



The Governess

Dramatization of the short story by Henry James

by Christian Lanciai (1999)

The characters:

Lord Mingus
Miss Pembroke, his secretary
Miss Rachel Ward, governess
William, butler
Mrs Grose, hostess at Blair House
Flora and Miles, the children
The coachman
Peter Quint
Miss Jessel
The cook

The action is in England around the turn of the century in 1900.

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The Governess

Scene 1.

(A beautiful richly furnished office. The secretary looks out from the door and sees the poor lonely and frightened governess applicant sitting and waiting.)

secretary We have a poor quivering applicant outside.
lord Only one who dared?
secretary Yes.
lord What do you think of her?
secretary (looks out again) She looks exactly like the right sort.
lord Young and inexperienced? Afraid of failure?
secretary Exactly.
lord A poor virgin greenhorn, precisely what we need. What shall we tell her?
Secretary She will probably take the job whatever we tell her.
lord So we should not scare her off.
Secretary That would be unnecessary and stupid.
lord So we say nothing to her.
Secretary She doesn't have to worry about what she doesn't know.
lord Let her in.
secretary (through the door) You may come in now, Miss.
Miss Ward (looks up hopefully) Oh, thank you so much. *(enters)*
lord Miss Rachel Ward, wasn't it?
Ward Yes, and you are lord Mingus, I trust. *(They greet each other.)*
lord How old are you, Miss Ward?
Ward Twenty-five.
lord Neither too young nor too old. Why did you apply for this position?
Ward It seemed so suitable. A quiet family life in the country is just what I need, and two children is exactly as much as I can take.
lord In other words, you seem perfectly cut for the job.
Ward Yes, I feel ready for such a task.
lord But you have no references.
Ward I am sorry about this. You see, this would be my first great challenge. But I could surely manage it. It's just two little children. *(The lord exchanges a glance with the secretary.)*
lord Since you are the only applicant, I am afraid we have to accept you.
Ward (joins her hands in delight) Oh, thank you so much!
lord I must inform you, though, that the position involves a condition.
Ward (sits down) If I can fulfill it, it will be my pleasure.
lord (sits down) My nephews are orphans. I am myself unmarried and will shortly go away. So you will be quite alone with the children and will carry all responsibility yourself for their education and development. And it must remain that way as long as you are employed. You will not be able to turn to me for any matter.
Ward Is that all?
lord Yes.
Ward May I only ask: what happened to their parents?
lord They passed away in typhus in India.
Ward How sad.
lord Yes.
Ward So I may take care of them like my own children?
lord Exactly. Will it suit you?

Ward Nothing could suit we better. You can't imagine how happy I will be!
 lord Then the job is yours.
 Ward Thank you!
 lord You go out to the Blair castle as soon as you can make yourself ready. Mrs Grose will take care of you there and give you all necessary instructions. I wish you the best of luck with the children, Miss Ward. *(offers his hand)*
 Ward Thank you! Thank you! *(leaves overwhelmed)*
 lord Well, Pembroke? What do you think?
 secretary If we are lucky she will never even know about her predecessor's death.
 lord If we only get her safely settled in her task, she will be likely to remain there. Mrs Grose has my exact instructions. Even if Miss Ward gets to know the worst, there will probably be no problems. Thank you, Pembroke. You may leave.
(The secretary leaves. The lord puts on his spectacles and sits down by his working desk.)

Scene 2.

Miss Ward makes her entrance in the castle with her luggage and the butler, looks overwhelmed around.

butler There, Miss! You were lucky with the weather, having no rain for the journey!
 Ward It feels like stepping right into a dream! How happy I will be here!
 butler Wait until you see the children.
 Mrs Grose *(enters)* I heard you coming. Welcome, Miss Ward. I hope you will like it here.
 Ward I already do. *(they greet each other cordially)*
 Butler Shall I carry Miss Ward's luggage to her room, Mrs Grose?
 Grose Yes, do that, William. She must not carry anything herself. Your pupil is eagerly waiting for you, Miss Ward.
 Ward My pupil? Shouldn't there be two of them?
 Grose You will meet young master Miles when he comes home from school.
 Ward May I see Flora presently?
 Grose If you wish. She was hoping to welcome you, but I asked her to wait until you had landed. Come in, Flora!
(A lovely young girl makes her entrance, like Anne of Green Gables.)
 Flora I am so glad you could come, Miss Ward! *(curtseys nicely)*
 Ward And I am so happy to have you for my pupil, Flora. *(They greet each other with affection.)*
 Grose *(satisfied)* You will get along well. That's obvious from the start.
 Ward I also think we will get along together, Flora. What do you think?
 Flora I am sure we will be best friends. I wished for exactly someone like you, Miss Ward.
 Grose Go now, Flora, and let Miss Ward make herself at home in her room.
 Flora I will be out in the garden gathering flowers. *(leaves)*
 Grose She always goes down to the shore gathering flowers when she is really happy.
 Ward What a lovely child! Is Miles also like that?
 Grose Miles is older but equally charming and well formed. Talking of that, this letter arrived today from his school. I haven't opened it. *(leaves a letter)*
 Ward Why haven't you opened it?
 Grose I wanted you to see it first. You are after all now their governess.
 Ward *(opens it and reads, puts her hand to her mouth in apprehension.)*

Grose Is it bad news?
Ward Miles has been expelled!
Grose It isn't possible!
Ward The headmistress writes here herself that he has had a bad influence on his comrades. Therefore Miles is sent home on Tuesday. That is tomorrow!
Grose That was really bad news.
Ward (*reads it again*) But she gives no explanation. There must be some mistake. What shall we do, Mrs Grose? Should we get in touch with their uncle?
Grose He wouldn't like it whatever the matter is. Don't you think you could handle the situation without him?
Ward He expressly forbade me to contact him in matters of the children's education. That should be my responsibility entirely. But with such a lovely sister, Miles couldn't possibly be a mean child?
Grose I assure you that it is quite impossible. Like his sister Miles is exemplary in every way. There are no sweeter children in the world.
Ward So there must be a mistake. Perhaps something has happened that couldn't be investigated which Miles was blamed for in the absence of other suspects... Such things often happen in public schools.
Grose Yes, it is probably something like that.
Ward We will receive Miles tomorrow and listen to his story of the matter before we do anything else, Mrs Grose.
Grose A sensible decision, Miss Ward. Now I suggest that you go to your room and recuperate after the journey and make yourself thoroughly at home. Then there will soon be tea.
Ward I am looking forward to it, Mrs Grose. In spite of the sunshine, the journey was no easy matter.
Grose See you later. (*Ward leaves.*)
So Miles is coming back home freshly expelled. I hope nothing worse will happen around here. (*leaves*)
Butler (*barges in*) Mrs Grose! Miss Ward! Young master Miles is here!
Grose (*comes rushing in*) But he wasn't supposed to arrive until tomorrow?
butler But he is here! He is just getting out of the carriage!
Ward (*comes back*) Is Miles here?
Grose He actually seems to have arrived already, Miss Ward.
Ward Then we must receive him.
(*The door is opened, and Miles is brought in escorted by the driver and cook. He is if possible even more endearing than Flora but somewhat bigger and older.*)
Miles Mrs Grose! How lovely to be back! (*rushes into her arms*)
Grose It's good to have you back, Miles. Meet your new teacher, Miss Ward.
Miles (*greet her politely*) I have heard about you, Miss Ward.
Ward I have also heard about you, Miles. I am sure we will make good friends.
Miles We are already.
Flora (*comes rushing in*) Miles! Miles! Welcome back! (*They embrace.*)
Miles My sister! (*Grose and Ward exchange a glance.*)
Grose Could you imagine anything bad about such a boy?
Ward Impossible.
Flora Miles, what have you done now to get expelled?
Miles Nothing as usual.
Flora Haven't you been naughty again?
Miles You know that I haven't.
Flora And still you just get expelled all the time!
Miles People don't understand me. Grown-ups are so weird. That's why, I suppose.

Grose Go out and play now, children. I will make some tea.
 Flora Come, Miles, swans have returned to the pond!
 Miles Is it true?
 Flora Come, and you'll see! *(They hurry out together.)*
 Ward There must be some mistake, Mrs Grose.
 Grose Without doubt.
 Ward Has he been expelled before?
 Grose Once.
 Ward I think I should be informed of all the circumstances.
 Grose Of course. You shall learn everything in good time, Miss Ward. *(leaves)*
 Ward What have I landed in? A mystery? An uncle who refuses to have anything to do with his nephews? Why?
(Suddenly she freezes. A man outside the window is seen to thoroughly regard her. She stares back. Then she hurries out but soon returns.)
 Gone. Who on earth could that have been? *(crosses her arms)* Mrs Grose has more and more things to explain.

Scene 3.

Grose Have you seen him before?
 Ward Yes, once. It was very odd. We were out in the yard, and I saw him up in the tower.
 Grose On the top?
 Ward Yes. And I had the distinct feeling that he was looking down on me.
 Grose What was your impression of him?
 Ward Wild, romantic, searching. He looked at me as if he examined me.
 Grose Describe his eyes.
 Ward Cold, hard, penetrating look.
 Grose What colour?
 Ward Blue.
 Grose It can't be true! It must not be true!
 Ward Do you know who he is, Mrs Grose?
 Grose And you have seen him twice?
 Ward Yes, first in the tower at a distance and then rudely staring at me straight through the window. But when I went out to face him he was gone. Who is it, Mrs Grose?
 Grose It is Peter Quint.
 Ward And who is Peter Quint?
 Grose He was the children's father's closest man. When the late master went to India with his wife, he left Peter Quint to take care of everything here. He was a kind of factotum and highly trusted by the late master.
 Ward But why are you so upset, Mrs Grose?
 Grose Because, my friend, Peter Quint is dead.
 Ward Dead? But I saw him very much alive!
 Grose I know. Nothing fits. And still it cannot be anyone else.
 Ward But that is terrible!
 Grose That's exactly what it is. How was he dressed? What did he look like?
 Ward His clothes didn't look like his own, as if they were too noble for him and too large...
 Grose He had clothes from the late master, who was greater in size.
 Ward He looked somewhat shabby. His hair was far too long...

Grose Yes, he never had a haircut. It certainly is him all right. But what does he want? Why is he coming here haunting us when he should be dead?

Ward I had another feeling also.

Grose Well?

Ward As if he wasn't interested in me at all but was looking for someone else.

Grose Who?

Ward Now I know! It was when Miles came home! He was searching with his eyes for Miles!

Grose Miles!

Ward Did young Miles know him?

Grose They were very good friends, or rather: Peter Quint liked to spoil Miles and spend too much time with him.

Ward This is getting worse and worse.

Grose Pardon my frankness, but I am glad though that he appears only to you and not to me.

Ward The worst remains, Mrs Grose.

Grose Well?

Ward Today in the park by the pond Flora was alone with me. Suddenly she fell quite silent and looked attentively towards the trees on the other side of the pond. She had discovered something but said nothing. I followed her eyes and saw what she saw.

Grose Did she see Peter Quint?

Ward No, Mrs Grose. It was a woman, a dark, beautiful woman dressed in black, a fine lady of some kind, much finer than I...

Grose No! This is too much!

Ward Who was it, Mrs Grose? Was it my predecessor? What happened to her? Why did she quit? Why did Peter Quint die?

Grose This is too much!

Ward Let's pull ourselves together, Mrs Grose, and face the challenges together, and thus we will be able to handle them. But I have to know everything.

Grose Both are dead.

Ward Peter Quint and my predecessor?

Grose Yes.

Ward What was her name?

Grose Miss Jessel. She was terrible.

Ward In what way?

Grose She allowed herself to be seduced by Peter Quint.

Ward I see. Did they have an accident?

Grose Peter Quint was found dead between Blair and the village. They believed he had fallen on his way home from the village pub, lost his way and fallen to his death.

Ward And Miss Jessel?

Grose She died shortly afterwards. She was found drowned in the pond. They believed she had drowned herself.

Ward And they had a relationship?

Grose An outrageous relationship!

Ward And she brought up the children, and also Peter Quint showed some interest in the boy. And now they can't leave the children alone. Miss Jessel on the other side of the lake only looked at Flora, not at me.

Grose What is this supposed to mean, Miss Ward?

Ward They are after the children, and we must protect them with our lives. We have no other choice, Mrs Grose.

Grose Good heavens!

Ward Mrs Grose, I must learn everything. If we are to protect the children, you must not keep any secrets from me.

Grose Miss Ward, I am completely helpless. I don't know much more than you. When I pointed out that Peter Quint was too much alone with the boy, Miss Jessel told me to let them alone. The only ones who to some degree know what has happened and what may still be going on, is the children.

Ward So we must attack these phantoms by the children.

Grose That will be your task, Miss Ward. You have seen them. Not I.

Ward But I may trust your help, I hope?

Grose Of course. But I don't think my help will be worth much, if the children don't want to help themselves...

Scene 4. Dark night.

Flora (*high up at a window*) Miles! Miles!

Miles (*down in the garden*) They are here, Flora! They are here!

Flora It is dark!

Miles Come down! They are here!

Ward (*coming up behind Flora*) Flora, what are you doing here?

Flora Nothing, Miss Ward.

Ward And why is Miles not in his room? Where is he?

Flora I don't know.

Ward What are you looking at down in the garden?

Flora Nothing.

Ward Who is down there? Who tempts you up in the middle of the night?

Flora No one!

Ward (*looks at last out of the window, is terrified*) Miles! (*disappears from the window*)

Flora Miles! She is on her way down!

Miles (*calm, looks up at the moonlight*) Let her come.

Ward (*comes out to Miles*) Miles, what are you doing out here in the middle of the night?

Miles Nothing, Miss Ward.

Ward And you want me to believe that?

Miles You wouldn't believe the truth, Miss Ward.

Ward And what is then the truth?

Miles That I am naughty.

Ward (*serious*) Miles, look into my eyes. Why did you go out here?

Miles Because I am naughty.

Ward That is not the whole truth.

Miles If I wasn't naughty I would not be here.

Ward You are in touch with the dead, aren't you?

Miles What dead?

Ward Miss Jessel and Peter Quint.

Miles They are dead.

Ward I know. But they are coming back. I have seen them.

Miles I don't know what you are talking about, Miss Ward.

Ward Yes, you know. Do you know why I can see them? Because I am so fond of you and Flora. I have entered your worlds. Therefore I can see them, when they show themselves to you.

Miles Miss Ward, you are hurting me!

Ward I am sorry, Miles, but I only want the best for you and Flora. Don't you see that Miss Jessel and Peter Quint want to tempt you over to the other side?

Miles What do you mean?

Ward They want you to join the dead! That's why they appear to us way up high in the towers, down by the river and out in the night, to tempt you to follow them into perdition!

Miles I don't at all understand what you mean.

Ward You understand much better than myself what I mean. Peter Quint and Miss Jessel liked you. You loved them. They were your best friends. But they were corrupt, Miles! Do you hear what I say? Corrupt!

Miles I don't want to hear any more, Miss Ward!

Ward Perhaps you didn't understand how corrupt they were. They shared the same bed together, Miles!

Miles So do I with Flora.

Ward What do you mean?

Miles Sometimes Flora gets cold in her room and then comes to my room and sleeps with me in my bed. Then she isn't cold any more.

Ward There is nothing wrong with that, Miles. But Peter Quint and Miss Jessel did worse things together. That's why they died.

Miles I am cold.

Ward Come, Miles. Let's go inside. But never walk out again in the middle of the night, whoever you see, whoever is calling you! Do you understand?

Miles I will try, Miss Ward.

Ward I am responsible for your lives, Miles. Nothing evil must happen to you, and nothing evil will happen to you as long as I am here. I am your warrant for your security.

Miles Thank you, Miss Ward. *(They go inside. Miles throws a look behind. Two dark shadows are seen there. Flora disappears from the window. When Ward and Miles enter the house and vanish, the two dark creatures come forth. She is dressed all in black with long dark hair down to her waist. Peter Quint looks wild and is also long-haired but without a hat.)*

Jessel We won't give up that easily, will we?

Quint They belong to us, not to her.
(The moon spreads a dark bluish light over the lewd couple. They glide away in the darkness.)

Scene 5.

Ward *(in the corridor outside her room)* Shall I stay on? I can't understand the children. It is as if they knew much more than I, were very well aware of it and mocked me clandestinely. They study me, they whisper about me, they laugh at me behind my back – it is unendurable! Shall I then pack my things and run away like a coward loser without even putting up a fight? If only they could give me their full confidence! But I can't reach them all the way, I am not sufficient enough...
(opens the door and enters. The walls glide aside. At Miss Ward's desk Miss Jessel is sitting showing her back or her side. She seems quite unaware of Miss Ward.

Miss Ward *stiffens in apprehension and is clearly shocked. Then she recovers, walking slowly up to her uninvited guest. Miss Jessel supports her head by her hand as if she was carrying some deep pain....)*

Ward *(cautiously but with firmness)* What are you doing in my room?

Jessel *(does not react)*

Ward I know who you are. I am not afraid of you.

Jessel (*does not react*)

Ward By what right are you using my desk? This is my room!

Jessel (*slowly turning her head. She looks worn out by sorrow.*)

(*faintly*) It used to be mine.

Ward So you can speak. I am not afraid of you. You can't scare me away from here. I will take care of the children! I will protect them against you! Don't imagine that you could harm them in any way as long as I am here!

Jessel (*rises wearied, regards Miss Ward with pity*) You don't understand anything.
(*disappears into the shadows*)

Ward (*recovers, after a while*) Mrs Grose! Mrs Grose!
(*rushes out, calling*) Mrs Grose!

Grose (*shows up in a nightshirt, nightcap and candle*) Yes, what is it, Miss Ward? Has anything happened, since you have to drag me out of bed?

Ward That creature was here.

Grose What creature?

Ward Miss Jessel. She was sitting here at my desk with no shame at all!

Grose If it is true I understand you must be upset.

Ward This won't do any more! I can't put up with just any importunities!

Grose What do you suggest?

Ward We have to contact the children's uncle. He has to come here himself and see what is going on. We must tell him how Miles was expelled.

Grose He hates being disturbed in matters of the children.

Ward Do we have any choice, Mrs Grose? Can you tolerate having these phantoms coming to impose on our lives, threaten our existence and harass the children?

Grose I suppose you are right, Miss Ward. I regret that I cannot take any stand in the issue, since I never saw these phantoms myself, and neither can I swear that the children do.

Ward Do you doubt me?

Grose No, Miss Ward, I don't.

Ward I will write a letter to their uncle immediately and tell him everything. He must come here and deal with the situation. There must be some order here. We have the right to be left in peace from shameless phantoms! We are just women, Mrs Grose! We cannot manage this by ourselves!

Grose (*sceptic*) I hope you know what you are doing, Miss Ward.
(*leaves with her candle*)

(*Miss Ward sits down at the desk and starts writing with energy and determination.*)

Ward You can't get away from these troubles, my good lord. It's your own family, and you have to deal with them. Miles must be put in another school. He can't continue here alone with only women and ghosts. (*She writes frantically. Outside you see Miles in his nightshirt standing watching her - you understand that he has heard and seen everything.*)

Scene 6.

Flora Why does Miss Ward worry so much about us although you don't, Mrs Grose?

Grose Because I am used to you, my love.

Flora Do you think Miss Ward will ever get used to us?

Grose I doubt it, my love. It takes many years, and she is just a governess.

Flora Miss Jessel also never got used to us.

Grose She was here for such a short time.
 Flora But much longer than Miss Ward. Do you think Miss Ward might go earlier?
 Grose Why do you think so, dearest?
 Flora I don't think. I asked.
 Grose Aren't you happy with her? Do you want her to go?
 Flora On the contrary! She is much sweeter than Miss Jessel.
 Grose Why then do you ask if she will go?
 Flora We are so fond of her. That's why we are afraid of losing her, like Miss Jessel.
 Grose Why are you afraid of that?
 Flora Because she worries too much. She cares too much about us.
 Grose Then I think all is well, Flora. She is also very fond of you. Go out and play now, Flora. The sun is shining.
 Flora Yes, Mrs Grose. *(runs out)*
 Grose It's good for us that Peter Quint isn't here. That gives Miss Ward every chance while Miss Jessel had none. *(gets back to her work)*

Scene 7.

Night in the corridor.

(Ward comes out from her room in her nightshirt and a candle.)

Ward Who goes there? *(looks around with nervous tension)* Come on, you miserable ghosts! I am not afraid of you! You will never get at us no matter how hard you try, for we are alive of flesh and blood! Do you hear? You are just dead and worthless dreams of no substance and sick fantasies! You don't exist! *(A whizzing sound is heard. Miss Ward shudders and is cold.)*

Hooo! *(the light goes out, but she immediately lights it again.)*

Just you try it, you silly phoneys!

Miles *(from his room behind a door)* Miss Ward.

Ward Miles?

Miles Yes, come in.

Ward *(opens the door)* How did you know I was in the corridor?

Miles I heard you all right.

(the walls glide aside. Miles is in bed.)

Ward Can't you sleep?

Miles I seldom can. Sometimes I go in to Flora.

Ward You mustn't. Better then to come in to me.

Miles That wouldn't be quite proper, would it?

Ward How precocious you are.

Miles What will you do, Miss Ward? Are you going to leave us?

Ward No, never.

Miles But you do have concerns about us.

Ward I am paid for it. I am in charge of your education, you know.

Miles I know that you have written to our uncle. Do you want him to come here?

Ward It's for him to decide. He just should know what is going on.

Miles Will you tell him about my expulsion?

Ward Miles, he must know everything.

Miles Why?

Ward Because he is your uncle and closest of kin.

Miles I have been expelled before, you know. He didn't like it. He doesn't want to care about us.

Ward He has to.

Miles Can you force him to?

Ward I can't force anyone to anything. But it is my duty to be honest.

Miles You can never tell everything.

Ward Secrets are of no good to anyone, Miles. Everything will come out sooner or later, and the later, the worse.

Miles But some things never come out, and that's lucky.

Ward Like what, Miles?

Miles You had better go now, Miss Ward. I think I could go to sleep now.

Ward What are you hiding from me, Miles? What is it that I should know which you don't want to tell?

Miles Nothing.

Ward Now you are lying.

Miles I never lie.

Ward Forgive me. But you are keeping something from me.

Miles That is not the same as lying.

Ward No, it is not, Miles. But don't you understand that I only wish to help you?

Miles *(after a pause)* I don't understand how you would.

Ward What happened, Miles, that made the school send you home?

Miles I don't know.

Ward You have to know something.

Miles They said I had a bad influence.

Ward That's what they wrote to us also. But something must have happened.

Miles They sent me home before anything happened.

Ward What could have happened?

Miles I don't know. They just became afraid of me.

Ward They just became afraid? Of you or of your ghosts?

(a cold wheezing wind suddenly blows out the candles. Ward immediately takes Miles into her arms.)

Miles *(calmly)* Miss Ward, I am not afraid.

Ward Of what, Miles? Of what are you not afraid? *(lights the candles again)*

Miles Of the others.

Ward Who are the others?

Miles Or of the other thing.

Ward What is the other thing?

Miles I am not afraid of death, Miss Ward.

Ward *(terrified)* You must not say things like that, Miles.

Miles But you seem to be, miss Ward.

Ward No, I am not afraid.

Miles I can go to sleep now. Just take it easy. There is no danger.
(leans back, lies still, goes peacefully to sleep.)

Ward I am not afraid. *(raises her voice)* Do you hear that, you ghosts? I am not afraid!
(Miles sleeps peacefully with a smile on his lips.)

Scene 8.

In the garden. Flora is alone. Enter Grose.

Grose But there you are, Flora! We were so worried about you!

Flora You need not be. I am in good company.

Grose With whom?

Flora With myself.

Grose Yes, of course! But we are always afraid when you vanish alone out in the garden.

Flora You need not be.

Grose Still we would prefer, Flora, that you tell us before you go out, so that someone of us could follow you.

Flora Miss Ward was busy with Miles. And you get so short of breath out here, Mrs Grose.

Grose I am not young any more, Flora.

Flora No, that's why you had better stay home.

(enter Miss Ward.)

Grose It is all right, Miss Ward. She is here.

Ward Yes, I can see that. Is everything well?

Grose I hope so.

Flora Why shouldn't it be?

Ward But you are here all alone, Flora.

Flora I am never alone. *(Miss Jessel is suddenly seen at a long distance among the bushes, all dressed in black as usual with a black shawl and her long black hair let out.)*

Ward *(discovers her suddenly)* That's what I feared.

Grose What is it, Miss Ward?

Ward She is here, Mrs Grose.

Grose Who is here?

Ward Can't you see her? She is standing there among the bushes, mocking, satanic and challenging with no limits to her impropriety.

Grose I see nothing.

Ward But you see her, Flora. *(Flora refuses to look in that direction and seems deliberately to ignore it.)*

Grose She doesn't know what you are talking about, Miss Ward. None of us can see what you are seeing, and you appear to be hallucinating. Are you quite well?

Ward But I see her with my own eyes! She couldn't appear more obvious! The haggard features, the dark look, the shabby appearance, as shameless as ever! I do see you, Miss Jessel, and it's more obvious than ever how you vibrate only evil with only wicked intentions!

Flora *(runs to Mrs Grose)* Take me away from here, Mrs Grose! Take me away from that evil Miss Ward!

Grose *(accusingly to Ward)* You have frightened her.

Ward Frightened? I? It's the creature over there that could scare anyone out of her wits by her intentions!

Flora Take me away from here! Take me away from Miss Ward!

Grose Come now, young Miss Flora! You need to get to bed! *(walks out with Flora)*

Ward *(to miss Jessel)* Are you happy now, monster, when you have succeeded in frightening Flora out of her wits?

Jessel *(darkly)* You should know better than to make enemies among the dead. *(leaves)*

Ward Come back! Come back!

In vain. She is gone like an invisible bird. Have I acted wrong? Is all this an absurd dream which I should just ignore? But I know that they want to get at the

children. I can't allow them! And now Flora suddenly regards me as an enemy because I revealed Miss Jessel to Mrs Grose... but it might pass. This is horrible! And Miles? Is he now alone in the house with Peter Quint? O horror! (*rushes back to the house*)

Scene 9.

Grose What am I to think? Is the woman mad, or am I limited in my senses? None of us understand what the children are seeing and knowing, and therefore none of us can get the wiser by them. We are both incompetent, because we are grown-ups. Here the poor creature comes now.

Ward Have you sent the letter?

Grose What letter?

Ward The letter I wrote to the children's uncle. I left it on the mantelpiece. Now it is gone.

Grose No one has taken it to post it. I have never seen it.

Ward So Miles must have taken it.

Grose And what was in the letter?

Ward Just everything. I asked Lord Mingus to come here. I requested a meeting with him. I wrote that there were things that he should know about.

Grose Nothing concrete in other words.

Ward No.

Grose Thank goodness for that.

Ward How is Flora?

Grose She is ill in a fever and does not want to see you any more.

Ward Only because I insulted Miss Jessel, that slut!

Grose You maintain that you actually saw her?

Ward To the highest degree.

Grose Yes, I can neither confirm it nor deny it. I saw nothing with my two eyes, and little Flora also denies it.

Ward Miss Jessel is jealous of me and has succeeded in turning Flora against me.

Grose Of what little Flora has told me about you, I believe you speak the truth. Such words she could only have had from another female adult than you, and she didn't get it from me.

Ward What has she said about me?

Grose She has called you a slut.

Ward Where on earth could she have had that from if not from Miss Jessel?

Grose I say the same thing.

Ward Mrs Grose, you have to go away with Flora. She is ill, she is lost to me, she refuses to cooperate any more, Miss Jessel has succeeded in poisoning her mind. Take her away from here.

Grose You will then be left alone with Miles.

Ward Yes, I will. But he cooperates. I will help him against those creatures and chase them out of his life once and for all. He and I will fight them together.

Grose You sound like a regular ghost-buster, to say the least.

Ward It sounds as if you couldn't take me seriously.

Grose Let me say it like this, that I am not too sure about the result. But I will do as you say. It will be best for Flora to get away from here, and I will be with her all the time. She still trusts me.

Ward I will notify you as soon as the crisis is over and peace has been settled again.

Grose Liberated from the spirits? Do you really think you could relieve an old noble house from its memories?

Ward You could always try.

Grose And what if Miles prefers having Peter Quint to stay on?

Ward That's exactly the point I want to bring him to, that he himself disassociates from Peter Quint. Only that could save him. I think it was Peter Quint who taught him to steal.

Grose You think he stole the letter?

Ward Not just the letter. I think he has stolen before. I think stealth was the reason for his expulsion, both from the latest and his earlier schools.

Grose You could be right. You are hardly expelled for anything less.

Ward Make ready, Mrs Grose. Prepare Flora for the journey. I think you had better go at once.

Grose I will immediately start packing my things. *(breaks up and leaves.)*

Ward I could handle Miles but not Flora, if she once has turned her mind against me. Miles will never turn against anyone. That is why he has become so receptive to Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. He denies nothing and makes no resistance. *(Miles is suddenly there, and you understand that he has heard everything.)*

Miles! Where have you been?

Miles Is Flora going away?

Ward Yes, she has fallen ill, and we have some things to talk about.

Miles About the letter to my uncle?

Ward Among other things.

Miles There was nothing in it. You didn't tell him anything.

Ward I don't want to lose you, Miles.

Miles *(throws herself in her arms)* And I don't want to lose anyone!

Ward Why did you steal the letter, Miles?

Miles I have the right to know what concerns me.

Ward Have you been stealing before?

Miles No, only spying.

Ward Spying? How?

Miles Eavesdropping.

Ward Was that why you were expelled?

Miles Maybe. Have I not the right to learn what people don't dare to speak about me in my presence?

Ward Yes, you have, Miles, if there is no other way.

Miles Thank you, Miss Ward. *(embraces her again)* I think you can help me.

Ward That is why I am here. I *want* to help you. *(He releases her.)* That's good, Miles. See you at dinner.

Miles I must see Flora before she leaves.

Ward No, Miles. You will see her when she comes back. It's best that way. She is not well now and must not get worse.

Miles As you wish, Miss Ward.

Ward Go now. We'll see each other later.

(Miles leaves. As he leaves, Jessel and Quint appear and walk away with Miles between them. Ward does not see them, as she has her back turned to them.)

Ward *(sighs)* Just a few days more, and then I can take it easy. *(embroiders)*

But I have to form a strategy. I must get Miles to deny the spirits. If only I could make him do so, they will have no more power over him. Yes, I must break their influence once and for all. Only that way could the children's lives and future be set in order.

(The doors are opened, and the cook turns up.)

Cook Dinner is served, Miss Ward.
Ward Good. Where is Miles? Will he come?
Cook I will tell him. *(leaves)*

(The walls glide apart revealing the dining hall with a well furnished dinner table with beautiful chandeliers. It is almost solemn. Miss Ward takes a seat and prepares to wait for Miles' arrival. He eventually appears but hesitates at the table.)

Ward There is no danger, Miles. It's just the two of us.
Miles I am not hungry.
Ward Who is? But if we don't eat we will get hungry.

(Miles takes a seat. The cook serves them and then leaves.)

Now when we are alone, Miles, there is one thing I have to know. There was a letter for your uncle on the mantelpiece this morning. Now it is gone. Do you know what happened to it?

Miles Yes.

Ward You took it.

Miles Yes.

Ward You opened and read it.

Miles Yes.

Ward Where is it now?

Miles I burnt it.

Ward Why?

Miles There was nothing in it.

Ward No, there wasn't. Therefore it was quite unnecessary to destroy it, wasn't it?

Miles I had expected to read terrible things about myself.

Ward Do you mean that you were disappointed?

Miles Yes.

Ward Do you really think I would report about you to your uncle?

Miles They all usually do.

Ward 'All'?

Miles All teachers.

Ward What did you expect to read about yourself?

Miles Anything but the truth.

Ward What is the truth?

Miles *(writhing)* You ask so difficult questions, Miss Ward.

Ward Well, I will ask simpler questions. Have you ever been stealing before?

Miles No.

Ward Never?

Miles Never.

Ward Not even at school?

Miles No.

Ward Why were you then expelled?

Miles For what I said.

Ward What did you say?

Miles All kinds of things.

Ward Did you tell about the ghosts?

Miles I repeated what they had told me.

Ward Who? The ghosts?

Miles No, Miss Jessel and Peter Quint, while they lived.

Ward Why did they die?

Miles Now you are asking difficult questions again.

Ward If I don't know everything, Miles, I cannot help you.

Miles How could you help me?

Ward I want to release you from Miss Jessel and Peter Quint. We have to get rid of them. We must forget them and leave them behind.

Miles But if they don't want to?

Ward What do you mean?

Miles If they don't want to forget us.

Ward They are dead, Miles! They are dead and buried! They have nothing more to do with us the living!

Miles But they still need us.

Ward How?

Miles The dead need the living.

Ward But the living don't need the dead.

Miles Therefore the dead get sad and look up the living who still think of them and care about them.

Ward You have your own life to mind, Miles. Your obligations are only with the living.

Miles *(looks uneasily around, as if he expected some visitor, then says bluntly:)*
Why are you grown-ups always so mean?

Ward Mean?

Miles Yes. You are mean to the dead, Miss Ward, and you want to deprive us who are small and gentle the possibility to show them some kindness.

Ward *(does not understand, mildly forbearing)* Miles, you don't know what you are talking about. You have to grow out from your fantasies. Miss Jessel and Peter Quint don't exist. The ghosts that you believe yourself to be seeing don't exist.
(Just as she says this, Jessel and Quint come in together in the darkest part of the room: you see them only vaguely, but they are seen to hold each other's hands and remaining at a distance like conferring with each other. Miles does not see them, but Ward observes them as soon as she has finished speaking. Shocked, she immediately embraces Miles.)

Do you understand, Miles? They don't exist! They have nothing to do with the living! They are just ghosts of your imagination!

Miles Why are you so upset, Miss Ward?

Ward I only want to save you from your illness, Miles. You must not imagine things any more! Promise me! Say to me that you deny the existence of Miss Jessel and Peter Quint except in your imagination!

Miles I can't deny two people just because they loved each other.

Ward Buit you can deny the dead! They are dead, Miles! Deny them!

Miles They could be hurt.

Ward No, they can't, for they are dead!

Miles Do you see them, Miss Ward, since you are so upset?

Ward No, I don't see them! I deny them!
(Jessel and Quint are seen to retire after a brief conference and vanish.)

Miles I don't see them either. *(turns suddenly around to Quint and Jessel, just as they have disappeared.)* You have frightened them, Miss Ward!! They will never come back any more!

Ward They have never been here, Miles.

Miles You have frightened them away, just as you frightened Flora! *(rises from the table and wants to run off.)* How cruel you grown-ups are just because you don't want to understand the truth! Just because they loved each other and also included us in their love you would not let them! They only wanted to be together with us!

Ward Miles!

Miles All you grownups only ruin life for yourselves and for everyone else by your stupid jealousy! I never want to be one of you!
(starts rushing out. Half way he stumbles and falls to the floor and remains motionless.)

Ward Miles! Miles! (*hurries up to him*) Miles! It was only for your own best! Now we are rid of them! You and Flora have to think of your own lives! The dead never bring any good for the living! Miles! Miles! (*tries in vain to wake him up. Enter the cook.*)

Cook What is the matter? What has happened?

Ward Miles has passed out.

Cook (*examines him with some knowledge*) It's worse than that, Miss.

Ward What is it?

Cook His heart has stopped beating.

Ward No! (*tries again in vain to wake up little Miles.*)

 Miles! Miles! (*is quite hysterical*)

Cook Now there will be more than ever to explain to lord Mingus, which he less than ever will stand hearing. (*leaves*)

Ward (*in vain*) Miles! Miles!

(*Curtain*)