

the Vampyre

by

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Based on the short story by John Polidori

FADE IN:

EXT. MERCER BUILDING - EVENING

Dusk approaching on a dreary, foggy day. A FULL MOON is barely visible through the mist. A soft rain falls outside the building - the private residence of Lord and Lady Mercer - as a small coach led by a single horse approaches.

TITLE CARD: "London, February 1819"

As the coach comes to a stop, its door has already been opened from the inside by WILLIAM AUBREY, a tall, conservatively dressed man in his early twenties. William exits the coach and reaches back to assist his sister, MARY, a strong-willed and beautiful 17-year-old.

INT. FOYER - EVENING

Inside, o.s., GUESTS are CHATTERING and LAUGHING and a STRING QUARTET plays Baroque MUSIC. A SERVANT takes the coats and other accouterments from William and his sister as they continue an argument:

WILLIAM (to Mary)

And I should be back home, planning my trip. I tell you, the only reason I came here is -

MARY

The only reason you came here was because I dragged you here!

WILLIAM

I only came here to see Christian. And I might say the same for you. The two of you shouldn't be carrying on as you do, you know ... you really should have a proper presentation.

MARY

Yes, yes, after your trip, when I'm 18 years of age. Just because I haven't been presented does not mean Christian and I can't enjoy each other's company, my dear brother.

William and Mary walk toward the entrance of the drawing room, but are stopped before they can enter by William's friend CHRISTIAN.

CHRISTIAN

Master Aubrey! And the charming Mary!
Excellent to see you again, my
friends. I'm sure Lady Mercer will be
thrilled to see you at her drawing-
room.

William smiles broadly.

WILLIAM

Oh, she might ... if she knew me!

CHRISTIAN

Well, I'd introduce you myself if I
could only find her. But who needs
Lady Mercer when we are graced with
the presence of such beauty in your
sister?

WILLIAM

Christian....

MARY

Brother, if you stop him now, I swear
that I'll never forgive you.

The three join in LAUGHTER at Mary's comment. Christian leads the group into the drawing room.

CHRISTIAN

Honestly, the two of you.... (a beat)
Come, let's join the crowd.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - EVENING

The drawing room is packed. A few guests are dancing, some are TALKING, some are drinking, and some simply enjoy the MUSIC of the quartet.

LADY MERCER chats with a MYSTERIOUS MAN. The man sits in a plush velvet chair; his hair is long, dark brown, and streaked with grey, although he still appears youthful. His eyes show no emotion.

LADY MERCER

So, milord, do you plan to stay with us through the whole evening tonight, or sneak off per usual?

The mysterious man smiles, though his eyes do not seem to share the gesture.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

We'll just have to see how things progress, Lady Mercer.

LADY MERCER

Well, I'm sure you can find something to suit your fancy. We seem to have quite an interesting crowd tonight.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Aye, that you do. But then, when have your drawing-rooms not produced a most interesting crowd?

LADY MERCER

Ah, but you flatter me, you scoundrel. I'd swear it was you they all came to see.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Oh, surely I can't be quite so interesting.

A chair opens up next to the mysterious man. Lady Mercer daintily lowers herself into it and leans close to him.

LADY MERCER

To me, you're the most interesting man here.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - LATER THAT EVENING

In another area of the drawing room, William, Mary, and Christian are smiling and LAUGHING, apparently at William's expense.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, old reliable "Oxford Aubrey." I tell you, Mary, you brother's a great friend, but not the best at conversation.

WILLIAM

Well, you still must admit, it is quite warm for this time of year.

CHRISTIAN

Maybe so, Aubrey, but I haven't seen you for eight months, and that's the best you could do for conversation?

WILLIAM

You may not be seeing much of me, but you're certainly seeing more than enough of my sister.

CHRISTIAN

Enough, William. You know very well that this isn't the place to discuss my involvement with Mary. I mean, if you'd only have taken an appropriate moment to talk with me -

MARY

Oh, you mustn't treat him so harshly, Christian. My brother has been so busy lately, he hardly even has time to talk with me.

WILLIAM

I will always have time for you, Dearheart. After all, you're the only family I have.

Christian SMILES.

CHRISTIAN

All right, all right, enough of this blathering sentimental nonsense. What exactly has made you so busy you haven't had time for a visit to Birmingham? These days, I do see Mary more than I see you. Not that I don't enjoy every minute of that, of course. But she's not one to speak of her pig-headed brother often.

MARY

He hasn't told you his plans?

CHRISTIAN

He hasn't spoken to me!

WILLIAM

As Mary said, I've been busy, Chris. I'm planning a trip abroad.

CHRISTIAN

All right, now that would certainly explain it. Where are you planning to go?

WILLIAM

Well, that remains undecided.

MARY

I think he's just waiting for someone to whisk him off and tell him where to go.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, come on now, Aubrey, don't you know it's you that's supposed to do the whisking? At this rate, you'll never find yourself a companion for your old age!

MARY

Why do you think I keep forcing him to go to these drawing-rooms?

WILLIAM

I don't really think women make the best travel companions anyway.

CHRISTIAN

Oh? And why is that, my friend?

MARY

Yes, William, my dear brother - why is that?

The crowd has begun to thin out; people are moving to the dining area, o.s. The atmosphere has become more relaxed and the music is down to one VIOLIN.

Lady Mercer and the mysterious man are now visible from the vantage of Christian and Mary, but not from that of William, as his back is turned. Lady Mercer is practically in the mysterious man's lap - he, however, seems quite uninterested.

WILLIAM

Oh, I don't want to get into this discussion again, Mary. Women are simply less well fit for travel.

Mary notices Lady Mercer.

MARY

Well that one certainly is!

William starts to turn around, but Christian grabs his arm.

CHRISTIAN

Careful, Aubrey, wouldn't want to be rude, now. It seems Mary has found our gracious hostess.

MARY

That is Lady Mercer? She doesn't seem like much of a lady to me.

WILLIAM

Why? What is she doing?

MARY

Nearly everything but removing all her clothing and straddling that man!

WILLIAM

Mary!

Christian can't help but burst into UPROARIOUS LAUGHTER at Mary's comment. Hearing the laughter, and sensing an opportunity for escape, the mysterious man looks up.

Lady Mercer, caught being less than ladylike, stands and rushes out of the drawing room.

MARY

Who is that man? People have been flocking to him since we arrived.

William turns around, no longer able to suppress his curiosity. The mysterious man stands and begins to walk to the trio.

CHRISTIAN

Well, he's on his way over. It will be my pleasure to introduce you.

The mysterious man arrives, with an expression on his face almost approaching jovial. William is completely transfixed by the man's appearance, unable to divert his eyes or remove the inquisitive look from them.

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Good Christian, how does this evening find you?

CHRISTIAN

Quite well, Vincent, as always. Please, let me introduce a friend from my days at university, William Aubrey, and his enchanting sister Mary. Aubrey, Mary ... this incredibly handsome man is Lord Vincent Ruthven.

Mary suppresses a GIGGLE. Ruthven LAUGHS outright, but his eyes continue to show nothing.

RUTHVEN

Oh, you make me out to be more than I am, sir. Don't rely on his words as a measure of my attractiveness.

CHRISTIAN

Of course not. (a beat) Rely on the ladies that seem to fall at his feet at every drawing-room.

William finally seems to break out of his trance.

WILLIAM

Well, regardless of your relative attractiveness, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, milord.

RUTHVEN

Oh, please ... call me "Ruthven" or "Vincent." I do so hate being called "lord"; it implies an undeserved superiority.

MARY

And what makes you think you do not deserve it?

RUTHVEN

Well, aren't you quite the little inquisitive one?

WILLIAM

You'll have to excuse my sister, Ruthven. She has had the benefit of little supervision other than my own, and I'm afraid I haven't done a very good job of it.

RUTHVEN

Oh? I'm not so sure of that.

MARY

I'm not so sure he ever supervised me.

CHRISTIAN

I'm not so sure you can be supervised, Mary. But I know I wouldn't mind being the one to try!

William shoots Christian a glance. The four guests are now the only ones to remain in the drawing room. Everyone else has entered the dining room, and SERVANTS have begun to clean the area.

RUTHVEN

There are some people who were never meant to be supervised. Though my sympathy goes with those who still attempt to control.

CHRISTIAN

And who can help but succumb to your control, Ruthven? Come, my friends, to the dining room. I must tell you how I came to meet this most intriguing fellow.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

This room is enormous, even more grand than the drawing room. The string quartet is here, playing SOFT MUSIC in the background.

A large, rectangular table around which many guests are seated dominates the center of the room. LORD MERCER sits at the head of this table, but Lady Mercer is nowhere to be found. Several smaller round tables encircle the larger table.

CHRISTIAN

Come, there is an open table yet.

WILLIAM (to Mary)

Do you see Lady Mercer anywhere?

MARY (to William)

Would you be seen in public if you had behaved as she just did?

The foursome work their way to an open table. Mary begins to take a chair with its back to the center of the room, but Ruthven grabs her arm.

RUTHVEN

Please. The visage of one so fair should not be denied this good company. Allow me.

Ruthven pulls a chair out for Mary, one that provides its occupant with a better view of the other guests (or vice versa), and sits in the chair in which she had originally planned to sit. Christian sits down next to Ruthven and William takes the remaining seat.

A light meal has already been placed at each setting, but no one starts to eat. A carafe of red wine is in the center of the table; everyone's glasses are empty.

CHRISTIAN

So I was saying -

Christian takes the carafe and fills everyone's glasses.

CHRISTIAN (Cont.)

Ruthven and I met in that casino in town. The one where -

RUTHVEN

Really, Christian, must you relate this tale again?

WILLIAM

No, I'd like to hear it.

RUTHVEN

Oh, very well then. Continue.

CHRISTIAN

(laughing)

Oh, as if you could stop me if you tried! Anyway, this is really a most intriguing story. So I was at that casino, playing baccarat. And you know baccarat is simply not my game. I may be an expert at whist -

WILLIAM

I'm always smart enough to have you on my team, am I not?

CHRISTIAN

Right. So I'm actually winning for once, surprising as that may sound. The poor fellow next to me, however, was not having quite as much luck....

FADE TO:

INT. CASINO - EVENING

Flashback. Posh, crowded, overdecorated atmosphere. Christian and three other PLAYERS are seated at a baccarat table. The two players to Christian's left are extravagantly dressed and dripping with jewelry; Player 1, to his right, is dressed plainly and looks a bit unkempt (more like he has lost sleep than he can't afford to look better). Christian provides the perfect balance.

CHRISTIAN V.O.

It was only a few weeks ago; I had just gotten into town and felt like getting out for a night.

The DEALER makes casual CONVERSATION with the bejeweled players as he tosses out cards. Player 1 talks to his hands.

PLAYER 1

Last round for me. Out after this is what I am.

Christian feels obligated to answer.

CHRISTIAN

Bad luck tonight, sir?

No reply.

CHRISTIAN (Cont.)

I say, not winning much tonight?

PLAYER 1

Winning, you bloody fool? Down to my last pence, I am.

CHRISTIAN

Hard luck, hard luck. Look, if you need to borrow -

PLAYER

Borrow? Sir, you mistake me for the indigent man. I can assure you, I have wealth enough at home. Only trying to recoup my losses for tonight, I am.

Ruthven walks over from another area of the casino and stands behind the two bejeweled players. The dealer finishes passing out cards.

CHRISTIAN V.O.

I certainly didn't mean to insult the man, of course. There was no need for his haughtiness. (a beat) Anyway, Vincent walks over then, and has the nerve to stop the hand just as we're placing our bets.

The players begin to move chips around on the table. Ruthven leans forward between the two bejeweled players and raises a hand.

RUTHVEN

Excuse me. Dealer? Would it be possible to join the game for this hand?

DEALER

I'm sorry, sir. Once the cards have hit the table, that's not allowed.

RUTHVEN

Oh, but surely these fine gentlemen won't mind if you deal this hand again.

Ruthven clasps a hand on the shoulder of one of the bejeweled players. A LIGHT briefly glows behind Ruthven's normally dull eyes, as if they were the eyes of a cat. The light dies as quickly as it appears.

There is a long, uncomfortable pause.

BEJEWELLED PLAYER

Oh, we may as well let the man in.
Yes, let's deal this hand again and
allow him to play.

No one else reacts, but the bejeweled player places his cards
in front of the dealer, face up, then reaches for Christian's
cards and does the same. Ruthven grins.

RUTHVEN

Misdeal.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Ruthven stares blankly at Christian.

RUTHVEN

I did not say that.

Christian looks highly amused at his own story, William seems
to be hanging on his every word, and Mary just looks
embarrassed.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, the devil you didn't! It didn't
matter anyway, that was probably my
worst hand of the night.

WILLIAM

So did they deal you in?

RUTHVEN

Of course.

MARY

It doesn't seem like you gave them
much of a choice.

CHRISTIAN

Anyway, no matter. He sat there for a
few more hands. That one poor fellow
won a few, so he stayed in the game
for a while. But his luck started to
turn in a frightening way.

INT. CASINO - EVENING

A hand is in progress. Player 1 is obviously trying to hold back a smile; Ruthven has a poker face any card shark would envy.

Christian lifts a corner of his cards to peek at them, then throws a chip in front of him.

CHRISTIAN V.O.

The take had grown quite large on this one hand. My cards were fair at best, but I figured I'd stay in a while longer.

Player 1 doesn't even look at his cards. He takes a small stack of chips and slides them into the growing pot.

PLAYER 1

To you, Lord Ruthven!

Ruthven matches Player 1's bet.

RUTHVEN

I call, sir.

CHRISTIAN V.O.

I had thought the man would have left the game on the last hand, which he broke even on, but he just wanted Vincent's money, I suppose.

Player 1, his face BEAMING like the cat that swallowed the canary, turns his cards over - a five and a three. Christian, an obvious loser, tosses his cards in face-down.

Ruthven does not move.

PLAYER 1

Then I've won? Yes! The last hand equaled my losses; this will certainly turn tonight into a big winning!

He reaches for the chips.

RUTHVEN

Sir, I have not yet shown my cards.

PLAYER 1

Yes, but surely -

Ruthven reveals his cards - the three remaining threes. Player 1 picks up his cards and THROWS them at the dealer in frustration.

PLAYER 1

Bah! My luck was turning! Never should've let you in the game.

RUTHVEN

If you recall, sir, your luck turned after I joined.

BEJEWELED PLAYER

'Tis true, 'tis true.

PLAYER 1

Dealer, kindly extend some credit to me that I might continue ... in the amount of -

DEALER

I'm sorry, sir, but we extend credit only to a few of our most -

PLAYER 1

What, most rich? Master Dealer, I am more than capable of covering any debt you may advance, I can assure you.

DEALER

That may be so, but our policy -

PLAYER 1

To Hell and Damnation with your policy! Extend the credit, or I shall be forced to speak with the proprietor of this establishment!

Ruthven holds up a hand in front of the dealer before he has a chance to retort.

RUTHVEN (to Player 1)
Now then. I don't think that will be
necessary, my friend.

Ruthven and the dealer begin a CONVERSATION, with occasional
PROTESTATIONS by Player 1, but it is the voices of Christian
and the others that we hear:

CHRISTIAN V.O.
I thought Ruthven was about to reach
into his coat pocket and hand the man
a roll of 100-pound notes!

MARY V.O.
So what did he do?

CHRISTIAN V.O.
Nothing short of convince the dealer
to extend credit from the casino.

WILLIAM V.O.
But I thought they would never do
that without an established, prepaid
account.

CHRISTIAN V.O.
As did I. It's all in the persuasive
art, I tell you, and this man is a
master. A lord.

RUTHVEN V.O.
Oh, you give me far too much credit.

MARY V.O.
I should say.

The loan to Player 1 is transacted, Player 1 signs a paper,
and the dealer begins to pass out cards. Player 1's hands
tremble when he picks up his cards.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Servants clear the dinner plates from the tables; some guests
start to leave. The quantity of food on Ruthven's plate
remains the same, though its contents have been moved around.

WILLIAM

Phenomenal bit of charity.

CHRISTIAN

That's not the end of it.

WILLIAM

Oh?

CHRISTIAN

Not quite. Turned out that the man had wagered his lands to cover that loan. He won a hand or two, but his bad-luck streak returned and he lost the entire loan by the time he was through.

MARY

The casino allowed him a loan against his own home?

Ruthven responds matter-of-factly, as if the answer were patently obvious.

RUTHVEN

That's what I could arrange.

MARY

Horrid. Simply horrid.

CHRISTIAN

Maybe so, but at least the man was happy for a time. He was given the opportunity to live like a lord.

WILLIAM

Quite intriguing.

A pause ensues during which William and Mary absorb Christian's story. Ruthven stands.

RUTHVEN

Sorry as I am not to offer an ... alternate representation of my character, I'm afraid I must proceed into the night.

CHRISTIAN

Sounds like a fine idea for us all,
in fact.

RUTHVEN

Until next time, then, my friends.

Ruthven hastens away from the table.

CHRISTIAN

Say, Ruthven, wait just one moment!

RUTHVEN

Yes?

CHRISTIAN

You've done quite a bit of traveling,
have you not?

Ruthven turns and walks back to the table. William senses that
Christian is about to mention his ill-planned trip.

WILLIAM

Christian, please....

CHRISTIAN

Nonsense.

RUTHVEN

Actually, I seem to travel more often
than I stay in one place.

CHRISTIAN

Well then, I'd say you're in a unique
position to assist our friend William
here. He's planning a trip of his own
shortly.

RUTHVEN

Oh?

WILLIAM

Well ... yes, I am. A "coming-of-age"
trip, you might say.

RUTHVEN

Where do you plan to go?

MARY

That's the problem, he can't decide!

CHRISTIAN

You must understand, Ruthven, my friend William has never been the best at convincing himself of anything.

WILLIAM

Thank you, but I believe I'm capable of speaking for myself.

Ruthven seems to be getting impatient.

RUTHVEN

Very well, very well. I must take my leave for tonight, but send a man for me tomorrow evening, William. I shall be honored to assist you in planning your trip. Now ... good evening to you all.

He briskly EXITS.

CHRISTIAN

There. Now was that so horrible?

WILLIAM

Well no. At least not for me, at least not yet. We'll have to see how tomorrow goes. (a beat) Interesting as I found him and your story, I fear he isn't overly fond of me.

Christian LAUGHS.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, William. You're putting too much thought into this - that's just his manner. He's more than happy to offer his assistance, I'm sure.

MARY

Still, there is something odd about that man.

EXT. MERCER BUILDING - NIGHT

The weather has improved, developing into a clear night. Ruthven comes outside and walks to a SERVANT who stands by the door. He QUESTIONS the servant, but we hear:

CHRISTIAN V.O.

How so?

MARY V.O.

Oh, I don't know. He seems somehow falsely charming. As if he were trying too hard.

Ruthven begins to walk down the street.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Mary, Christian, and William continue their conversation. Servants clear the dining room.

CHRISTIAN

Not everyone can be as genuinely charming as I, my dear.

Mary GIGGLES demurely.

WILLIAM

He certainly charmed Lady Mercer into making a royal fool of herself, at any rate.

INSERT (EXT. LONDON - NIGHT): Lady Mercer makes her way down a deserted London Street, dabbing at tears with a handkerchief.

CHRISTIAN

Oh, I don't see how you could blame Ruthven for that.

WILLIAM

Who's blaming? I only wish I had that sort of persuasive power over all the women I come into contact with!

Christian and William LAUGH at the idea. Mary just SMILES.

MARY

Still, you'd think she'd have the decency to make an appearance for the meal after her own drawing room. I mean, does anyone even know where she disappeared to?

INSERT (EXT. LONDON - NIGHT): Lady Mercer rounds a corner into a dark alleyway.

CHRISTIAN

Not if she has anything to say of it, I have no doubt.

WILLIAM

One would think she had returned by this time of night, anyway. Most likely she simply retired without having to make excuses to anyone.

MARY

I haven't any doubt this will all be explained away tomorrow. But for now, my brother, I am tired. And sleep awaits.

The three walk out of the room, continuing with idle CONVERSATION as they exit.

EXT. LONDON - NIGHT

Lady Mercer walks in an alley lit only by the moon. As she approaches a well-lit main street, a SHADOWY FIGURE grabs her from behind, back into the alley.

Lights from the main street glint off a dagger, as the shadowy figure plunges it into Lady Mercer's neck. The silent night is pierced by her SCREAM, though it is quickly muffled.

INT. AUBREY HOME (LIBRARY) - NIGHT

Ruthven and William sit in large, leather-backed chairs, which are set at an angle on opposite sides of a small mahogany end table. Several books are piled on the table, obviously removed from the myriad of shelves in the room.

WILLIAM

I really am sorry to have asked you here so late, Ruthven. I tried again to decide on my own where to travel, but -

RUTHVEN

Really, do not even give it a second thought. I am happy to assist you, and I prefer the night, anyway.

WILLIAM

Well. Good. I really am quite anxious to get your opinions on the trip. From the way Christian was talking, I got the impression that you were quite well traveled.

RUTHVEN

I certainly have seen my share of the world, I suppose. But there are always places one desires to see again.

WILLIAM

Right, right. Exactly. Which is why I wished to consult with you. Books can only say so much about someplace, whereas you can give me more of a first-hand account.

RUTHVEN

(overlapping)

Ah, but I am only one man, with one opinion. And these books -

Ruthven lifts a book off the mahogany table and begins leafing through it.

RUTHVEN (Cont.)

- are but another.

WILLIAM

I suppose what I want from you is to find out what makes one want to return to a place. What do we see that embeds good places in our minds and makes us want to return?

RUTHVEN

'Tis not mere sight, my friend, that draws us to return, but more of a combination of the senses. The sight in conjunction with the smell, the sounds, the feel of a place ... the taste. (a beat) And it is not always a sense of good that brings us back time and time again. Both good and horrific experiences play equally on the mind; one type of experience holds just as dear a place as the other, whether we wish it to or not. Strong memories can be both sweet and sad. It is the strength of the final effect that such a memory has on our mind - and not its type - that brings the memory to the fore and makes us long to relive it. (a beat) Or some memories, we cannot help but relive ... though we may constantly try to forget them, striving to release the tormenting grasp that they maintain on us, to force them out of our heads, the thoughts continue to come to the fore of our minds, of our dreams, occasionally peeping through and troubling our waking thoughts. Think back to the first memory of your youth, my friend. For most people, it is some traumatic moment, a moment that they would prefer not to remember yet it still lingers in their thoughts.

A pause ensues, during which William seems to be deep in thought, entranced by Ruthven's speech. Finally, he regains the power of speech.

WILLIAM

What of your first memory?

RUTHVEN

I remember very little of my youth.

Ruthven shifts uncomfortably in his chair. He closes the book he was holding and places it back on the table.

WILLIAM

Very little, sure, but your first memory, what was it of? Was it a traumatic one?

RUTHVEN

I just told you, I remember almost nothing.

Ruthven begins to grow agitated.

WILLIAM

Your first memory, though, Ruthven. I mean, surely you have a first memory.

An uncomfortable pause, then nothing. A LIGHT appears behind Ruthven's eyes, then quickly fades away. William speaks hesitantly.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

I apologize, Lord Ruthven. It is obviously not something you wish to speak of.

RUTHVEN

Ah, no, it is I who should apologize to you. I suppose I am the one who started talking about first memories to begin with.

WILLIAM

But it was me who would not let the subject go.

RUTHVEN

Enough, I will hear no more. Your trip, William, is what I am here to discuss.

WILLIAM

Yes, well ... (a beat) I believe I have a general plan in mind, and I would very much appreciate your opinions on it.

Ruthven nods.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

I was considering beginning in France, Paris most likely. I have heard such wonderful -

RUTHVEN

Excuse me, William.

WILLIAM

Yes?

RUTHVEN

Are you a child?

WILLIAM

What?

RUTHVEN

A child, William. Do you consider yourself to still be a child? Or do you wish to take this trip as an adult?

WILLIAM

Well, an adult, of course. What exactly are you getting at?

RUTHVEN

Paris is a place for children, my friend. Drunkards and bad poets. Nothing more than children playing the roles of adults: le théâtre des bouffons. It is not a place to which I would ever return.

William throws up his hands in disgust.

WILLIAM

It took me three months to determine this much, and you dismiss it so quickly. At this rate I'll be lucky to leave London before my death.

RUTHVEN

Relax, my friend. I can just as quickly plan an entire trip for us.

WILLIAM

Us?

RUTHVEN

Well, I have been meaning to begin traveling again for a few days. As I have said, I do not usually remain in one place for very long.

WILLIAM

I am more than flattered, Lord Ruthven. It would be an honor to have you accompany me.

RUTHVEN

Yes, yes. On with the task at hand.

WILLIAM

Right.

RUTHVEN

Interests, my friend. What is it that interests you?

William pauses and looks around at the books in the room as if they might give him the answer.

WILLIAM

Well ... in my studies at university, I did a lot of research on architecture - ruins and such, you know. I found that quite interesting.

RUTHVEN

Splendid! Problem solved. We leave two days from now.

Ruthven stands and walks to the door.

WILLIAM

What? But where? Wait a moment!

RUTHVEN

Italy, and perhaps on to Greece.
There you will find all you desire
and memories to relive for centuries!

WILLIAM

Amazing ... you certainly do know
what you want. And, it would seem,
what I want.

RUTHVEN

Indeed ... indeed. I can find my own
way out.

He exits.

INT. AUBREY HOME - AFTERNOON

Sunlight streams through an open window of a bedroom in the house. Two trunks sit in a corner of the room: One is closed, and the other is half packed. Mary follows William around the room as he adds items to the second trunk.

MARY

So where exactly are you going,
anyway? You still haven't told me.

WILLIAM

That's because I hardly know myself.
We start in Rome; I know that much.
From there, I believe it's somewhere
in Greece.... Beyond that, Mary, I
really don't know.

MARY

Didn't you have any say at all in
planning your own trip?

WILLIAM

It's not really my own trip anymore
now, is it? I mean, it's mine and
Ruthven's together.

Two SERVANTS come by to carry the first trunk away. Mary patiently waits for them to exit.

MARY

Don't you think he seems to be in an awful hurry to leave?

WILLIAM

What is that supposed to mean?

MARY

Oh, nothing. Never mind.

William stops, with a few items in his hands, and turns to face Mary.

WILLIAM

Stop this nonsense, Mary, and tell me what's wrong. Since I told you I'd be taking this trip with Ruthven, you've been refusing to discuss the gentleman at all.

MARY

I find Lord Vincent Ruthven to be far less than a gentleman, brother.

WILLIAM

Mary!

MARY

Well I'm sorry, but I do! I can't explain how or why, but I just know that there is something he's trying to hide. Something in his past, something in his present. (a beat) I don't know, maybe something in his future.

William returns to packing. He crams a few last items into the trunk, then SLAMS it closed.

WILLIAM

Now you're just talking nonsense.

MARY

Am I?

No response.

MARY (Cont.)

Fine, William. Maybe I am. (a beat)
Just promise me you'll be careful.

WILLIAM

Of course. Though I don't see how
it's a younger sister's place to tell
this to an older brother.

The servants reenter and carry the final trunk away. William
turns to look his sister's gaze.

WILLIAM

Now, about this matter with you and
Christian.

MARY

Brother -

WILLIAM

Stop and let me speak a moment. You
know there is nothing I'd rather see
than the two of you together, but ...
Mary ... I'm not asking you to wait
long.

MARY

You know I've never been one to
follow convention, William.

WILLIAM

Yes, I know. But I also know that you
know I only have your best interests
at heart. Mary, it's just not proper,
and for once, I'd like you to do
something the proper way.

MARY

Fine. (a beat) It's a long ride,
brother; you're going to miss the
ship.

William slings a small bag over his shoulder and starts
walking out of the room.

MARY (Cont.)

You will remember to write me, won't you?

WILLIAM

Of course, Dearheart.

Mary runs over and HUGS William.

MARY

A safe and fruitful voyage, brother.

WILLIAM

I know of no other kind.

MARY

And be sure to write!

He exits.

WILLIAM (O.S.)

Yes, yes.

Mary walks to the window.

P.O.V. Mary:

William exits the house and meets a waiting carriage. Servants lift the trunk into the back. William walks to the DRIVER and SPEAKS to him, but it is too far for Mary to hear.

EXT. AUBREY HOME - AFTERNOON

William and the carriage driver conclude their conversation, and William climbs into the carriage. From the window of the home, we see Mary wave good-bye. Over this scene, we hear William's voice reading his first letter to Mary:

WILLIAM V.O.

"Dear Mary ... It has been only a week since my arrival in Rome, but I fear your hasty judgment of Lord Ruthven may have been more accurate than I had imagined. His conduct, it seems, has been far less than exemplary, particularly for a man of his standing in society."

P.O.V. Mary:

The driver CRACKS a whip, and the carriage drives away.

INT. AUBREY HOME - AFTERNOON

Mary slowly turns from the window. She walks around the room and examines its emptiness.

WILLIAM V.O. (Cont.)

"It seems strangeness follows the man wherever he goes. He did not even appear on our ship until the night after it had set sail! I still have no idea how or when he got on board, and he was entirely unwilling to share such information, so I cannot relate any more of that story as I have not been made privy to any more of it."

FADE TO:

INT. AUBREY HOME - WEEKS LATER - NIGHT

Mary stands, reading from William's letter, which she holds in her hands. Christian reads over her shoulder.

WILLIAM V.O. (Cont.)

"I can, however, relate what has happened since we arrived in Rome. After Ruthven's numerous encounters with females en route (I think he's left a ruined woman at every stop we have made!), I finally feel forced to confront him here, as I know we plan to stay at least a month. It seems he has gained the favor of another young innocent whose reputation I am now certain he intends to tarnish. This time, however, the girl is the daughter of the very family who has been kind enough to take us in."

int. berCovicci home (William's room) - dusk

TITLE CARD: "Rome, March 1819"

William sits at a writing desk in the home of the Bercoviccis, the family with whom he and Ruthven are staying. A single candle lights the sparsely-furnished room.

WILLIAM V.O. (Cont.)

"I will of course attempt to put an end to his scheming, assuming I can even track the man down. He has become rather difficult to even locate since we arrived in Rome."

William replenishes the ink in his pen, then returns to his letter.

WILLIAM V.O. (Cont.)

I will be sure to write again when the issue is resolved. Please take care to behave, Dearheart. As always, William."

He finishes the letter, folds it in thirds, and seals it with a few drops of wax from the candle. As a final touch, he marks the wax with a signet ring.

Ruthven walks past the open door to the room just as William looks up from sealing his letter.

WILLIAM

Ruthven!

RUTHVEN (O.S.)

What?

WILLIAM

Please, Vincent. A moment of your time.

RUTHVEN (O.S.)

Can't this wait until later? I have an encounter at which I am expected, William.

WILLIAM

With Anna Bercovicci, no doubt? Must you choose to pursue and ... demean the daughter of our hosts?

A moment passes, then Ruthven reappears in the doorway. The amount of grey in his hair has increased, and he looks pale and haggard. Only his eyes seem more animated than previously, afire with a red glow.

RUTHVEN

So now you feel the need to meddle in my personal affairs? Of all the impudence! Demean...! Was it not I who...? (a beat) You would never have even taken this trip if not for me!

WILLIAM

I only meant to -

RUTHVEN

To what? Harass me? Am I not entitled to a moment's peace?

WILLIAM

Peace? What is "peace" to you, Ruthven? Playing with the lives of the affluent until they end up festering in a dungeon when you abandon them? Or worse, cast out from the society in which they once held the highest stature?

RUTHVEN

What?!

William stands from behind the writing desk.

WILLIAM

Oh, you can't tell me you have no idea what I'm talking about! In every stop we've made en route to Rome, the noble are turned ignoble at your hand.

RUTHVEN

My dear William, that is nothing short of an ignoratio elenchi.

WILLIAM

Pardon? A what?

RUTHVEN

Indeed ... Latin scholarship is not what it once was. (a beat) An ignoratio elenchi. A simple error in logic. Because the virtuous become infamous, does that mean it must be due to my actions?

WILLIAM

Well, no, but you still must admit.... That is, I mean to say, why must it always be those with whom you have had the most intimate contact?

RUTHVEN

Coincidence.

William SLAPS his hand against the writing desk in frustration and turns his back to Ruthven.

WILLIAM

You can't reasonably expect me to believe that this has all been mere coincidence?

RUTHVEN

Yes, I can.

A LIGHT glows behind Ruthven's eyes as William turns back around to face him.

RUTHVEN (Cont.)

And can you honestly say that such occurrences were not coincidental?

William straightens the items remaining on the writing desk, takes his letter to Mary in hand, and walks toward the door of the room.

WILLIAM

I suppose perhaps I cannot. (a beat)
But this does not change things. Do
you deny that you intend to see Anna
this evening?

RUTHVEN

I do not.

WILLIAM

Very well. Then I leave your company
immediately. This evening. For I am
certain of two things: that your
intentions with Anna are less than
honorable and that our host will take
such intentions harshly.

RUTHVEN

You may do as you choose, my friend.
Though I still say I do not aim to
sully the virtue of Anna or of any
other. But "honor," William ...
"honor" is an outdated concept.

WILLIAM

Maybe to you.

William exits. Ruthven takes one step into the room and looks
in the direction of the candle. The candle, seemingly
assaulted by a breeze from Ruthven's direction, is
extinguished.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

TITLE CARD: "London, May 1819"

GUESTS interact in a reception room more lush than Lady
Mercer's. The room is aglow with candlelight from a huge
chandelier and several candelabra that sit on tables
throughout the room.

Christian and Mary sit at one of these tables and stare at
each other for a few moments without speaking.

CHRISTIAN

Do you suppose we should write your
brother and tell him?

MARY

Tell him what?

CHRISTIAN

About us, Mary.

Christian picks up a glass of white wine from the table and drinks from it.

MARY

Oh come now, Christian. Really, what is there to tell?

CHRISTIAN

Mary....

MARY

What?

No reply. Christian puts his glass back on the table.

MARY (Cont.)

If there is one thing that my brother has taught me it's the virtue of patience. I have no intention of abruptly announcing a betrothal to you when other suitors have not even had the chance to -

CHRISTIAN

I am not suggesting a public announcement, Mary. Besides, you have only heard my offer. You haven't exactly promised to accept it.

MARY

You know I can't do that, Christian.

CHRISTIAN

Of course I do. I understand and appreciate etiquette as well as any educated man, which is why I don't get upset by your utter lack of response to my proposal. But did you not say that you are concerned for William's safety?

MARY

Yes.

CHRISTIAN

Well, don't you think this might entice him to cut his trip a bit short? Besides, he's not a fool; he knows I've been pursuing you for years.

He reaches out and takes Mary's hands in his own.

CHRISTIAN (Cont.)

I love you, Mary. The sun rises when you smile and sets when you leave me. And damn the "other suitors," anyway. I intend to win your heart and your hand ... I always have.

Mary BLUSHES and tries to hide a smile, but she pulls her hands away.

MARY

It's just not proper, Christian. (a beat) You know I feel for you, but ... I simply cannot promise anything right now. And how can I lie to my brother and tell him I have promised what I have not?

A SERVANT comes by and stops at the table. Some of the guests begin to exit the drawing room.

SERVANT

Pardon me gentleman, miss ... but Lord Manning has requested that the guests join him in the dining room for a brief repast.

CHRISTIAN

Yes, of course.

The servant walks away. Christian stands.

CHRISTIAN (to Mary)

Shall we go?

Mary does not respond. She stares absentmindedly at the ground as the servant walks away.

CHRISTIAN

Mary?

MARY

Has Lady Mercer been found yet?

Mary looks up. Christian takes a deep breath.

CHRISTIAN

No. (a beat) She hasn't been seen since her last drawing-room, with Lord Ruthven. But no one has seen much of Lord Mercer lately either. (a beat) She's just embarrassed, Mary, I'm sure it's nothing more. She arranges a drawing-room twice a year, and I'm sure she'll reappear by the summer. I mean, Lord Ruthven isn't even here.

MARY

Nothing ever seems to happen when he's here; it's only when he leaves that disaster is revealed.

CHRISTIAN

William can take care of himself, Mary. I'm sure he's fine.

Mary stands.

MARY

I know in my heart that you're right. I know he's fine and I'm sure he will be fine. But it's just that....

CHRISTIAN

What is it?

MARY

Write the letter.

CHRISTIAN

Are you sure that's what you want?

MARY

Write him; tell him we're madly in love and intend to wed tomorrow if you must. Just bring him home before this Lord Vincent Ruthven destroys him. Just know that what you write is not what I feel.

Christian smiles, walks to Mary, and pulls her into an embrace. Mary willingly succumbs.

CHRISTIAN

I know very well what you feel.

INT. AUBREY HOME (FOYER) - THE NEXT DAY

Sunlight streams in from large windows at the front of the home. Mary paces back and forth, wax-sealed papers in her hand.

There is a booming KNOCK at the door. Mary rushes and flings the door open, revealing Christian on the other side.

CHRISTIAN

I came as soon as I got the news.
When did the letter arrive?

MARY

Two letters. They arrived only just last night, while we were at Lord Manning's.

CHRISTIAN

So all is all right?

MARY

I haven't even broken the seal yet.

CHRISTIAN

So what are you waiting for?

Mary smiles.

MARY

You. (a beat) Come, let's read them out in the garden; it is such a beautiful day!

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Mary and Christian walk along a path in a resplendent garden, filled with purple and white flowers, beautiful trees and bushes, statues, stone benches, and in the center, a large gurgling fountain.

The seal has been broken on one of the letters, which Mary now holds in her hands, reading aloud. Christian holds the still-sealed second letter.

MARY

"... and so I left him the following morning. Anna Bercovicci had gone missing the night before (I of course assume she met with Ruthven as they had secretly planned), and the whereabouts of Ruthven himself were also unknown. I fear the worst." (a beat) "I fear the worst"? what do you suppose he means by that?

CHRISTIAN

He doesn't say?

MARY

No, that's the end of that letter. Except for his usual admonitions for me to behave and so forth.

They reach the center of the garden and sit next to each other on a bench facing the fountain. Christian then hands the second letter to Mary, who breaks its seal.

MARY

Well, I suppose he's fine, anyway, since this letter is dated after the first.

CHRISTIAN

Does he say where he is now?

Mary begins to scan the letter:

MARY

"Dear Mary" ... "hope all is going well" ... "have neither seen nor heard from Ruthven since my arrival in Athens."

CHRISTIAN

Athens!

EXT. ATHENS - DAY

TITLE CARD: "Athens, May 1819"

Establishing shots of Athens, mainly architectural ruins (such as the Parthenon), architectural achievements (intact temples), and archeological sites.

WILLIAM V.O.

"Athens was to be the next major stop on the trip Lord Ruthven had designed, and I must say, it is the perfect choice. The architectural ruins alone make this the most spectacular place I have ever known! I sit and sketch for hours upon hours; the work that the ancient Greeks put into their architecture is phenomenal. Plus I take frequent trips into the woods ... oh, you would love it here, Dearheart! But there is more, Mary. As you predicted, I have met someone."

EXT. ATHENS (OVERLOOKING RUINS) - DAY

At the top of a tall, grassy hill that overlooks some minor architectural ruins, William sits and draws in a large sketchbook. Running in dizzying circles in the fields around him is IANTHE, a naturally beautiful, young, Greek woman.

Ianthe wears a long, loose-fitting dress that flows in the breeze behind her as she runs. Her dark, long hair is tied back into a loose braid that bounces with each step.

WILLIAM V.O. (Cont.)

"Her name is Ianthe, the daughter of the family I'm staying with. She is the most beautiful, delicate, and innocent creature I have ever laid my eyes upon. Michelangelo created this kind of beauty; I never thought it could exist in front of me in a living being such as this. This is a beauty unencumbered by drawing-rooms, parties, and other affectations of society. Ianthe is truly natural, unlike anyone I have ever seen. I am in love at last."

Ianthe finally tires of her circuitous route. She runs to William, drops down beside him, and falls into a fit of GIGGLES. William attempts to hide a smile.

WILLIAM

Silly.

Ianthe sits up next to William and leans in to see what he is doing in the sketchbook, but William pulls back. She speaks with a Greek accent:

IANTHE

What are you doing?

WILLIAM

Drawing.

IANTHE

(mocking William's accent) "Drawing."
You're always "drawing," William. Do you not have any interests besides "drawing"?

WILLIAM

I have you.

IANTHE

Oh, you think you do?

Ianthe resumes her GIGGLING fit and William can't help but join in.

WILLIAM

You are the silliest person on this earth, Ianthe. And I love every bit of you. You know if it were not for my fascination with these ruins -

IANTHE

And with your walks in the woods.

WILLIAM

And with my walks in the woods. If not for those two things, I would spend every waking moment in your company.

IANTHE

Ha! And you call me silly!

William stares at Ianthe for a moment, then tosses his sketchbook aside. He leans over to tackle Ianthe and after a bit of wrestling, has her pinned to the ground. The two are LAUGHING hysterically.

WILLIAM

Yes, I call you silly. And what do you intend to do about it?

IANTHE

Maybe I intend to do ... this!

With that, Ianthe flips William onto his back, pins his arms to the ground over his head, and sits on his stomach. William lets out a weak little OOF.

WILLIAM

Fine, fine, I give up. I'm yours for the rest of the day, Ianthe.

IANTHE

That is all I ask.

Ianthe leans in and gives William a little KISS on the nose. She's about to get back up when William PULLS her down to him, and soon enough, the two are passionately KISSING and rolling around in the grass.

EXT. ATHENS (RUINS) - DAY

A lone figure watches from the ruins below.

EXT. ATHENS (OVERLOOKING RUINS) - AFTERNOON

William and Ianthe lie on their backs, gazing at the sky. A FULL MOON has just become visible, low in the sky just behind the ruins. Clouds threaten from the west.

IANTHE

Full moon tonight.

WILLIAM

Yes. Should be a beautiful night, if that storm holds back. (a beat) I'm thinking a ride through that wooded area just outside of town is in store for me later this afternoon.

Ianthe turns on her side to face William, a look of concern in her face.

IANTHE

Oh, William ... you mustn't. Not tonight. No.

WILLIAM

Why ever not?

Ianthe looks back to the sky as if the answer might lie there.

IANTHE

The ... the storm, of course.

WILLIAM

Now you're just being overly worrisome. Even if the storm does come, it won't be any bother for me. (a beat) I'm reasonably sure I won't melt in the rain, after all.

IANTHE

Don't be that way, William; I'm serious.

WILLIAM

Serious about what? You can't expect me to heed any warnings if you're not going to elaborate.

Ianthe stands and turns her back on William.

IANTHE

Fine. If your opinion of me is not high enough to take me at my word.... Besides, if I told you, you'd only call me "silly" again.

She starts to walk away. William darts up after her and puts an arm on her shoulder. They begin to walk together back toward Ianthe's village.

WILLIAM

You know how much I value your company and your opinion, Ianthe. You know I love you and would do nothing to harm you. But this isn't you; it's me. And you've given me no viable reason for your concern.

IANTHE

My concern in itself is not enough?

WILLIAM

I'm afraid not. (a beat) And besides, it's obvious that you have your reasons. You should never hesitate to share anything with me, no matter how silly -

Ianthe throws William's hand off her shoulder and stops walking.

IANTHE

There's that word again!

WILLIAM

Oh, you know that's not what I meant!

IANTHE

Do I? All I know is that you're not willing to take me seriously!

WILLIAM

You're not giving me a chance!

Ianthe is now on the verge of tears. She turns away from William.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

Ianthe ... Ianthe, I'm sorry. I-I didn't mean to yell.

He walks over to comfort her. She speaks between sobs.

IANTHE

I know, William ... I know. (a beat)
It's just that ... it's ... I don't know whether to believe in it myself....

WILLIAM

Believe in what? Please, tell me.

IANTHE

The stories of that wood, William. When I was a child, my nurse would tell me horrible stories of that place. No Greek would ever remain in that wood at night, not under any circumstances. In that wood ... at night ... on the night of the full moon....

William's interest reaches its peak.

WILLIAM

What? What would happen on the night of the full moon?

IANTHE

The ... vampyre.

No reaction.

IANTHE (Cont.)

By light of day, this creature would pass unnoticed amongst friends and society - so my nurse would speak. Oh, the stories of horror she would tell, William. (a beat) At night, on the night of a full moon, the fiend would be forced to drain the blood from a victim to prolong his ... his "existence" for another year. The victims would often be horribly ... mutilated ... cut up by whatever weapon was at hand. Oh, I can never forget those horrible, horrible stories she would tell.

Still no reaction from William. Ianthe begins to regain her composure and end her sobbing.

IANTHE (Cont.)

You don't believe me.

WILLIAM

I didn't say that.

They begin walking back to Ianthe's village.

IANTHE

Maybe not. But I can tell by your reaction. (a beat) Then you won't cancel your ride tonight?

WILLIAM

No.

IANTHE

If you won't believe me, then talk to Mr. Paulus, my neighbor. He lost a niece. Mutilated three years ago and completely drained of blood. (a beat) Or the blacksmith, Granaupoulis. His own wife, sixteen years ago almost to the day.

WILLIAM

And you have spoken to these people?

IANTHE

Of course not. If you had lived through such events, would you want to talk of them?

WILLIAM

Ianthe, has it ever occurred to you that your nurse was trying to instill some fear in you? That she didn't want you wandering off without supervision? That she wanted to maintain some sort of ... I don't know ... control over you?

Ianthe does not respond.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

I can't see canceling my ride based on your nurse's fictions.

IANTHE

You may choose not to believe me, William, but it is said that those who question the existence of the vampyre always have proof thrust in their faces. I cannot stop you from doing what you wish ... but that does not mean I must agree with it. (a beat) There are times, my love, when you can be the most frustrating man I have ever met. But I, for one, can put my faith in you, for you are where my love lies.

WILLIAM

My love lies with you, as well, Ianthe.

IANTHE

But apparently not your trust. Just promise me one thing.

WILLIAM

I promise you my heart. Is that not enough?

IANTHE

William, just promise me you'll return before nightfall. It is the night that allows the full power of these creatures to come to light.

WILLIAM

Oh, I still simply cannot see how you expect me to -

IANTHE

Just promise me that. If your heart truly lies with me, surely you can grant me that one promise?

William SIGHS, tired of the argument.

WILLIAM

Very well, Ianthe. Ere night falls upon the wood, I will return.

INT. AUBREY HOME (LIBRARY) - MORNING

Mary and Christian walk around the stacks of books. One of them occasionally pulls a book off a shelf, searching for a particular volume.

CHRISTIAN

You sent the letter yesterday?

MARY

Christian, I just told you I finished it but this morning - how could I have sent it yesterday? I swear, you are as nervous as if you had actually proposed marriage.

CHRISTIAN

Are you saying that I didn't?

MARY

Christian....

CHRISTIAN

What, Mary? We both know that my proposal was genuine, despite what you may try to convince yourself in order to please your brother. And though I may love William like a brother, I still wish to know if the greater love that I have for his sister has any chance of becoming....

MARY

(overlapping)

Enough! Christian, enough! I cannot tolerate any more discussion of this proposal.

CHRISTIAN

But you cannot deny that you agreed to -

MARY

I agreed to use this as a ruse to bring my brother home, and nothing more. And if you continue to insist that there was anything else in our understanding, then I'm afraid any potential future agreement may be in jeopardy. (a beat) Now, can we please set this discussion aside?

CHRISTIAN

Yes, I suppose so. Though I still feel as if this is a step in -

MARY

I keep trying to tell you, this is not a step at all. And if you continue to insist on thinking that way, I won't ever let the letter leave this house.

CHRISTIAN

I understand.

MARY

Do you? It certainly doesn't seem that you do. Much as I care for you, I shall not go against my brother's wishes.

CHRISTIAN

What about your own wishes?

MARY

What of them?

CHRISTIAN

Do you intend to deny your feelings for me? Deny what we've shared? Deny what we could share in the future?

Christian moves to take Mary into an embrace, but Mary pushes him away. She turns to hunt through the shelves of books.

MARY

Could share, Christian. Could, not will; you just said it yourself. Do not continue to take me for granted, for you will find you have lost me. (a beat) Please, just help me find that book already.

Christian picks a book of a shelf and carries it to Mary.

CHRISTIAN

The love I feel for you could never be taken for granted, Mary, not for a second. (a beat) Is this the book? Some of the pages have been marked.

With an inquisitive look on her face, Mary takes the book and leafs through the first few pages.

MARY

Where did you find that?

CHRISTIAN

Here.

Christian leads her to the shelf from which he removed the book. Mary replaces the book and pulls one from a bit further down the shelf. She suppresses a smirk.

MARY

Athens is in Greece, dear.

EXT. ATHENS (WOOD) - EVENING

A FULL MOON is ensconced in thick clouds. A strong wind HOWLS through the trees. William, carrying a lantern in his hand, stands and studies the foliage and the land around. Obviously lost in his work, he occasionally scribbles on a few sheets of paper that he carries. A sturdy-looking, coal-black horse (SARDIS) is tied to a tree nearby.

A RUMBLE OF THUNDER sounds; Sardis rears up and WHINNIES in response. William, his concentration broken, quickly walks over to try and calm the horse.

WILLIAM

Calm, Sardis ... calm. It's only the storm.

Another PEAL OF THUNDER, louder than the last, pierces the air. This time it is William who is startled. He turns to look at the sky just as a few RAINDROPS begin to fall.

The lantern is extinguished by a GUST of wind.

WILLIAM

I believe now might be an ideal time to head back home.

William unties the horse and mounts with a quick, smooth movement. The WIND picks up again, causing another LOUD HOWL through the trees, accompanied by more THUNDER.

As William goads Sardis into motion, a TORRENT OF RAIN suddenly lets loose. In moments, the horse is SLOSHING through mud; William grips tightly to the slippery reins as Sardis picks up speed.

An intensely bright FLASH OF LIGHTNING lights up the sky. Another ROLL OF THUNDER follows almost immediately. William goads Sardis on through the mud.

EXT. ATHENS (ANOTHER AREA OF THE WOOD) - EVENING

The RAIN continues pouring out of the sky. A BOLT OF LIGHTNING flashes out of the sky and hits the base of a tree, SPLINTERING it in half. THUNDER follows.

Half the stricken tree falls into the mud-soaked road leading toward Ianthe's village. William and Sardis gallop into view just as the tree hits the road. Sardis REARS back and WHINNIES, then speeds off the road, deeper into the wood. It takes all of William's effort to avoid being thrown off his horse.

EXT. ATHENS (OUTSIDE IANTHE'S VILLAGE) - EVENING

The STORM continues to rage. Even this deep in the wood, the rain is managing to work its way through the dense foliage. A few buildings, grown over with vines and appearing almost like part of the forest, are sparsely scattered in the area.

The MUFFLED SLOSH of hoofbeats on wet ground gradually grows louder. Eventually, Sardis gallops into view; William appears to be regaining control of the horse.

WILLIAM

Hold, Sardis ... hold! Easy, girl.

Sardis finally comes to a stop about fifty yards from what appears to be a small, abandoned house. A FLASH of lightning illuminates this sight, and William notices it for the first time as he dismounts from the horse.

WILLIAM

What place is this? Are we near
Ianthe's village, Sardis?

A loud SNORT is as close to an answer Sardis seems willing to give. William LAUGHS.

WILLIAM

I'm not sure if I should take that as
a "yes" or a "no." Still ... maybe
there's someone here who can tell us
how to get back, hmm? Or at least
there's shelter to keep me dry until
this storm passes.

As William looks for a tree to tie Sardis to, THUNDER again sounds - this time, however, it is accompanied by a woman's SHRIEK. William looks up and toward the abandoned house, unsure if he actually heard a scream or if the storm was playing tricks on him.

He stands there, staring, unsure of whether to react. Just as he starts to go back to his task of tying up Sardis, the woman's SHRIEK again sounds, this time blending into a man's MOCKING LAUGHTER.

William's head raises toward the house again, and this time he drops the reins of the horse and runs to investigate. With the force of pure adrenaline, he kicks in the door to the house as another ROLL OF THUNDER resounds.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT

The inside of the house is totally black with darkness. William stands cautiously in the doorway, at first silhouetted by the dim moonlight, then suddenly lit up with a FLASH of lightning.

WILLIAM

Hello?

Another SCREAM sounds and William's head jerks to the right. He enters the house and walks to his right, immediately becoming enveloped by the darkness. The door SLAMS shut behind him, leaving total blackness. The MOCKING LAUGHTER continues.

WILLIAM

Is anyone there?

No response for a moment, then another SHRIEK. William's FOOTSTEPS suddenly become loud and rapid; a FLASH of lightning shows he is running toward the source of the noises - a WOMAN lying on the ground with a MYSTERIOUS MAN standing over her.

WILLIAM

Stop! Immediately, whoever you are,
stop at once!

The woman's SHRIEKING has become weak and half-hearted, but the mysterious man's LAUGHTER continues. Another FLASH of lightning shows that the man holds some sort of blade in his hand. The mysterious man's face cannot be seen, as his back is to William, but the woman is Ianthe.

WILLIAM

Ianthe!

William reaches the mysterious man, bumping into him in the dark, and tries to seize hold of him from behind.

WILLIAM

What have you done!? My beautiful
Ianthe ... my love.... Stop!

MYSTERIOUS MAN

Again, baffled!

As another BOLT OF LIGHTNING illuminates the scene, the mysterious man picks William off the floor by his throat, HITS him twice across the cheek, and HURLS him to the ground across the room, like a rag doll. The mysterious man's LAUGHTER again resounds.

William lets out a painful GASP as the mysterious man's knee comes down with a THUD on his chest. The man raises his right hand above William. A glint of light SHINES off an oddly-shaped dagger poised above William's neck. The mysterious man suddenly turns around, looking over his shoulder.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT

The source of light that shines off the dagger has come from a group of PEASANTS carrying torches. They approach the abandoned house. Nothing is visible through the window of the house but the mysterious man's dagger and a LIGHT that glows behind his eyes.

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - NIGHT

The mysterious man lets out another LAUGH, then disappears out the front door as fast as the wind itself. The oddly shaped dagger CLINKS to the ground next to William. William can do little but let out a feeble GROAN.

WILLIAM

Ianthe....

The peasants reach the door and enter the house. The torchlight fills the room and clearly illuminates the mud-encrusted walls for the first time. One of the peasants notices William, who continues to GROAN incoherently.

PEASANT 1

Sir? Sir, can you hear me? Are you alright? (to another peasant) Cerus, over here.

WILLIAM

Ianthe.... Please, Ianthe....

Cerus comes over to Peasant 1, who is attempting to clean the blood off William's face.

PEASANT 1

I think he's calling for someone. Sounded like "Ianthe."

CERUS

Yes, I hear. (a beat) Sir, please, where is she?

WILLIAM

Ianthe ... Ianthe....

William feebly raises his head and looks to an obscured corner of the room. Cerus and Peasant 1 turn to follow his gaze. They signal for light to be brought to that corner.

As some of the peasants move their torches to the obscured corner, their bodies block the view of William and the others. A few of the peasants who went to investigate the corner GASP in shock. After a moment of MURMURING, a consensus is reached, and the peasants lift something from the corner, carry it over, and lie it next to William.

William shuts his eyes to the sight - the lifeless form of Ianthe - and starts to SOB. Ianthe's face is completely devoid of color; even her lips are pale and ashen. Her neck and breast are covered in blood, most of the damage probably done by the mysterious man's dagger.

On one side of her neck, however, are what appear to be teeth marks. One of the peasants notices these marks and points at them in a panic.

PEASANT 2

A vampyre! A vampyre!

This cry starts a general PANIC amongst the other peasants.

PEASANT 1

Cerus?

CERUS

We must leave this place, at once.
(to William) Sir, are you able to walk?

WILLIAM

Ianthe....

CERUS

We'll have to carry him. Before that demon returns. Come on.

Cerus and Peasant 1 pick up William and carry him out the front door of the abandoned house. Two other peasants carry out Ianthe's body.

Grasped in William's hand is the oddly shaped dagger of the mysterious man.

INT. IANTHE'S HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - DAY

William lies in bed, with the curtains drawn. His eyes are open, but he just stares out into space. DARVELL and GEORGINA, Ianthe's parents, walk in quietly. Her mother carries a letter in her hand.

DARVELL

William?

GEORGINA

William ... this letter came for you.
From England, some time ago ... we thought it best not to burden you with it earlier, but ...

DARVELL

It's an urgent communication,
William. From your sister.

Ianthe's parents pause, hoping for some reaction, but there is none.

DARVELL

Just leave it for him, Georgina. I'm
sure he'll soon recover from -

William suddenly jerks up in bed.

WILLIAM

Ruthven! No, Ruthven, spare her! Take
whomever you will, take me, save
yourself, but spare Ianthe!

Ianthe's mother (Georgina) rushes to William's side and
attempts to calm him.

GEORGINA

William....

WILLIAM

You've destroyed her! My only love!
You contemptible.... No! Spare her,
Ruthven! If only her, spare her! Save
us, Ruthven! Lord Ruthven, please,
help me! Help me, please ... please,
help me....

GEORGINA

William, calm yourself. There is no
Ruthven here. Ianthe is already ...
she's already....

Georgina starts to WEEP, and the father walks over to take her
out of the room.

DARVELL

Just leave him be. I have no doubt,
he will recover. Just leave him be.

She places the letter from William's sister on a nightstand
beside the bed and exits with Ianthe's father.

CU - LETTER

"Urgent news" is written on the front of the letter and underlined twice.

WILLIAM V.O.

Help me ... Ruthven, help....

EXT. AUBREY HOME (GARDEN) - DAY

Christian and Mary sit on the stone benches outside the fountain. Mary's face is twisted with a look of concern.

CHRISTIAN

No reply at all?

MARY

What do you think, Christian, that I'm lying to you? If I had gotten a reply, I surely would have told you. (a beat) I'm concerned, Christian ... I'm very concerned. This isn't at all like William, to not even respond to such a thing.

CHRISTIAN

Maybe he's on his way home.

MARY

Without sending word ahead?

CHRISTIAN

Considering that he could most likely arrive himself as quickly as his word could, maybe he simply chose not to send word?

MARY

I suppose that's possible, but it just doesn't add up.

CHRISTIAN

His last letter did say how happy he was.

MARY

Exactly. Which makes me question why he would have left at all. I think he would have been more likely to simply write back, beg of us to wait for his return -

CHRISTIAN

- with Ianthe.

MARY

Right, with Ianthe. Chris, what if Lord Ruthven found him? I mean, what if he tracked him down and found him?

CHRISTIAN

And what? Mary, you can't honestly think that Ruthven would do him any physical harm?

MARY

And why not? What would stop him? The man has been doing enough harm around here, even though he left months ago. Certainly, you can argue that he may not have done physical harm directly, but somehow, I don't think Lord Mercer would agree with that. (a beat) People have died, Christian! I mean, what kind of a man can cause something like that to happen when he isn't even here?

CHRISTIAN

How can you connect Ruthven to that, Mary? What evidence do you have?

MARY

What evidence do I need? What evidence do you have that gives any other cause?

CHRISTIAN

Why should I need any evidence? It's not like I'm trying to defend myself against anything, after all.

MARY

Aren't you? Or perhaps you don't recall who introduced us to Lord Ruthven in the first place?

CHRISTIAN

Oh, now you certainly can't be holding that against me!

MARY

Why can't I?

Christian stands and walks over to the fountain.

CHRISTIAN

Honestly, Mary, I feel I can hardly recognize you as the woman I love any longer. I love you for who you are, or who you have been, but . . . I just don't know who you are anymore.

MARY

The same woman I have always been. Can't you see that? Can't you see how I care for my brother, as I do care for you? And I can't imagine what that friend of yours has done to my brother.

Christian returns to the bench, sits beside Mary, and pulls her into an embrace. Mary succumbs.

CHRISTIAN

Anyone who could hurt you, or any member of your family, is no friend of mine.

Mary lies for a while in his arms, then sits up and glares.

MARY

You're only trying to distract me. Despite your claims, you still have to admit you've supported Ruthven all along. You brought him to our table, all but invited him into our home, and did nothing to intervene on my brother's behalf.

CHRISTIAN

What do you call the letter I suggested you write?

MARY

Ha! You had your own motivations for that letter, Christian, and you know that!

CHRISTIAN

Well, that may be so, but does that mean I don't care for your brother?

MARY

Your intentions with me are certainly clear. (a beat) Or are they?

CHRISTIAN

You know how I feel about you.

MARY

Do I? I mean, you certainly know that William and I shall both be quite wealthy, once we're of age and our guardians release their hold on the Aubrey estate. It's all so clear! You seduce me, become my betrothed, then have this Ruthven make certain that William is not around to make any claims on the fortune! And God only knows what plans you have for me once I'm no longer needed as a means to my estate!

CHRISTIAN

Mary! You're being simply ludicrous!

Mary stands and walks briskly toward the house.

MARY

Fine. Maybe I am! You know your own way out. Good day, Christian.

Christian POUNDS his fist against the back of the bench in frustration.

INT. IANTHE'S HOME (HALLWAY) - AFTERNOON

Ianthe's parents stand outside William's room, quietly looking in. The curtains in his room are now open, and the late afternoon sunlight casts shadows across the bed. Sitting in a chair at the side of William's bed, CHATTING with an apparently coherent William, is Lord Ruthven. Ruthven seems to be a changed man, jovial and animated, as is William.

DARVELL

And this is the Ruthven that William spoke of in his delirium?

GEORGINA

I assume so. I mean, it's not as if I could ask William. How would you broach such a subject?

DARVELL

I suppose you're right. Besides, I don't imagine he'd remember who he was speaking of while under the influence of such a violent fever.

They observe William and Ruthven a while longer. William says something that causes Ruthven to LAUGH BOISTEROUSLY. It is the laugh of the mysterious man, but William either doesn't notice or doesn't care.

DARVELL (Cont.)

William seems well, at any rate. I imagine he owes a debt of gratitude to this Lord Ruthven fellow.

GEORGINA

Yes, I suppose so.

Ruthven and William LAUGH together.

DARVELL

It's good to see the boy back to his old self.

GEORGINA

How is this back to his old self? He still hardly leaves his bed. His delirium certainly seems to have passed, but still -

Georgina is interrupted as William notices that he and Ruthven are being watched.

WILLIAM

Georgina, Darvell! Please, a moment of your time. Ruthven, of course you've met Ianthe's parents.

INT. IANTHE'S HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - DAY

Darvell and Georgina, smiles on their faces, enter the room. Ruthven stands and offers his chair to Georgina.

RUTHVEN

Please, sit.

Georgina nods her head "thank you" and takes the chair.

WILLIAM

You know the two of you have my deepest sympathies at the loss of one so fair as Ianthe.

DARVELL

Please, William ... you, too have lost -

WILLIAM

No, I will hear nothing of what I have lost, Darvell. There can be no greater loss than the loss of a child. As for what I have lost. (a beat) What I have found is that I have a great many friends and supporters. In you, in the gracious Lord Ruthven, and in the villagers who have stood by and inquired of me, despite ... despite the fact that I was unable to help -

DARVELL

Enough, William. What is it you wish to say?

William takes a moment to regain his composure.

WILLIAM

The time has come for me to move on. I'm well enough again, and Ruthven has suggested a trip through the mountains, the thought of which appeals to me greatly. It will allow me a chance to clear my head before my return to London.

Darvell and Georgina exchange openmouthed looks.

GEORGINA

But, William ... have you not heard? The-the dangers in the mountains? The robbers?

DARVELL

Aye, William, she speaks the truth. Many have returned from there with stories, took upon by robbers ... with firearms. Some have left in pairs and returned alone. Guards and guides alike are providing stern warnings against -

Ruthven dismisses this with a wave of his hand.

RUTHVEN

Nonsense, sir. Merely a fiction created by these same guards and guides so that they might raise their fees for guarding and guiding. I assure you, William and I will be quite fine on our own.

DARVELL

And there is nothing I might do to convince you to stay with us, William? (a beat) We have come to think of you as ... well, as something of a son, I suppose.

WILLIAM

Touched as I am by your sentiment, I'm afraid commitments would prompt my return to London shortly anyway. Which reminds me....

William reaches into a drawer in the nightstand next to his bed and pulls out a sealed letter.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

You'll see that this is sent back to London for me, won't you?

Georgina takes the letter.

GEORGINA

Certainly, William. (a beat) A letter to your sister, I suppose?

WILLIAM

Of course. She's been fearing for me unnecessarily since before I even left on this trip, and I can't imagine what she's thinking since she hasn't heard from me for so long. Ruthven and I will be off on our brief mountain excursion, and with any luck, the letter will reach London before my return.

GEORGINA

I'll see to it, William.

DARVELL

Do be careful, my boy.

WILLIAM

Yes, yes ... I always am.

FADE TO:

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DUSK

Ruthven follows William down a rocky path between two outcroppings of rock. The sun settles behind the mountains, casting long shadows in front of them. They each carry a small pack of their belongings.

They walk along in silence for a while until a SCUTTLING SOUND behind them causes William to suddenly halt his progress. Ruthven nearly walks into William as William stops, turns back to the sun, and strains to listen.

Ruthven turns around for a moment and SQUINTS into the bright sun behind them. He WINCES almost as if in pain.

RUTHVEN

What is it?

William SHUSHES him and continues his attempts to hear. Another moment passes, and Ruthven finally grows impatient.

RUTHVEN

Come on, Aubrey, it's obvious there's nothing there. Let's go already.

William doesn't react.

RUTHVEN (Cont.)

Let's move, William!

Ruthven nudges William into motion just as the sound of a single GUNSHOT splits the air. William dives to the ground and drags Ruthven into the dust with him.

WILLIAM

Down!

The air again falls silent as William looks around for a safe spot of shelter. He spots a large boulder about a hundred yards ahead of them and indicates it to Ruthven.

WILLIAM

(quietly)

There. I'll crawl over; you follow.

Ruthven nods.

William begins to crawl along the rocks toward the shelter. Ruthven remains lying on the ground, looking to the rocks around them to see if he can spot anyone.

EXT. MOUNTAINS (BEHIND BOULDER) - DUSK

William raises himself up on his knees and peers around the boulder to Ruthven. Ruthven does not move, but lies on the ground, listening. William motions for Ruthven to follow him behind the boulder.

Ruthven does not move.

WILLIAM
(whispering, barely audible)
Ruthven.

No reaction.

WILLIAM
(a little louder)
Ruthven.

Ruthven turns back but waves William off. He sits up cautiously and begins to look around until it appears that he has spotted something. He turns back to William and gestures to the outcropping of rock to his left.

Just as William looks to the source of Ruthven's gesture, another SHOT is fired.

WILLIAM
Ruthven!

A third shot RESOUNDS immediately - this time catching Ruthven in the left shoulder. Ruthven SCREAMS out in apparent agony as William rushes out from behind the boulder.

EXT. MOUNTAINS - DUSK

Ruthven is lying on his back. The remaining sun is streaking down onto his body. His right hand, covered in blood, grips his left shoulder.

As William rushes out to check on his friend, two ROBBERS descend from the outcroppings of rock above. They are all brandishing pistols.

WILLIAM

Ruthven, are you hurt?

RUTHVEN

Am I hurt? What the devil does it look like, you simpleton!? Of course I'm hurt!

ROBBER 1 (to Robber 2)

See? I told ya you hit 'im! Damned if that ain't the finest shot I ever saw!

ROBBER 2

As if it mattered. (to William)
Gentlemen, let's have your valuables.
Come on, out with 'em.

WILLIAM

Varlet! Can't you see the man's hurt?
Give me a damned moment!

William tries to tend to Ruthven's wounds, but Robber 1 pulls him away. Ruthven lets out a pained GRUNT.

ROBBER 1

Try that again, and you'll be in the same state as your friend here, understand? I believe you were just asked for your valuables. Why don't we tend to that first, okay?

William makes a move as if to lunge at the man, but Ruthven manages to forcefully GRAB him before he can get himself into any trouble.

RUTHVEN

William, no!

A brief moment passes while William decides on the best course of action. He attempts to negotiate:

WILLIAM

Sir, surely you can wait a moment for me to tend to my friend's wound here. One way or another, you'll get what you -

He is cut off as Robber 1 lowers his gun and FIRES two shots into Ruthven's wounded shoulder. Ruthven lets out another YELP of pain.

WILLIAM

NO!

William throws himself across Ruthven's body to shield it from any further shots.

ROBBER 1

Hesitate any more, and you're going to have quite a few more wounds to tend to. Just give us what we want, and we'll be on our way.

William looks up at the robbers, down at Ruthven, and finally makes up his mind. He takes the two packs that he and Ruthven were carrying and HURLS them toward one of the outcroppings of rock.

WILLIAM

There! Perfect! Take it; take it all! For what have I left to live for? The love of my life, my Ianthe ... dead! My friend ... wounded by ... by ... the likes of you! My sister, set to wed before her life has even begun! I cannot take anything more! You want what's left of my life? Take it! Why should someone such as myself, someone bereft of possessions of the heart, of the soul ... why should I possess worldly goods? What right have I to any possessions at all? I who cannot protect those who mean so much to me? For I have no need to live, I have no need to save myself ... how can I, when I cannot save my Ianthe, my-my Mary, my-my-my-

ROBBER 2

Yeah, thanks.

The two robbers walk over, pick up the packs, and depart over the hills. William collapses to the ground, exhausted from his emotional outpouring. He has apparently forgotten about Ruthven entirely.

RUTHVEN

William?

Ruthven struggles to prop himself up on his good arm and look over at William. Finally, William lifts his head and looks at Ruthven.

WILLIAM

I-I'm sorry, Ruthven. Can I ... is there anything I can do? Are you ... will you be all right? Or is it ... I mean, how badly are you wounded?

RUTHVEN

William, your assistance is greatly appreciated, as always.

WILLIAM

But what? What have I done? What can I do?

He walks over to Ruthven and is sickened by the mere sight of his wounds. Blood has been spattered across the side of Ruthven's face and the front of his body. His right hand still grips his left shoulder, though blood no longer flows from the wounds. His left arm has practically been severed from his body. Surprisingly, however, Ruthven seems quite calm - his face shows no pain or fear for his life.

RUTHVEN

You may save me yet.

WILLIAM

But.... Lord Ruthven, I fear these wounds will prove quite fatal. I don't see how I can possibly save you!

RUTHVEN

But save me you must!

WILLIAM

How can I save your life now? The wounds, Ruthven, the-the gunshots, the blood....

RUTHVEN

I do not refer to my life, William. The death of my earthly existence means as little to me as the passing of the day. But William, if you heed me as a friend, as a compatriot, you may yet save my honor.

WILLIAM

Anything, my friend.

RUTHVNE

Help me, William.

WILLIAM

But how? Please, Vincent, tell me how. I would do anything - anything at all to assist you; you need merely ask.

RUTHVEN

I ask but little of you. I have little time left....

Ruthven takes a deep, apparently painful breath and slowly lets it out through his mouth. He adjusts the position of his body, sits up a bit, and lets out a weak GRUNT.

RUTHVEN (Cont.)

I fear I cannot explain the whole situation, for I have such little time left. But ... if you could conceal all you know of me - all you have learned, all you have discovered, all you have presumed. If my honor were to remain intact, my character to remain unstained in the world's mouth.... And-and if ... if my death were to remain unknown for some time back in England. I believe ... I believe that....

His strength waning, Ruthven collapses back onto the ground. William rushes to his side and cradles the dying man's head in his hands.

WILLIAM

It shall not be known.

Ruthven once again struggles to a sitting position. An all-too-familiar LIGHT glows behind his eyes. He seems, in fact, to become quite animated - almost energetic - as he speaks.

RUTHVEN

Swear! Swear to it, William. Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your heart desires, and by all your nature fears! Swear that for a year and a day you shall not impart any knowledge of me that you have obtained upon any living being in any way. Any knowledge of ... of my crimes, of my misdeeds ... of my death. Whatever you may see, whatever may happen, swear, William, that you will not reveal any of this to anyone!

WILLIAM

I swear!

RUTHVEN

You must, William ... you must uphold
this oath. Do not reveal my life or
my death. One year and one day!

Ruthven again collapses to the ground with a GRUNT.

RUTHVEN (Cont.)

By all that ... all that you love ...
all you hold sacred. (a beat)
William: Remember your oath.

WILLIAM

Yes! Yes, Ruthven! You have my word!
Upon my very soul, I do swear!

Finally, Ruthven DIES. William collapses on the ground next to
him, obviously the victim of extreme emotional distress. His
body begins to shake as some BREATHY NOISES emanate from him,
but it is unclear whether he is sobbing or laughing with
relief.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

I will uphold my oath!

William tends to Ruthven's body, cleaning the blood in futile
respect for his friend.

WILLIAM V.O.

"I can say with certainty, Mary, that
he will not be accompanying me upon
my return. But I can say no more. And
though I understand you always
abhorred the man in life, I ask that
if you speak of him, you do so
respectfully ... for he was my
friend."

FADE TO:

INT. AUBREY HOME (FOYER) - DAY

TITLE CARD: "London, July 1819"

Mary sits on a bench, idly holding a letter from William in
her lap. She is not reading the letter, but simply stares at
the front door in expectation.

WILLIAM V.O.

"The last few months of my life have been almost impossible, Dearheart. I long for the return to my native England far more than you can possibly imagine. I shall come home as soon as affairs are settled, with any luck perhaps even arriving before this letter. As always, William."

Using some sort of sixth sense, Mary rises and walks to the door a moment before a KNOCK is heard from the other side. After a considerable pause, as Mary continues to stare at the door, she opens it to Christian, who waits patiently on the other side.

CHRISTIAN

I came as soon as I received your request, Mary. From your message, I gathered his ... well, he's fine, right?

MARY

Not here, Christian. Outside. In the garden.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Christian and Mary stand by the fountain, talking in hushed tones.

CHRISTIAN

So William is unscathed, and Ruthven will not be returning? Then all is as you've hoped.

MARY

Well, apparently, though I must wonder what exactly happened out there. I know my brother always seemed fond of your Lord Ruthven ... I mean, he still does. Supports the man even now. It just seems peculiar.

CHRISTIAN

Oh? How so?

MARY

Made an entreaty in his last letter.
Asked me to "speak of him
respectfully," or something to that
effect. I tell you, Christian,
something happened out there -
something William is choosing not to
share. But I know not what, and that
concerns me.

Christian shakes his head and walks to one of the stone
benches.

CHRISTIAN

Of course. I should have known.

Obviously upset, Mary walks over and stands in front of
Christian, who has now sat down on one of the benches. He
looks up at her.

CHRISTIAN

What?

MARY

I might ask the same question of you.
You should have known what, exactly,
Christian? That your plans would not
be successful?

CHRISTIAN

I thought I explained that I had no
plans.

MARY

Well, what then?

CHRISTIAN

You can't exactly deny the feelings
you have for Lord Ruthven, Mary.

MARY

Feelings? Why, I feel nothing but utter hatred for that monster! How could I have made that any more clear? He is a contemptible, contemptible man. I could not be more pleased that he won't be returning. The fact that you could even imply -

CHRISTIAN

Methinks the lady doth protest too much.

Mary gears up as if to launch a retort - or a fist - in Christian's direction, but thinks better of it. She releases a HMPH sound, then turns her back and walks to the fountain.

Christian shakes his head, then reluctantly gets up and follows Mary to the fountain. He stands beside her as they both gaze into the fountain's flowing waters.

CHRISTIAN

I'm sorry. (a beat) You still must admit, hate is hardly the antithesis of love. I'm certain there have been times that you've hated me. I don't doubt that for a moment.

He puts his arm around Mary's shoulder, but she THROWS it off and spins to face him.

MARY

I think this is one of those times.

She walks back toward the house, o.s., leaving Christian alone, staring after her.

INT. COACH (MOVING) - AFTERNOON

William sits alone, bound for home. He stares out the window as the coach cuts through the countryside. His thoughts are obviously elsewhere....

RUTHVEN V.O.

I fear I cannot explain the whole situation, for I have such little time left. But ... if you could conceal all you know of me - all you have learned, all you have discovered, all you have presumed.

WILLIAM V.O.

It shall not be known.

RUTHVEN V.O.

Swear! Swear to it, William. Swear by all your soul reveres, by all your heart desires, and by all your nature fears! Swear that for a year and a day you shall not impart any knowledge of me that you have obtained upon any living being in any way. Whatever you may see, whatever may happen, swear, William, that you will not reveal any of this to anyone!

WILLIAM V.O.

Yes! Yes, Ruthven! You have my word!
Upon my very soul, I do swear!

EXT. AUBREY HOME - AFTERNOON

William's coach pulls up to his home and stops behind another coach. As William opens the door to his coach, the driver of the other coach CLICKS his tongue and flicks the reins, spurring his horse into motion.

William exits his coach as Mary emerges from the front door of the house.

MARY

William!

She runs up to the coach, a smile beaming on her face. William merely stands there and waits as she practically KNOCKS him over, running into him, and pulling him into an embrace.

MARY (Cont.)

Oh, William, how I've missed you!
I've just felt so alone the entire
time you've been on this dreadful
trip of yours.

No reaction from William. He simply stands there, staring
dully back at his sister.

MARY (Cont.)

What is it? What's wrong?

Finally, a little animation flickers behind his eyes.

WILLIAM

Have you? Have you missed me, Mary?
Have you felt so alone? Or has my
"friend" Christian seen to it that
such problems did not befall you in
my absence?

MARY

Why...? William, six months I have
not seen you and this is how you
greet me?

WILLIAM

Oh, stop this charade, Mary. Do you
take your brother for a fool? Did you
think for but a moment that this was
not how I would greet you? Can you
honestly expect me to believe, with
what you were writing me, with your
plans with Christian!

Mary is too shocked and upset to defend herself. She begins to
SOB quietly, but tries her best to hide it from William.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

Tell me one thing, Mary. Was any of
it true? Have you and Christian
already planned to wed, or was this
all merely a fiction designed to get
me to cut my trip short?

Mary can no longer hold back her emotions, and she begins to SOB openly. William realizes almost immediately what he has done. He reaches out to comfort her, but she PUSHES him away roughly.

MARY

No! None of it is true ... not now,
not anymore. (a beat) And how crude,
how inconsiderate of you, William!
How could you ... greet me with this?

William once again reaches out to comfort his sister; this time, she does not resist. A SERVANT begins removing William's trunks from the coach.

WILLIAM

Please, forgive me, Dearheart. If you
could only know what I have been
through. (a beat) But no, what I have
been through is no excuse. Even if it
were, I shall make no excuses for my
actions any longer. Mary, you're all
I have left.

Mary remains in his arms until her SOBBING eventually begins to subside. William holds her at arm's length and looks into her eyes.

MARY

Oh, William....

WILLIAM

Yes?

MARY

William, it's simply not entirely
your fault. It's Christian. Ever
since you've gone away, he's become,
well ... increasingly infuriating.

WILLIAM

How so?

MARY

I can't say exactly.

William reads his sister's face.

WILLIAM

The letter was his idea, was it not?
I know my friend well enough to
recognize his hand when I see it. I
tell you, Mary, if he has forced
himself upon you in even the
slightest way, I'll see to it that he
doesn't -

MARY

No, no ... it's not that at all. I
mean yes, the letter was his idea.
But at the time, I was as
enthusiastic about the notion of
engagement as he was. I just don't
know. (a beat) William?

WILLIAM

Yes, Dearheart?

MARY

Is it possible to fall out of love?

WILLIAM

I can only hope.

The servant, having finished removing the three trunks from
the coach, approaches.

SERVANT

Sir? Shall I bring these inside?

WILLIAM

Oh, yes, certainly. To my room. I'll
be right in.

MARY

Three trunks? I thought you only
brought two of them with you. Oh, now
you certainly can't be bringing back
such an inordinate amount of
memorabilia!

William walks toward the house.

WILLIAM

The third is ... nothing, not my own.
I mean, nothing to be concerned with.

William enters the house. Mary just stands there, slightly dazed.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - EVENING

The servant, aided by a young HELPER, places the third trunk in a corner of a room, directed by William. Mary watches from the doorway.

MARY

Where exactly do you plan to put all these things, anyway?

WILLIAM

I told you, it's nothing to be concerned with.

MARY

Oh, I can't help but be curious. You leave with one man's possessions, and you return with enough for two!

WILLIAM

Don't be absurd. It's only one more trunk.

MARY

Certainly, but this trunk is big enough to hold a dead body!

WILLIAM

Mary!

Mary suddenly realizes she may have let a major faux pas slip.

MARY

Oh, William ... Ianthe! Oh, I certainly didn't mean ... I'm so sorry!

WILLIAM

No, no.... (a beat) I'm the one who should apologize. I'm still tired from my trip. And besides, I'm sure you have a lot on your mind, with your first drawing room as a member of society tomorrow night. That is tomorrow night, is it not? I wanted to be sure I returned in time.

MARY

Yes, William. Tomorrow. And I can only hope Christian is not the only man there vying for my hand.

WILLIAM

I'm certain he won't be the only choice. As certain as I am that he'll be the best choice all the same.

MARY

I wouldn't be so certain of anything.

WILLIAM

Well, regardless ... I think I should just get to sleep now - I won't be of any use to anyone tomorrow if I'm still in this condition.

MARY

Oh, very well. I think I'll go take a walk in the garden before retiring. The summer night air has always helped clear my head. Goodnight, William.

WILLIAM

Goodnight, Dearheart.

She exits. William just stares after her, the concerned older brother.

EXT. AUBREY HOME (GARDEN) - DUSK

The night carries few noises other than those of the fountain GURGLING its waters into the air. The sun has just set. Only an occasional passing cloud blocks a brilliant crescent moon.

Mary walks into this scene, further enhancing its beauty. She circles the fountain, staring into its center, then eventually sits on one of the benches.

MARY

Ah, Christian. Tomorrow you must attempt to earn back what was once yours for the taking.

Mary takes a DEEP BREATH, enjoying the night air. After staring at the fountain a few moments, she hears a RUSTLING off in the garden.

She turns her head about, trying to find the source of the noise. Just as she's nearly satisfied that it was merely her imagination playing tricks on her, the RUSTLING repeats. Now certain of the direction, she jerks her head to her left.

P.O.V. Mary:

A pair of glowing eyes flashes for a moment in the darkness of the garden. As if sensing they were seen, they disappear in an instant.

MARY (O.S.)

Who is it? Who's there?

End P.O.V.

Mary stands.

MARY (Cont.)

Christian?

FADE TO:

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - MORNING

Brilliant sunshine floods the room from an open window. A gentle breeze ruffles the canopy about William's bed.

William has set himself about the task of unpacking the trunks. One empty trunk stands in a corner of the room, and another nearly empty one sits open on a low table. The third trunk - the largest - sits on the floor by the table, closed. William removes some clothing from the open trunk and carries it to a bureau.

A mournful look comes across William's face as he returns to look in the trunk. He stands and stares into it for a moment, as if he cannot bear to remove the next item. A tear forms in his eye and rolls down his cheek.

WILLIAM

Ianthe....

Finally, he reaches in and pulls out the offending item: the oddly-shaped dagger with which Ianthe was killed. Her blood still stains the blade. William drops to his knees and hugs the dagger to his body - the last reminder he has of the woman he loved.

As William continues to mourn his lost love, Mary suddenly strides into his room. William's back is turned to her.

MARY

William, I was wondering what you thought might be most appropriate for me to wear to the drawing-room this evening. I was thinking of the red gown our guardians got for me summer last, but I'm just not sure if that would be fitting. What do you think?

No response.

MARY

William?

With a look of combined anger and despair, William stands and turns to face his sister. Tears cover his face. He slams the lid of his trunk closed.

WILLIAM

Not now, Mary!

Shocked and dismayed, Mary slowly backs out of the room and shuts the door.

William kneels again and turns back to contemplating the dagger. He runs his finger slowly across its blade, tracing the odd shape. He grips its handle, tests its weight....

WILLIAM

Had I only been able to get there
sooner, Ianthe ... Had I only been
able to help you.

He places the dagger down on the table and turns his head to
the large trunk.

WILLIAM (Cont.)

Or you, Ruthven.

William stands, wipes the tears from his face with the back of
his hand, then places his hands atop the trunk. With a DEEP
BREATH, he undoes the trunk's latch and lifts its lid.

Carefully, he begins lifting items out and placing them neatly
on the closed lid of his own. Gradually, neat stacks of
clothes, papers, and books form. Eventually, William stops and
gapes into the trunk with a dumbfounded look.

WILLIAM

What's this...?

Reaching his hands back into the trunk, William pulls out
several daggers and other blades. He turns each one over in
his hands as he takes them out, examining their form. They are
all meticulously clean; the sunlight glints off each one as it
turns in William's hands.

Finally, he stops again, and just stares into the trunk. Tears
again start to form. He turns back to the oddly-shaped dagger
on the table and picks it up. Reaching into the large trunk,
he pulls out a small, ornate, leather sheath.

WILLIAM

It can't be....

But it is. Placing the oddly-shaped dagger into the sheath,
William discovers they are a perfect fit. A SHUDDER runs
through his body and another tear rolls down his cheek. He
restores everything to the third trunk and slowly closes the
lid.

INT. AUBREY HOME (MARY'S ROOM) - LATER THAT MORNING

Mary is busying herself with preparations for the evening's drawing-room. A young lady servant, CARMILLA, walks into the room.

CARMILLA

Begging your pardon Miss Aubrey, but, well....

MARY

Yes, Carmilla. What is it?

CARMILLA

It's Christian. Here to see you.

MARY

Christian? What the devil does he want at this time of morning?

CARMILLA

I'm certain I don't know, Miss. But he was rather insistent that he see you.

William appears in the doorway. He looks haggard and pale.

MARY

Well, just tell him he'll have to wait for tonight like any other gentleman. I don't see any reason I should be giving him special treatment at this point.

CARMILLA

You're sure, Miss?

MARY

Quite sure. Only ... do make it clear I'll see him tonight.

CARMILLA

Yes, Miss.

Carmilla exits. William just stands in the doorway until Mary eventually notices him.

MARY

William? Is there something you wanted? (a beat) My god, you look as if you've just seen a ghost.

WILLIAM

Maybe I have.

Mary guides William into her room and sits him in a large, padded chair. He just stares into the distance.

MARY

What is it, William? What's happened?

Another moment of staring, then William comes to suddenly, as if being brought out of a trance.

WILLIAM

It's ... nothing, Mary. At least nothing I have the liberty to discuss at this time.

MARY

Then when?

WILLIAM

Later.

MARY

Tonight then? At the drawing-room?

William LAUGHS softly.

WILLIAM

Oh, later than that, I fear. I'm quite sure it's nothing, anyway. Probably just my mind playing tricks on me. Yes, that's it. Just haven't recovered from my trip yet.

MARY

If you're sure you don't wish to discuss it, then.

WILLIAM

Did I hear correctly? Is Christian come to call this morning?

MARY

I'm afraid so.

WILLIAM

I've half a mind to speak with him myself. See if he'll be willing to tell me exactly what's going on between the two of you. I'm certainly not getting answers from you.

MARY

Oh, I really wish you wouldn't do that, brother. This is between myself and Christian.

William SMILES.

WILLIAM

Well, I certainly wouldn't want to incur your wrath, my dear. I suppose I can wait until this evening.

MARY

I can say this much: He hasn't fallen out of my favor entirely. He's just going to have to approach me as any other suitor might.

William stands and walks to the window.

INSERT (EXT. AUBREY HOME - MORNING): Christian mounts a horse, and with a flick of the reins, he hastens away.

WILLIAM

I'm sure he's up to the challenge.

MARY

We'll see.

FADE TO:

INT. COACH (MOVING) - EVENING

Mary sits across from William in a small coach led by a single horse. She is dressed in the red gown that she alluded to earlier. William is dressed in black.

WILLIAM

Where is this again?

MARY

How many times must I tell you, William? It's at Lord Jonas's estate. Out in the country? You said yourself it would be the perfect place for my "official" entry into the scene.

WILLIAM

Yes, of course. My apologies, Dearheart ... my mind is elsewhere.

MARY

Still abroad, no doubt.

WILLIAM

Oh, maybe, I suppose. I still think I might've been better off back home, rather than hinder you with my thoughtlessness.

MARY

Nonsense. I need you here. Besides, I wouldn't think to leave you alone to swim in your melancholy. You haven't been stable of mind since you returned from your trip. Being out among people will do you good.

William forces a SMILE.

WILLIAM

How like you, to be concerned about your pitiful brother when this day should be special for only you.

MARY

Don't bother yourself about that.

EXT. JONAS ESTATE - EVENING

The Jonas Estate is nestled among rolling hills in the English countryside. It is another crisp, clear evening as Mary and William's coach pulls up to the back of a short line of coaches. The line winds along a rocky path that leads up to the main building on the estate - a huge, white, pillared mansion.

As the coach reaches the front of the line, Christian can be seen waiting by the front door. Beside Christian stands the EARL OF MARSDEN. Marsden is a young man with short brown hair, who bears a resemblance to Lord Ruthven. As William opens the door to his coach, Marsden enters the mansion.

CHRISTIAN

William! How wonderful to see you again, my friend. I trust this evening finds you in good health?

WILLIAM

Good enough, I suppose.

William exits the coach and helps his sister out behind him. Christian and Mary gaze at each other, but neither can seem to find the words to speak. William attempts to break the tension.

WILLIAM

Um ... quite the crowd here tonight. I suppose we should head inside, Mary? People are probably expecting to see you.

MARY

Yes ... certainly.

William takes Mary's arm and leads her inside, with an apologetic glance at Christian. Christian follows a few steps behind.

INT. JONAS DRAWING ROOM - EVENING

The huge room is packed nearly shoulder-to-shoulder with GUESTS. A small but LOUD orchestra is situated under a large window to one side of the room. A section of floor in front of the orchestra has been set aside for dancing; several COUPLES twirl to the music.

SERVANTS weave through the crowd, offering platters of food and drink to the guests. The large, boisterous crowd seems to be thoroughly enjoying itself.

William walks Mary into the middle of this scene and lets her go. Mary mouths a few words of protest, but we cannot hear for the NOISE of the crowd and the orchestra. Eventually, Mary goes off on her own, and William retreats to a corner of the room.

INT. JONAS DRAWING ROOM (WILLIAM'S CORNER) - EVENING

William grabs a glass of wine off a tray as a servant zips by. He attempts in vain to find a spot to stand that has a bit of elbow room - the crowd is simply too big. He goes to take a sip of wine, but someone jostles him. He jerks his head to the right.

RUTHVEN'S VOICE

William ... remember your oath.

No one is there.

William stands, fixed in his position. He moves nothing but his eyes, which sweep the room in search of the source of the voice he has just heard. Finally, he spots a figure across the room. His eyes lock, and all the color drains from his face.

P.O.V. William:

The Earl of Marsden stands in a small group, drinking and laughing heartily.

End P.O.V.

WILLIAM

It can't be!

A small group of FRIENDS near William turn to him at this outburst. One starts to CHUCKLE, but a second motions for him to stop.

SECOND FRIEND

Sir? I say, sir? Is everything alright?

William responds by dropping his glass of wine to the floor with a CRASH. His legs give out, and he nearly drops to the floor himself before the second friend grabs him. The first friend begins to CHUCKLE again.

FIRST FRIEND

Well, this one seems to have been into the drink a bit early, wouldn't you say?

SECOND FRIEND

I would guess he has.

Having spotted William from across the room, Christian makes his way over.

SECOND FRIEND (Cont.)

You don't suppose he came in with anyone, do you?

CHRISTIAN

William ... what is it? What's happened?

FIRST FRIEND

There's your answer.

SECOND FRIEND

Seems your friend's had a bit much to drink already, sir. I'd be happy to help you out with him. (a beat) If that's what you'll want to be doing, of course.

Christian turns his head, looking about the room to see if he can spot Mary.

CHRISTIAN

Ah ... yes, I suppose that's for the best. Just bring him out front; I'll find his coach driver and meet you there. And thank you for your kindness.

SECOND FRIEND

My pleasure.

The second friend leads William gingerly toward the exit. Christian starts weaving his way into the crowd, getting pushed this way and that as he walks.

CHRISTIAN

Damn ... where have you gotten to, Mary?

Christian eventually gives up his attempts to work through the crowd. He stops, takes one final look around, and SIGHS. With a new determination in his step, he heads for the door.

INT. JONAS DRAWING ROOM (DANCING FLOOR) - EVENING

Mary, with a beaming smile on her face, waltzes with a young BLOND MAN. She seems to be enjoying herself immensely, until she spies Christian scurrying out of the drawing room. Her smile subsides.

INT. AUBREY HOME (LIBRARY) - DAY

Mary sits in one of the leather-backed library chairs, sipping from a cup of tea. She stares at the stacks of books and waits patiently. Eventually, Christian steps out with a thick book open in his hands.

CHRISTIAN

Here we are. I'm sure this volume can offer some answers to William's dementia. How long has he been like this now?

MARY

Christian, I really don't wish for you to attempt to solve my brother's health problems. It's not your place to do anything of the kind. In fact, I'm not entirely sure what your place is in my home at all.

CHRISTIAN

Humor me, Mary ... will you, please? On just this one topic, try to at least work with me instead of against me? Is this so much to ask?

No answer.

CHRISTIAN (Cont.)

I've accepted the fact that if you ever did love me, you no longer do. I can accept that much. I cannot be pleased with it, but I can accept it. What I cannot accept is that you no longer love your brother. If there were ever two people more clearly meant to be related than you and William, I have surely not encountered them. Nor do I ever expect to encounter such a pair. You love your brother, Mary. And he loves you, perhaps even more. For him Mary, not for me, can we just cooperate on this matter? I do what I do to help him. I have no selfish motives.

Mary finishes her tea and places the cup and saucer on a table beside the chair.

MARY

Three weeks. He's hardly left his room in the past three weeks.

CHRISTIAN

Good heavens! It's been that long?

MARY

You're the one who extracted him from that drawing-room.

Christian begins thumbing through the book.

MARY (Cont.)

Really, Christian ... you can't expect to find any answer in there. I think it's past time to call in the doctor, see if he can't help my brother.

Christian SIGHS and shuts the book.

CHRISTIAN

I suppose you may be right. I simply don't like feeling like I can't be of any help when it comes to a friend such as William. I must do all I can to speed his recovery. (a beat) And if that means medical help, then so be it. Who knows, perhaps he might even be well enough by tomorrow night to accompany you to your aunt's.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - DAY

William quickly paces back and forth across the length of the room. His clothes are unwashed, and his face has a scraggly mess of a beard. The bags under his eyes make it look as if he hasn't slept in weeks. The distant voices of Christian and Mary waft into the room:

MARY (O.S.)

I'm surprised you'd even mention such an event. Strictly arranged to marry me off, I've no doubt.

CHRISTIAN (O.S.)

Why be surprised then? Just because I'm convinced you no longer love me doesn't mean I'm convinced I can never win you back.

MARY (O.S.)

Judging by the drawing-room the other week, you'll certainly have your competition.

William ceases his pacing at this last statement. He swings his head toward his door and stares at it in disbelief for a moment.

WILLIAM

Mary, married! I-I had never even considered it up to now, but ... alas, what an addle-minded fool am I. Of course, marriage!

He begins pacing again, now with his hands gripping the sides of his head tightly.

WILLIAM

But what of ... the fiend! Should she, or should Christian ... should Mary encounter him, should either, they'll know not what to expect! No, still ... it's still simply not possible what I saw. What I saw, I could not have seen! Or perhaps I have indeed gone mad.

The pacing again stops, and William turns back to the door.

WILLIAM

Proof, is what I need. If I only could see the man again, could prove that what I saw was indeed what I saw, then.... (a beat) But the oath. Oh, oath be damned if what I saw was what I saw! How could I allow such a man to move among society freely, as freely as might I.

William's eyes light up, as if he's suddenly found the answer to an ancient riddle. He begins pacing again, slower, with his hand pointing at the air as it outlines a plan.

WILLIAM

Of course! I must myself enter society again, for to catch a glimpse of the man, I must move in the same circles as he might. I must myself accompany Mary to our aunt's, for to enter society, I must once again prove myself fit. I'm sure ... I know I can do this. For mine own sanity, I can do this.

His pacing carries him out of the room.

INT. AUBREY AUNT'S FLAT - NIGHT

A moderately large flat in London. A soft rain falls outside, the wind occasionally blowing it against the window with a PATTERNING sound. The scene is much more sedate than a drawing-room. Musicians are nowhere to be found; only the CHATTER of guests is heard.

William sits by himself, in a chair with its back to the wall. He has kept the beard, but it is neatly trimmed. His clothes are impeccable, but the bags under his eyes remain. He drinks from a glass of red wine. His eyes are fixed on Mary, who stands in another section of the room (separated by an archway), surrounded by a semicircle of SUITORS.

MARY

No, I'm trying to tell you, the man swore it had been a Chianti!

SUITOR 1

But it wasn't?

MARY

Oh, that's really not important. The point is, he actually tried to convince me that he could drink the red out of a wine!

SUITOR 2

And you believed him?

MARY

He's my older brother, how could I not? So ... I went through almost ten years believing my brother had the ability to turn a wine from red to white.

They all LAUGH - some more patronizingly than others.

SUITOR 2

I know of only one thing that could have the chance to change a red wine to white.

MARY

Oh? And just what might hold that magic?

SUITOR 2

Your beauty.

Suitor 2 tilts his glass to Mary, then drinks. Mary merely BLUSHES demurely. More TALKING and LAUGHTER ensues.

Most of the guests who have not circled around Mary have begun to leave; William observes e intently. As ehe last few guests make e way out the door, William makes a decision:

WILLIAM

Time to leave.

He stands and begins eo walk to the archway and into the other room to fetch Mary. He finds her quite unreachable due to the six or so suitors who have formed a neat little cocoon around her.

WILLIAM

Excuse me.

He puts his hand on Suitor 2's shoulder, and proceeds eo turn the man around and out of his way.

WILLIAM

Sir, if you'd kindly pardon me so that I might get to -

William cuts himself off as he looks into Suitor 2's eyes and finds he is the same Earl of Marsden that he saw across the room a month earlier. He stares for a moment into the Earl's eyes - those eyes in turn GLMW for but a moment.

Mary spots William staring at Marsden.

MARY

Oh, William! I don't believe you've had the pleasure of meeting Charles, the Earl of Marsden. Charles, my brother, William.

William steps into the semicircle of suitors, GRABS his sister's arm, and drags her away.

MARY

William! William, what are you doing? I was talking to those gentlemen. William, you're being very rude.

He doesn't answer, but continues to force her out of the apartment. As he descends a final flight of stairs before the door to the street, a whisper reaches his ear:

RUTHVEN'S VOICE

Remember your oath!

Reaching the night air, William PUSHES his way through the few servants who remain waiting for their lords and ladies. He finds his own coach, SHOVES Mary inside, and SLAMS the door after her.

INT. COACH - DAY

William enters the coach and sits opposite Mary; the coach begins moving almost immediately. A wild look is in William's eyes. He gazes out the window as if to check for someone following them.

MARY

William.

He continues checking out the window.

MARY

William!

WILLIAM

What?

MARY

William, what in the name of the Lord has gotten into you? Are you still my brother? Do you still care about my life, my happiness?

WILLIAM

Yes.

MARY

Do you!?

William finally pulls his head away from the window.

WILLIAM

Yes! Mary, I care for you more than, more than ... than you or I can possibly imagine! But if ... I can't have seen what I have seen. Ah, but if you could only know how I care, if I could only tell you....

MARY

Then tell me, William. Tell me how you can ruin my life if you still care.

Mary begins to CRY.

WILLIAM

But I do! I do!

Mary's CRYING continues. She is too distraught to continue questioning her brother. He returns to checking out the window, still seeming concerned as if something or someone might be following them close behind.

WILLIAM

I do ... I do....

INT. AUBREY HOME (GARDEN) - EVENING

Mary and the Earl of Marsden sit by the fountain.

MARY

I'm just concerned for his health and safety, Charles.

MARSDEN

It's not as if I'm not concerned as well, Mary. I mean, I've not had the pleasure of meeting your brother under brighter circumstances, but that doesn't mean I don't care for him. Your love for him is reason enough for me to be concerned, for you do not give your love lightly. I only hope that one day, I might earn such affection from one so fair as you.

Mary SMILES.

MARY

This constant flattery may soon get you what you wish.

MARSDEN

Dare I dream?

EXT. LONDON - EVENING

William walks through the filthier streets of the city. A strong breeze blows his greasy hair in and out of his face at intervals. He never bothers to brush it away. His clothes have become ragged and torn, but he doesn't seem to mind. He just continues to walk at a steady pace toward no particular destination.

MARY V.O.

Dreams were made to come true, in my opinion.

MARSDEN V.O.

Well then, I suppose I shall continue to dream the very best of dreams.

William turns a corner. Two DRUNKARDS stop a CONVERSATION to stare at him, but he pays them no heed. A few paces past the drunkards, he MUMBLES something incoherently.

MARY V.O.

I think he's out walking again. (a beat) Charles, there are often days at a time that I don't see him. I have no idea where he goes, and he refuses to talk to me about it - any of it. I've tried to have people follow him, but they always claim he just disappears from their view. I simply can't find any clues as to what could possibly be troubling him so.

MARSDEN V.O.

Don't you think it's time to get him some more reputable help? The doctors who have been seeing him are not exactly the best available.

EXT. AUBREY HOME (GARDEN) - EVENING

The Earl of Marsden has moved closer to Mary on the bench as they continue their conversation.

MARY

I think it's more a cost issue than anything else. Our guardians have never exactly been generous with our parents' fortune. (a beat) I often think they'd rather William lose his faculties completely.

MARSDEN

Oh, Mary ... if it's a money issue, then it's a non-issue. I'm more than happy to assist.

MARY

Charles, I often wonder why you're so generous to me.

MARSDEN

You mean it isn't that obvious? I always hoped I was subtle, but never thought I actually was.

Mary SMILES at the comment. Marsden slowly leans in and KISSES her softly on the cheek. Mary, however, turns his face, and the KISS soon turns passionate.

EXT. LONDON - EVENING.

William stops walking. He turns around and begins walking in the other direction.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - AFTERNOON

William lies in his bed, looking simply awful. A well-dressed DOCTOR stands over him, lifting his closed eyelids one by one, as Mary looks on. William is unresponsive.

DOCTOR

How long did you say he's been back from his trip?

MARY

Oh, let's see.... I think it's been nearly ten months now.

DOCTOR

And how long has he been in this condition?

MARY

I'm not entirely certain, doctor. That is, he's slipped in and out of this melancholia for the past six months. Sometimes he seems perfectly normal, coherent, other times....

Mary trails off and rubs her eyes wearily.

DOCTOR

I see. I'm sorry, Miss Aubrey ... I just have a few more questions.

MARY

I understand.

DOCTOR

When he's been more ... coherent, did he try to interact with you, with his friends?

MARY

That's really when it got most frightening. He would seem fine at first. Except for his looks. His eyes haven't seemed quite right since before he ever left on that trip. So I guess everyone was sort of suspicious of him when he entered a room.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

Flashback. A moderately crowded drawing-room, with the standard string ensemble and guests. William walks in from a side room, looking less than his best. His dress is formal, but it looks as if it was hung on him. The large bags droop below his bloodshot eyes and his hair - rather long now - hangs loosely about his face. The only sound we hear is the continuance of Mary's conversation with the doctor.

MARY V.O.

Not that he didn't give a need for that suspicion. It's no doubt that his actions have been peculiar for months. He would wander around all day ... usually return at night to sleep in his own bed. Sometimes, though, he'd disappear for days ... never giving any indication as to where he'd been once he returned. It got to be so we were forced to keep him here, in his room, under lock and key. But then, like I said, he'd show signs of coherence, so we'd do our best to let him go as he pleased. Anyway, when he'd accompany me to drawing-rooms and the like, he'd usually act normally for a while, though he'd keep somewhat to himself.

William begins to wander about the room. He just observes at first, but eventually he starts approaching individual guests, animatedly speaking to them, and gesturing wildly.

MARY V.O. (Cont.)

Eventually, as the night progressed, he would start going around to the guests and warning them of their impending doom. He never got specific about anything, what form the doom was going to take, when exactly it was impending, and so forth. If anyone was actually brave enough to engage William, ask him what danger exactly was in their midst, his only response would be -

WILLIAM

True! True!

MARY V.O. (Cont.)

Which was the same answer he'd give me whenever I questioned him about anything. (a beat) Um, meaning, of course, he's given me the same warnings of my doom. Keeps warning me "not to go near him," "if you have any love for me left in you, do not touch him," things like that.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - AFTERNOON

The doctor looks up from William and turns to Mary.

MARY

Lately, he's taken to counting when I come in.

DOCTOR

Counting?

MARY

Yes. Like he'll mark off a number, count it out on his fingers. Seems like he's trying to calculate something, I don't know. So he'll count out some number and then just smile. I mean, it's not much, but at least I still get to see him smile.

DOCTOR

When's the wedding, Mary?

Mary SMILES gleefully.

MARY

This time tomorrow, doctor.

DOCTOR

You do understand that William will simply not be in any condition to attend?

The smile quickly fades from Mary's face.

MARY

I can always dream. If there is anything my future husband has taught me, it's that there is never harm in dreaming.

The doctor walks to Mary and leads her out of the room with a hand on her shoulder. William lies alone in bed.

DOCTOR (O.S.)

In this case, I fear there is. I'd recommend keeping this room well guarded tomorrow. If you wish your wedding to occur without incident, your brother is not to attend under any circumstance, no matter how much you may desire it.

William's eyes pop open.

MARY (O.S.)

I suppose you're right.

WILLIAM

Wedding?

EXT. AUBREY HOME (GARDEN) - MORNING

The garden is made up in spectacular fashion for Mary's wedding. Rows of chairs are set out in an open area. It seems as if the entire garden is in bloom on this one day. SERVANTS still set up a few last minute items: food on tables that line the exterior of the garden, a few flowers along the sides of the path that lead through the rows of chairs, a wooden plank that serves as a stage in front of a row of flowering bushes.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - MORNING

William sits on his bed. He is clean-shaven and well-dressed, but still has a wild look in his eyes. A LARGE SERVANT stands in his room, in front of a closed door.

WILLIAM

Don't be absurd! This is my own
sister's wedding for God's sake!

LARGE SERVANT

I'm sorry, Master Aubrey. I have
strict orders from your guardians,
Miss Aubrey, and the Earl of Marsden,
that you are not to -

WILLIAM

Do not say that name! I never want to
hear that name uttered from your or
anyone else's mouth when in my
presence! Should I hear you speak
that vile name again, I'll be certain
to wring your neck!

LARGE SERVANT

As you wish.

The servant knocks three times on the door behind him, and it opens a crack to allow him egress. William SNEERS after the servant.

WILLIAM

Addle-minded fool.

William walks over to his window, which overlooks the garden. He watches the preparations proceed for his sister's wedding and frowns.

INT. AUBREY HOME (OUTSIDE WILLIAM'S ROOM) - MORNING

The large servant and another GUARD stand outside the door, talking.

LARGE SERVANT

I tell you, the man has simply lost his mind. He just threatened to kill me.

GUARD

Oh, he did not!

LARGE SERVANT

Sure as I'm standing on this spot here and now he did. Threatened to throttle me if I mentioned the Earl's name to him. (a beat) I feel sorry for the lad, not being able to attend his sister's wedding and all, but there's got to be better ways of going about this.

Three KNOCKS sound on the door to William's room.

GUARD

Now what's this?

LARGE SERVANT

(to door)

What is it this time, Master Aubrey? You know I can't let you out of there, sorry though I may be on it.

WILLIAM (O.S.)

No, no ... I understand. It's not that. Under the door.

The guard looks down to the floor under the door as a neatly folded sheet of paper is slipped out beneath it.

WILLIAM (O.S.)

You'll be sure my sister gets that, won't you? I mean, it's the least I can be allowed, right? My only sister's wedding ... I can accept being stuck in this room, but can you at least deliver this to her?

The guard kneels down picks up the paper just as the doctor approaches.

GUARD

I'll see that it's done, sir.

WILLIAM (O.S.)

Thank you, oh thank you kindly. You have my word, then, I won't be any more trouble. I won't need to be.

GUARD

Um, certainly, sir.

The doctor grabs the paper out of the guard's hands.

DOCTOR

What's this?

LARGE SERVANT

Letter, I guess. Master Aubrey wants it delivered to his sister. We were just about to go and give it to her.

DOCTOR

I'll be the judge of that.

He scans the letter.

DOCTOR (Cont.)

Best not to give this to her. I don't think on the day of her wedding that Miss Aubrey ought to be any further harassed by the ravings of a madman such as her brother.

The doctor walks away. The guard shrugs.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - AFTERNOON

William reclines on his bed, looking a bit better than he did earlier. He seems almost relaxed. Eventually, the sound of approaching HORSES can be heard out his window. He lifts his head with a questioning look on his face.

Slowly, he rises from the bed and makes his way to the window. He cranes his neck to see outside.

WILLIAM

It can't be!

INSERT (EXT. AUBREY HOME - AFTERNOON): Several carriages arrive at the front of the house. Well-dressed lords and ladies exit and make their way back to the garden.

WILLIAM

Damn!

He begins PACING about the room, hands grasping his head.

INT. AUBREY HOME (OUTSIDE WILLIAM'S ROOM) - AFTERNOON

Only the one guard remains outside the door. Sound of BUSY PREPARATION waft up from other areas of the house. The guard keeps walking down the hall, attempting to hear the various bits of conversation. He has obviously grown bored with his task.

Eventually, an older WOMAN SERVANT happens by. The guard stops her in her path.

GUARD

Excuse me ... it's Genevieve, right?

GENEVIEVE

That's right.

GUARD

Genevieve, I'm wondering if you might be willing to do me a little favor for a few minutes?

GENEVIEVE

What's that?

GUARD

Could you just watch this door while I take a peek out at the garden? I've just got to know what the crowd out there looks like - I keep hearing from the others walking by here, but I'm supposed to watch the door, keep Master Aubrey from coming out and spoiling his sister's affair. You know how he's been.

Genevieve SMILES.

GENEVIEVE

Oh, I don't think he'll be any trouble. You go ahead, watch the ceremony if you like. I've seen plenty of weddings for a while anyway.

GUARD

Much obliged ... I'll do my best not to be long.

The guard turns to walk away.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - AFTERNOON

William stands with his ear to the door, listening to the conversation on the other side.

GENEVIEVE (O.S.)

You take your time.

William runs over to his window and looks out at the garden below. Through his window, we can see that the various guests have all assembled; the wedding is set to begin shortly. William paces away from the window, returns to take a second glance, then makes up his mind.

With a few steps to get up some speed, he RUNS full force and THROWS his body against the door. The door flies open almost as if it were never locked. On the other side, Genevieve is KNOCKED into the wall, and drops to the ground, out cold. William walks briskly out of his room and pays her no heed.

INT. AUBREY HOME (STAIRWAY) - AFTERNOON

At the bottom of the stairway, a few servants make some last-minute preparations. The Earl of Marsden stands obscured by a door that opens onto the garden.

At the top of the stairway, William rounds a corner, slips, and runs into a wall with a SMASH. The servants and the Earl all turn their heads to the sound. William regains his balance and begins to make his way NOISILY down the stairs.

The Earl notices his descent, and quickly walks to the stairwell. GRABBING William forcefully by the arm, he hurries him back up to the top of the stairs. The servants return to their duties as if nothing has happened.

MARSDEN

Remember your oath, William ... and know, if not my bride today, you sister is dishonored. Women are frail!

William is speechless. His entire body begins to QUIVER; he would collapse if Marsden did not retain his tight grip on his arm.

The large servant and guard come running down the hallway. Marsden looks up at them, then tosses William to them as if he were nothing more than a rag doll.

MARSDEN

See that he doesn't get out again. I don't want my bride to see him in this condition.

GUARD

Yes, sir.

They carry him away. A servant calls from the bottom of the stairwell.

SERVANT

Master Charles; they're ready for you now.

Marsden proceeds slowly down the stairs.

INT. AUBREY HOME (WILLIAM'S ROOM) - MORNING

William lies in bed, a blanket pulled up to his chin. His face is quite red, bloodshot eyes are open, staring straight ahead. He seems to be struggling merely to breathe.

After a moment, the doctor enters. He leads Christian into the room.

DOCTOR

I'm afraid I doubt he has much left in him. He asked to see you.

CHRISTIAN

Thank you, doctor.

The doctor exits. Christian slowly approaches William's bedside.

CHRISTIAN

William?

William is slow to respond. Sweat streams down his face. He finally struggles to speak.

WILLIAM

Mary's wedding. Went forward, I assume?

CHRISTIAN

Certainly. A beautiful ceremony. From what I was told.

WILLIAM

The bride and bridegroom?

CHRISTIAN

In Paris. To return in about a month, I believe.

William CHOKES for an instant, and the redness in his face increases to unbelievable levels.

WILLIAM

They will not return.

CHRISTIAN

William, please ... for once, explain
yourself, I implore you.

William CHOKES again. This time, a trickle of blood spills out his nose. A moment later, he attempts to speak again, but it only comes out as another CHOKE. A red-stained tear spills out of his eye. He struggles to get out his last words:

WILLIAM

The vampyre!

EXT. PARIS - NIGHT

A FULL MOON shines brilliantly.

INT. PARIS INN - NIGHT

A set of glowing eyes flash bright red. In the dim light, a man's figure swoops down, attacking a woman lying on a bed. A SCREAM pierces the silence.

FADE OUT.