura who opens her arms wide

for a hug. Ms. De Lafontaine approaches, a bit more awkwardly, all angles, and takes a hug too.

When she speaks, it is as if she's over-excited or terribly frightened. Breath escapes her as she talks. Her voice is small.

MS. DE LAFONTAINE

It's good to see you, miss Laura.

Laura takes the nervous creatures face in her hands kindly.

LAURA

Margaret. Lookin' saucy.

She tugs on the lacy garment poking out from her hiked up skirt. Ms. De Lafontaine blushes deeply and rights herself.

MRS. PERRODON

Well we could say the same for you, ducky, but I'm not sure about all the black.

LAURA

(rolling her eyes)

Thanks for your opinion, Mrs. P.

MRS. PERRODON

I liked the babydoll dresses, this leather and lace look is...

Laura rolls her eyes and turns away.

MRS. PERRODON

Well either way, you're beautiful.
Looks more like her mother every day.

She pulls Laura back and hugs her from behind then releases her, bustling back to the food. She opens the lid of a pot on the stove. Laura twirls back around.

LAURA

What is that? It smells like heaven.

MRS. PERRODON

Beef tips in a red wine sauce. We're letting in simmer in its own juices before we tear into it like rabid animals.

She smiles a bit madly, all teeth.

MRS. PERRODON

You haven't gone veggie, stuck with all those calorie counters at that school, have ya?

LAURA

No, ma'am. Red blooded carnivore right here.

MRS. PERRODON

Good girl.

Joseph enters, following his nose with impish delight.

JOSEPH

It smells divine Mrs. Perrodon, absolutely magnificent. Perfect for our little moonlight picnic.

LAURA

(incredulous)

Picnic?

MS. DE LAFONTAINE

We can't miss the moon tonight.

JOSEPH

(thumbing his nose)

Margaret here knows about these things.

Ms. De Lafontaine puffs up, smiling brilliantly at Joseph. She places a hand on his chest and Laura cocks her head at the familiarity of the gesture.

MS. DE LAFONTAINE

It's an important moon. When the moon shines like the one tonight it foretells special spiritual activity.

LAURA

Makes you bold, anyway.

Ms. De Lafontaine drops her hand and runs to the big windows gazing out at the darkening sky.

MS. DE LAFONTAINE

The effect of the full moon in such a state of brilliancy is, is manifold.

She presses her face to the glass of the window and her

reflection appears to be a ghostly second head.

MS. DE LAFONTAINE

It acts on dreams, on lunacy, on
nervous natures, like your father's,
it has marvelous physical influences
on life.

She glances back at Joseph, eyeing him hungrily.

Joseph gestures half grandly, half all too aware that he's
trying too hard.

JOSEPH

We're going to bathe in the light of
the moon and wondrous things will
happen! Plus, I thought, it might be
nice to have dinner with your mother.

Laura's enjoyment of the moment evaporates as though it had
never been there. Ms. De Lafontaine wilts.

Mrs. Perrodon busies herself packing a picnic basket with
plates and cutlery. She gives Ms. De Lafontaine a look. The
maid leaves silently and swiftly.

LAURA

Dad, no, that's... so morbid.

JOSEPH

You never spend time with your mother.
What will it hurt?

LAURA

I never spend time with her because
she's been dead since I was 6.

His eager smile vanishes. He goes very still.

Ants swarm a piece of beef that landed on the floor near the
sliding glass door. Mrs. Perrodon notices the ants guiltily
and surreptitiously steps on them.

She lifts her foot and dazed ant survivors mill around the
dead ones, while others keep coming. She simply walks away
from them.

JOSEPH

Well, if you don't want a picnic...

Joseph casts about, eyes a bit blind. He grabs the pot on the stove by both handles with his bare hands and hefts it off the burner. It's too heavy.

He nearly drops it. It slams onto the counter-top with a "thunk" and he starts sliding it toward the sink, his skin unprotected from the boiling heat.

Mrs. Perrodon rushes toward him, her massive bosom heaving. She pries his hands off the pot, wincing and hissing when she accidentally touches the scalding metal in the process.

MRS. PERRODON
Mr. Sheridan, no!

Laura grabs him by the shoulders and pulls him back. She looks into his devastated eyes. She thrums with concern.

LAURA
What are you doing?!

JOSEPH
(like a child)
I don't know.

Ants can be seen here and there all over the kitchen crawling by the sink, milling under the fridge, marching toward the cupboards.

Laura looks at Joseph's hands, they are red and starting to blister. She pushes him to the sink and runs them under cold water.

Joseph starts to shake.

LAURA
Daddy? Daddy we can have a picnic with mom, okay? Would you like that?

He lifts his hands and looks at them, realizing.

JOSEPH
I've got into one of my moping moods again.

Laura rushes to the fridge, opens the freezer and pulls out a bag of frozen beets. She wraps them in paper towels and places them in his hands.

LAURA
Are you okay?

JOSEPH

(Quoting)

In truth I know not why I am so sad.
It wearies me: you say it wearies you;
But how I got it...

He trails off, thinking.

JOSEPH

Came by it?

It's gone.

JOSEPH

I forget the rest.

Mrs. Perrodon presses her lips together, finds some pot holders, and moves the pot back onto the stove top. She glances back at him, un-surprised but full of concern.

JOSEPH

Do you ever feel like some horrible
tragedy is just hanging over you,
waiting to happen?

LAURA

It already happened, Daddy, the worst
is over okay?

JOSEPH

Is it?

Ants creep around every corner of the kitchen floor.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

A blanket is spread out between the stone gazebo and a grave that was fresh ten years ago. The food has been devoured, dishes left askew.

Laura and Mrs. Perrodon gaze at the moon from a seated position. Ms. De Lafontaine twirls in circles under the stars with her arms outstretched.

Joseph kneels before the grave. Unlike the rest of the graveyard it has been kept pristine.

The headstone is covered in red roses. Some withered, faded, crumbling, some new, with petals that are still silken. Each with wicked, curved thorns.