

The Night Road

by Gillian Greenbaum

LOGLINE: A young woman traveling at night learns that the danger is not the darkness, but what hides within it.

FADE IN

EXT. BARRINGTON MANOR GATE - EARLY EVENING

ADELAIDE BARRINGTON (20s) stands at the gate of a Victorian estate. She is dressed sensibly for travel, yet clearly she is a young lady of means. She is beautiful and demure, a stark contrast to her surroundings.

The darkening sky leaks just enough rain to warrant the use of her umbrella. Her only companion--a single suitcase--lies at her feet.

A two-man fly carriage pulled by a majestic BUCKSKIN MARE slows to a halt on the road in front of her. The flyman, HARRY GRAVES, sits on the sprung seat at the back of the carriage. He is a fit man in his late 30s who wears an air of the firmly middle-class and likes it that way. He smiles and tips his hat at the girl.

GRAVES

(in a warm cockney accent)

Miss Barrington?

ADELAIDE

Please, I prefer Adelaide.

Adelaide reaches to pet the mare at the front of the carriage while Graves dismounts to collect her lone bag.

GRAVES

Tha's Mildred, and I'm Graves.

Pleasure to meet you, Miss Adelaide.

He helps her into the seat and closes the front half-doors before climbing back onto his perch and sliding open the trapdoor in the roof so he can speak to his new passenger.

GRAVES (CONT'D)

(winking)

Best set off then, 'fore the spooks
come out o' the shadows.

He jostles the reins and Mildred begins to trot forward.

INT. FLY CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Through the windows of the carriage, Adelaide watches LAMPLIGHTERS climb their ladders and illuminate the gas street lamps.

GRAVES

So this uncle of yours must be pretty wealthy, sendin' a fly to take you all this way.

ADELAIDE

Oh, he said in his letter he doesn't trust these new "railroads," and I don't blame him. Besides, I would need an escort for my journey and this way you can fulfill the role of chauffeur and chaperone.

She giggles innocently, as if she doesn't see a single thing wrong with embarking on a night-time carriage ride through the countryside with only a common flyman for company.

GRAVES

Haven't you lady's maid--or a governess perhaps? Surely a servant could have accompanied ya?

ADELAIDE

I'm far too old to have a governess!

She crosses her arms and pouts like a petulant child.

ADELAIDE (CONT'D)

And in any case, all the servants left when Mother and Father died and they found out the money was all dried up.

GRAVES

Apologies, m'lady. I hadn't meant to bring up anything to cause you pain.

ADELAIDE

(waving her hand in false dismissiveness)

You couldn't have known. I'm sure you drive young women to their long-lost uncles' estates for pleasant reasons all the time.

Graves snorts at the joke, but Adelaide looks nervous.

GRAVES

So you've never even met this uncle?

ADELAIDE

Well I have, but it's been years and

years. I scarcely think we could recognize each other.

GRAVES

And that's the only place you have to go? No other family or friends?

Adelaide shifts uncomfortably at the mention.

ADELAIDE

No other family. And the manner in which they died and left their affairs rendered us--I mean me--rather alone.

A long pause hangs in the air as she gazes out the window and Graves ponders how to respond.

ADELAIDE (CONT'D)

So I wrote to Uncle Regis about perhaps assuming wardship of me.

Graves is startled.

GRAVES

Regis? As in Regis Martindale?

ADELAIDE

(excitedly)

Yes! You know him?

GRAVES

Well, no, not personally. But I've heard of him. Most everyone has around these parts, I reckon.

He noticeably flicks his eyes back and forth at their surroundings. The sparsely populated city streets of the evening give way to even more lonely-looking meadows, dotted with the occasional farmhouse, shed, or cottage.

GRAVES (CONT'D)

(nervously glancing about)

There are...rumors about him.

Adelaide frowns in disbelief.

ADELAIDE

Rumors can be so nasty. I'm sure they're harmless.

GRAVES

Could be.

(beat)

Even so, he is certainly a curious character.

ADELAIDE

In what manner? I'd like to know more about the man with whom I'll be staying, if you know anything.

Her eyes light with piqued interest. She pulls her gaze from the landscape and peers up through the trapdoor at Graves, who has locked his jaw and refuses to meet her eyes.

ADELAIDE (CONT'D)

Mr. Graves? Is he truly such a monster you fear even to speak of it?

He snaps a hard look at her, before softening at her innocent expression of amusement.

GRAVES

I feel, perhaps, it is impolite to discuss accusations against a powerful man with his own niece.

He clears his throat and stares ahead again, urging Mildred on with the reins and severing the thread of conversation.

EXT. FLY CARRIAGE - EDGE OF THE WOODS - NIGHT

The carriage arrives at the edge of a dark wood with only a narrow dirt path for the carriage. Mildred whinnies quietly.

There are no street lamps, no ambient light from houses in the distance or flickering lanterns marking farmers' properties.

A small breeze gutters out the flame of the lantern hanging from the fly.

GRAVES

(muttering)

Good god, not now.

He fumbles with some matches in the dim starlight. The waning gibbous moon drifts behind a cloud, wrapping the traveling party in darkness. Adelaide gasps.

GRAVES (CONT'D)

Don't be frightened, Miss Adelaide.
S'only a bit of darkness. Can't hurt
you none.

ADELAIDE

(barely audible)

But what about with hides within it?

The lantern lights and the cloud drifts away from the moon
again, breaking the spell of blackness.

GRAVES

Ah, there we go!

(to Mildred)

Onward, steed! To Uncle Regis!

Mildred stomps her hooves and snorts, starting to trot into
the spindly trees marking the start of the forest.

EXT. FLY CARRIAGE - FOREST - NIGHT

The trees are bare of leaves but densely packed, creating an
interwoven pattern of dark and darker above and surrounding
the carriage, casting the travelers in eerie tattoos of
shadow.

ADELAIDE

Mr. Graves?

GRAVES

Yes, m'lady?

ADELAIDE

I've never been to Crasterville
before. Have you?

GRAVES

My home is in the town over, m'lady.

ADELAIDE

What's it like? I'm anxious to
familiarize myself with my new home. I
suppose I'll have to be the one to go
to market and run other such errands.

GRAVES

A lady of your standing?

Adelaide plays with the edges of her traveling gloves.

ADELAIDE

My uncle said in his letter he keeps very few servants and prefers not to venture to town. He despises crowds and noise.

GRAVES

Yes, I've heard he's rather...reserved. They say he keeps odd hours to avoid the masses. Perhaps he's a snob who can't bear to be near the filth. Or maybe he's painfully shy. Or maybe--

Graves stops abruptly, clamping his mouth shut and focusing on the road. Adelaide narrows her eyes at him.

ADELAIDE

Mr. Graves, what aren't you telling me?

He clears his throat.

GRAVES

I don't want to scare you, miss. But Crasterville has had some mysterious disappearances lately and many think the reclusive Lord is to blame.

There is a small moment of silence.

ADELAIDE

Disappearances? You mean like kidnappings?

CUT TO

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

POV--KILLER: A WOMAN in a torn dress runs down the alley, reaching a dead end. She turns back, looking straight at us and pleading, sobbing, but the only sound we can hear is the pulse of blood in our ears.

EXT. FLY CARRIAGE - FOREST - NIGHT

GRAVES

Well, sort of. Mostly they do reappear, just not altogether in one piece.

ADELAIDE

(gasps)

There's a murderer on the loose in
this town?

EXT. ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

POV--KILLER: The woman from before lies slumped in a bloody pile in the alley. Using a POCKET KNIFE, the killer punches two perfect holes into her neck. He then begins to saw at her finger.

EXT. FLY CARRIAGE - FOREST - NIGHT

GRAVES

They say the killer might not be
human. Leaves the bodies drained of
blood, holes in their necks.

ADELAIDE

Impossible. There's no such thing as--

GRAVES

(cutting her off)

Vampires? I beg to differ, Miss
Adelaide. I seen one.

ADELAIDE

And lived to tell the tale?

GRAVES

Wouldn't have if he'd seen me. But I'm
sneaky.

He snorts proudly, as if he manages to outsmart immortal creatures with inhuman senses on the regular.

ADELAIDE

(nervously)

What...what did he look like? Was he
horrid?

GRAVES

Scariest part about him was he looked
like any other fellow you might see on
the street.

ADELAIDE

Then how did you know he was really
a...you know?

EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

YOUNG GRAVES (13) jumps playfully from a rooftop onto a shop awning, stifling a laugh as he almost overshoots the jump. He lands with his hands just gripping the edge, stopping himself from tumbling face-first into the cobblestone street.

His eyes catch on a scene unfolding beneath him. A young, dark-haired MAN with even darker eyes silently approaches a STREETWALKER, who is smiling at him and leaning to show him her barely covered cleavage.

Wordlessly, the man tosses a coin at the woman and when she goes to catch it, the man is suddenly upon her, biting down onto her neck.

GRAVES (V.O.)

The teeth. Saw him open his mouth and jus' chomp right into a girl's neck. I was a youngster at the time, sneaking around rooftops and alleyways for a bit o' fun. But the second I saw that I took off into the night.

Young Graves rolls back onto the awning, scrambling to climb back over the roof.

The vampire snaps his head to look at the roof, narrowing his eyes, but Graves is unaware. As quickly as he was on the girl, the monster vanishes.

Graves gives up on reaching the roof and peeks to see if the vampire has gone. Finding only the lifeless, bloodless body of the hooker, he carefully drops off the awning and prepares to run off.

But he looks back at the body in the street with morbid curiosity.

EXT. FLY CARRIAGE - FOREST - NIGHT

GRAVES (CONT'D)

So I know they're real. And by the reports of these crimes, there ain't a doubt in my mind it's a bloodsucker.

Adelaide sits paralyzed with a terrified look on her face.

GRAVES (CONT'D)

Damn it, I knew I shoulda kept my big mouth shut. I've gone and scared you.

ADELAIDE

No, it's alright Mr. Graves. I wanted to know. I'll be sure to tell my uncle that I'll not be alone, particularly at night. Perhaps he can hire you to be my permanent driver! What do you say, Mildred?

The horse chuffs as if she can understand the joking offer, and the tension dissipates somewhat.

EXT. UNCLE'S ESTATE - NIGHT

The carriage comes to a halt at the end of a winding dirt pathway leading up to a menacing manor. The stars have begun to fade into a barely lightening sky. Dawn is just a few hours away.

GRAVES

Looks like this is the place. No neighbors for miles, eh?

His gruff cockney accent seems to melt away.

ADELAIDE

Yes, well... I suppose my uncle values his privacy.

Adelaide attempts to open the folding wooden doors to free herself from the carriage, but before she can release them, Graves reaches through the trapdoor in the roof, grabbing her shoulder.

INT. FLY CARRIAGE - NIGHT

GRAVES

(fully posh)

Are you sure it's quite safe for a pretty young lady to wander up the road all alone and knock on the door of a strange old man she's barely met in the middle of the night?

ADELAIDE

I believe he's been expecting me sometime this week, and I shan't dally any longer.

GRAVES

Surely no one is waiting up for you at this hour. Unless of course he's

nocturnal.

Graves' hand trickles upward from her shoulder to Adelaide's neck.

ADELAIDE

Mr. Graves, I--

He silences her by squeezing one large hand around her throat and brandishing a very familiar pocket knife in the other.

GRAVES

And seeing as he's never met you, he wouldn't be inclined to miss you much, would he?

Adelaide's breathing picks up as Graves toys with the knife, leaning further and further over her through the trapdoor.

GRAVES (CONT'D)

(chuckling)

His meal, my meal, what does it matter, Miss Barrington? One of us will have you. Why can't it be me?

She closes her eyes and attempts to steady herself.

ADELAIDE

Because I'm hungry.

Her eyes open, revealing that Adelaide's irises have disappeared, leaving only vastly dilated pupils in their wake. She smiles and vicious fangs poke down from her gums.

With inhuman speed, one hand seizes Graves' knife by the blade, disarming him and tossing the blade into the dirt. The other wraps around his head and tugs his upper half entirely through the trapdoor.

Adelaide sinks her teeth into Graves' neck and tears a chunk from his carotid artery, spitting the discarded flesh onto the floor of the carriage and proceeding to allow gravity to guide the torrent of blood into her open mouth below.

After draining Graves' body, she lets the empty sack of meat slither all the way through the trapdoor and into the cab, landing in a heap on the seat beside her.

She licks her own blood from the open wound of her hand, healing it over. She sighs and her eyes return to normal, if not brighter than they were previously. Her skin gains color,

her cheeks look fuller.

She dismounts from the carriage, collecting her bag and Graves' knife before opening her umbrella.

EXT. UNCLE'S ESTATE - NEARLY DAWN

Adelaide pats Mildred on the nose before giving her rear a sharp smack, sending the mare trotting obliviously along down the road towards whatever town she'd wander into some hours from now.

She lifts her luggage easily with one hand and angles her umbrella towards the east, where a sliver of gold can be seen on the horizon through the trees. She sets off up the long, winding path.

EXT. UNCLE'S ESTATE - PORCH - DAWN

The sun is nearly breaching the tree-line when Adelaide reaches the large wooden doors of the manor. They swing open immediately and she walks in breathing a sigh of relief. They close with a BANG.

INT. UNCLE'S ESTATE - FOYER - DAWN

The house is dark aside from a few lit candelabras. The curtains are drawn on all the windows and in the dim light, she takes in the colossal staircases curving upwards, the grand paintings, the pedestals with statues and trinkets lining the carpet walkway.

The portraits hanging in the foyer show generations of rather similar-looking couples in various time periods and at various ages, all with the same eyes. The women all look suspiciously like Adelaide.

REGIS

(whispered off-screen)

Is it done?

REGIS MARTINDALE sneaks up behind Adelaide, wrapping his arms around her waist and speaking into her ear in a decidedly non-avuncular manner. He is young and well-built, with dark hair and even darker eyes. His skin is pale and he nurses bags under his eyes.

ADELAIDE

Of course, my love. Have I ever failed you before?

She reveals Graves' knife--still bloodied--to Regis and the two smile.

ADELAIDE (CONT'D)

And I took enough for both of us.
Imbibe, my king.

With the words, Regis' irises disappear and his fangs descend. He uses Graves' knife to score Adelaide's wrist as she holds it out, and then sinks to his knees before her. As she allows blood to pour from her wrist into Regis' waiting maw, he starts to gain strength and color the way she had after devouring Graves.

With his replenished strength, he rises from his knees and kisses Adelaide savagely, placing the knife on an empty nearby pedestal.

The next pedestal holds a scimitar from the sixteenth century with brown specks of dried blood still clinging to it.

The one after displays a garrotte as well as a human head somewhere in the middle stages of decay.

As we see further into the rows of pedestals, they reveal more gruesome weapons and body parts in various stages of decomposition. The final hanging portrait shows Adelaide and Regis as they look now. On the table in the painting is a decanter and two wine goblets, one of them overturned and allowing the liquid within to pool on the white tablecover. It is very clearly not wine.

FADE OUT