

The Haunting

By
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Based on the
Novel
By Shirley

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BEGIN MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE.

At the very edge of hearing, the tone of human VOICES. Unintelligible, babbling, eerie. Then a loud FLAPPING SOUND. It shifts from one side of the theater to the other, like something moving among the wall hangings.

As the TITLE appears, the noise mounts, drowning out the VOICES, agitated, becoming violent, banging --

-- WE FADE IN:

EXT. RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOOD, LYNN, MASSACHUSETTS - DAY

ON AN OLD, decayed residential neighborhood lined with triple-decker tenements, the remains of what was once a small, vibrant American city. Fifty years ago it was Norman Rockwell. Now...

The gray skies of dying summer beat on a laundry line, its rickety poles the source of the BANGING. It's on the front porch of an apartment, the top floor of one of the triple-deckers.

THROUGH A WINDOW is a woman pacing inside, agitated. The VOICES rise, becoming intelligible --

INT. LIVING ROOM, NELL'S APARTMENT - DAY

-- becoming a fight. **JANE**, 30s, dark-haired, furious, wheels across a diminutive, neat, but poor living room.

JANE

It'll take a month to probate the will, Nell! A month! Even if Mother left you something, you won't get it in time to pay the rent here. Thank goodness Lou got you these two weeks to get Mother's things packed.

At first we can't even see who she's yelling at. At first we don't even notice her. Then we do...

Holding herself, in a dim corner away from the light, small, plain, like a part of the faded room is **ELEANOR VANCE**, late 20's. Nell.

Nell peers up at Jane, then across the room at Jane's bored husband, **LOU**. He's turning a Franklin Mint commemorative coin set in his hand, studying it.

LOU

You're still going to have to settle with him on the back rent.

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Nell watches Jane's little boy, **RICHIE**, unpacified by the cartoons murmuring on an old TV set, plow a plastic tank across a shelf through neat little rows of delicate glass vases and knickknacks.

NELL

I'm not planning on staying anyway.
And I'll get a job. My own apartment.

Richie knocks over a vase, breaks it. His parents don't notice. But Nell feels it in the soul. Richie turns and looks at her, insolent, then plows on with his tank.

JANE

A job? You've been trying for two months. You have no degree, you've never worked --

NELL

(harsh)
-- I've never worked. How dare --

She glares at Jane.

JANE

-- and you have no experience.
(beat, softening)
Now we all appreciate what you did for Mother. Isn't that right, Lou?

LOU

Eleven years. Long time.

JANE

That's why we've been talking. With me getting more time in Accessories, and Lou at the shop all day, we need somebody to take care of Richie. Do a little cleaning and cooking. And in return you can have the extra room.

She goes to Lou's side, puts a hand on his shoulder, proud of her generosity. Nell stares. And then RAP RAP.

Like a shot Nell is out of the chair and turning for a set of FRENCH DOORS across the room.

It's all reflex. Nell catches herself.

RAP RAP. Richie, lying on the couch like he's sick, raps on the wall with a wooden CANE and squeals:

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RICHIE

Eleanor! Help me! I've got to pee!

Nell REACTS, but rather than it being amused or annoyed, a wave of TRAUMA flickers over her face. The reaction so strong we instantly know something is very wrong.

LOU

Richie, knock it off before I beat the living crap out of you!

Richie rolls onto the floor, back to his plastic tank.

Nell turns away, sick, breathing hard, looks at Jane. Nell is paralyzed. Lou, scowling still at the kid, checks his watch, give his wife a meaning look.

LOU (cont'd)

Game's on in ten.

JANE

Okay. Nell, don't take the car out.

Nell's burn is very controlled. Controlled like that of a person who is used to being controlled.

JANE (cont'd)

You don't know who Mother left the car to. Lou always liked that car.

Lou rises, pocketing the coin set.

LOU

Come on, Richie.

Richie follows his father out. Jane lingers at the door.

JANE

Think about our offer. You don't know how hard it is out there, Nell.

INT. NELL'S KITCHEN - DAY

Nell rams through the door into the small kitchen, spotless, empty. And then bursts into tears. She blindly gets out a glass, fills it from the tap, drinks, calming herself, refills it. She goes back out the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM, NELL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nell crosses the living room straight for the closed French doors, the glass obscured by gauze curtains. She throws them open and enters --

INT. SICK ROOM - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

-- what once was a parlor. Transformed into a sick room. Drawn shades. Dim. The first traces of dust.

Nell lingers in the doorway a beat, daunted.

A perfectly made bed. The PILLOW, however retains the IMPRESSION of a head. Lodged between the bed and a nightstand, a CANE.

On the nightstand, a brass HAND BELL.

On the opposite side of the bed is a plastic toilet. I.V. stand. Shrouded shapes in white sheets.

On the wall above the bed, a framed needlepoint counsels: A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE. A bit of wisdom. A way to live a life.

A way Nell has lived for too long. Seeing it galvanizes her into movement.

Nell goes to an old armoire, a medicine chest, opens it, removes a BOTTLE OF TYLENOL WITH CODEINE and marches out.

INT. LIVING ROOM, NELL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Nell closes the doors on the chamber of horrors, exhales. She has been holding her breath.

INT. NELL'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Head in hand, Nell sits at her tiny kitchen table stirring a mug of hot chocolate, humming to herself. The TUNE is soft, lonely, like a lullaby, but eerie, off-key. She pages through a MAGAZINE, having given up on the EMPLOYMENT CLASSIFIEDS spread out on the table.

MAGAZINE PICTURES. Rich. Feminine. Visions of homes... of gardens... of romance... of life.

Then she stops. Her face twists into a smile of sheer, private joy. Her eyes shine. And in that moment the faded, gray woman is gone. Nell is beautiful. Alive.

The PICTURE she has stopped on shows two STONE LIONS on either side of a gate, teeth bared at each other. Beyond them, a long driveway, a glimpse of some grand estate, promises of hidden joys. The caption reads:

NELL
Home is where the heart is.

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Nell sinks back in her chair, closes her eyes. For a long beat she is just breathing. In some other world. Her breathing gets deeper. Her hand relaxes. Her face relaxes. She is asleep.

CUT TO:

ANOTHER ANGLE:

Of Nell sleeping. The kitchen, dark, silent. A PHONE on the wall. A long BEAT. And then it RINGS.

Nell's EYES OPEN. Not startled at all. Almost as if she expected it. As if she's been awoken from sleep a thousand times. Or as if she hasn't really even been awoken at all... Nell rises, goes to the phone.

NELL

Hello? Yes, this is she. Yes. I do.

She reaches to the table, picks up the classifieds, and flips through. And there it is:

NELL (cont'd)

Yes. I see it.

WANTED - RESEARCH SUBJECTS. \$300.00/.WEEK + RM.&BD. @ BEAUTIFUL OLD HOUSE IN BERKSHIRES. PSYCHOLOGY STUDY.

END MAIN TITLE SEQUENCE

EXT. AMHERST COLLEGE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

STUDENTS stream past the college's psychology building.

INT. WHITE ROOM - DAY

A MAN, sitting in a chair, stares at a painting hanging crooked on a white wall. He straightens it.

MAN

It's straight, I think.

Suddenly there's a loud, mechanical WHIR.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL, TURNING 45 DEGREES AS WE DO:

INT. LAB, PSYCHOLOGY ANNEX - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

The Man in the "room" is in fact sitting inside a box tilted at a 45-degree angle to the real room - a spacious lab. He's "straightened" the painting with the tilted room, not gravity. A gearbox rotates the man's chair.

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Observing from the solid ground of the lab floor, stands **PROFESSOR JAMES MARROW**, mid-30's, handsome in a severe, intellectual way.

Marrow glances up from his notes. **MALCOLM**, 50s, a colleague, leans in the doorway. Grinning.

INT. HALL, PSYCHOLOGY ANNEX - DAY

The two men walk side by side down a long hall past deserted offices and labs.

MARROW

Full funding. About time.

MALCOLM

Oh? Tell me how this really makes you feel. One shrink to another.

MARROW

One shrink to another... Thanks. They wouldn't have signed off without you.

MALCOLM

Damn right they wouldn't have. Nobody else would take over your classes. Do me a favor. I'm not going to be around forever. Make at least one friend here your age. You're gonna need a buddy who'll cover you while you publish your way to the top.

MARROW

I should probably worry about tenure before I start worrying about the top.

(beat)

Full funding. Good thing. Already took out ads in the Globe.

INT. MARROW'S OFFICE - DAY

Marrow and Malcolm enter Marrow's professorially-cluttered office. Long, narrow, badly lit, it's filled with filing cabinets, stacks of unread textbooks still in publisher's plastic, a desk with computer.

Marrow rolls Malcolm a chair from across the room. Malcolm catches it, but doesn't sit.

Instead, as Marrow drops into a chair behind his desk, Malcolm studies photos, articles, and various items tacked to a corkboard which covers one whole wall.

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MARROW

I bet Lehmann had a cow over the design.

Malcolm doesn't answer at first. He moves from image to image on the corkboard.

Clinical-looking shots from Stanley Milgram's experiments: subjects appearing to scream in response to electrical shock.

Rows of weeping prisoners in Phil Zimbardo's prison experiment.

Photos of victims crushed under the stands of a soccer stadium, the aftermath of a riot.

A picture of the Fuhrer before his mesmerized masses.

Malcolm finally looks up, his face unreadable.

MALCOLM

No, actually. He agrees with your variant-personality approach. He bought your argument about running only four subjects per batch. Didn't think you could handle more. Thought twenty eight subjects were sufficient for the initial pool.

(beat)

But he does have problems with the, uh, so-called tone. He thinks you should run something more neutral, more scientific in feel -

MARROW

- you mean boring, stilted, and impenetrable. That's bullshit. So what if it's sexy? I might turn people on to learning. God forbid.

MALCOLM

It's just a different style from what we're used to around here.

MARROW

Zimbardo does it.

MALCOLM

He's in California. Lehmann brought that up too. He said maybe your style would go over better out there.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Marrow is stung to furious silence by the insult/threat. A beat. At last he replies - slow, deliberate.

MARROW

Science should catch peoples' attention, Mal.

Malcolm nods, sits down in a chair, tired-sounding.

MALCOLM

It'll be big. Just remember me when you get your talk show. Hill House, huh?

MARROW

You've got to get a load of this place.

(beat)

You've never seen anything like it...

EXT. THREE-DECKER TENEMENT, LYNN, MASSACHUSETTS - DAY

Nell crosses the patch of dead grass that is the tenement's front lawn, a suitcase in hand, the relic of someone else's past. This could be any old town, she the girl next door you know lives there, but have never met.

EXT. GARAGE - DAY

Nell staggers down the drive behind the building. She swings the suitcase on her hip, making for a detached garage. Its door is open. In it, a rust-wormed Buick.

But the way Nell looks at it... it is salvation.

EXT. MASS PIKE - DAY

The Buick cruises down the Mass Pike. The last traces of suburban Boston drop behind, and the Buick vanishes into the blazing color of New England autumn.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Nell exits the Turnpike onto a small state route. On her dash, computer-drawn directions to HILL HOUSE.

EXT. ROUTE 39 -DAY

The car speeds down the country road, past old stone walls, out into rolling meadow. The CAMERA FLIES UP AND AWAY, revealing its winding route across the western Berkshires, farther and farther into the glorious hills.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Countryside speeds by. Nell beams, iridescent in the hues of fall. She passes an antique store in a barn with a gravel turnout for a parking lot.

A handpainted sign warns MELBY'S APPLE FARM 100 YARDS. PICK YOUR OWN. FRESH CIDER TOO. Nell grabs for the window handle, letting in air.

She snorts, smelling, breathing like it was the first time in her life... sounding like a pig. And it makes her burst out in embarrassing, animal laughter.

EXT. HILLSDALE - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

The white-steepled church, five stores and gas station of Hillsdale lie in a forgotten notch in the hills.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Nell hunkers over a sandwich and a glass of water. A **FAMILY** in the booth behind Nell are the only other customers: **MOM, DAD, BIG SISTER** and **LITTLE GIRL**. A **WAITRESS** brings their check.

MOM

Come on, drink your milk now, honey.

Nell turns her head a little so she can watch the table behind her out of the corner of an eye.

The Little Girl, all of 4, shakes her head. Dad frowns. Big Sister giggles. Mom explains to the Waitress:

MOM (cont'd)

She wants her cup of stars.
She has a little cup at home, a cup with stars in the bottom, and she always drinks her milk from it.

(to Little Girl)

Come on honey, be a good girl.

The Little Girl smiles a tiny, subtle, comprehending smile at Nell, and shakes her head stubbornly at the glass. Nell looks away, rooting for her.

DAD

All right, she's had her little power play. Let's go.

They start to rise from the table, gather their jackets. The Little Girl struggles into hers right next to Nell.

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Nell stops eating, helps her put it on, unnoticed by Mom and Dad. She leans close to her and whispers:

NELL
Never let them take away that cup of
stars. Okay?

The Little Girl nods. Mom notices Nell helping, smiles.

NELL (cont'd)
Sweet little girl.
(wishful)
You have a beautiful family.

MOM
Thank you. Do you have children?

NELL.
No. Maybe some day.

Mom smiles in something like sympathy, and the family leaves. The Waitress, tired, brings Nell her check.

Nell, still smiling over the Little Girl, digs in her pocket. The Waitress takes the money and turns to go.

NELL (cont'd)
Do you know a place called Hill House?
About ten miles from...

Nell trails off. The Waitress stops. And as she turns back to Nell, Nell sees something's wrong. Very wrong.

NELL (cont'd)
I'm sorry. Did I say something --

The Waitress' voice is calm. Terrifying calm. A beat.

WAITRESS
-- Hill House. Now what the fuck
would you want with a place like that?

Nell flinches.

Her whole world is kicked off kilter.

NELL
Sorry.

Nell squirms up out of the booth.

NELL (cont'd)
Sorry. I --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

And, shocked, unable to finish her thought, Nell makes her way across the shop for the front door, afraid to look back until she is out.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Nell slams the Buick door, and breathing hard, starts the engine. She gets control, and puts the car in gear.

NELL
Nice mouth.

But she's shaken. Badly.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

Nell's Buick bounces over a country road. The car works its way up into the steep, switchbacking hills.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Nell looks out at the forest, feels a chill. The road is more like a tunnel through the forest than a road.

EXT. HILLS - DAY (AERIAL)

The CAMERA finds Nell's car through the trees, and rises up and away, tracking it higher and higher into the awesome solitude.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Nell takes a final switchback, and the road straightens. Something off to the right catches her eye, then is gone in the trees. She watches again for it. There. A glimpse of a gray stone property wall set back twenty yards from the road.

There it is again. Moss-greened, twenty feet high, a wicked array of iron spikes and glass mortared atop it.

And then out of the tangled forest in front of her looms a pair of immense stone pillars. Between them, a steel GATE as high as the wall, chained and padlocked.

EXT. GATE - DAY

The gate stands immense. Silent. Forbidding. Beyond them a gravel drive curves away through the trees. Nell kills her car, gets out, instructions in hand. No one in sight. A long beat. She reaches in and blows the HORN.

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The HORN shatters the air, rackets off the trees beyond the gate, echoing. Silence.

Nell blows the HORN a sustained staccato in annoyance. The echo replies in a terrible, deafening battering of sound. Nell covers her ears. Silence once again.

In a fit of agitation she goes to the padlock and rattles it. It's locked good. She turns --

-- and there is a man right behind her. It is **MR.DUDLEY**, 40s, his hair tied back like an ex-hippie. He stands between Nell and her open car door, weed spear in hand. He stares at her -- rough, dirty, massive.

MR.DUDLEY

What do you want?

NELL

Scared me.

MR.DUDLEY

I said, what do you want? Blasting your goddamn horn like that.

Nell breathes, eyes the door to her car.

NELL

I'm with Dr. Marrow's group. He's expecting me. Are you Dudley, the caretaker?

Mr.Dudley draws closer, his bulk and sweat oppressive.

MR.DUDLEY

Yeah, I'm Dudley the caretaker.

NELL

I'm supposed to check in with Mrs. Dudley up at the house. Is she here?

She hands him the directions. He glances at them. She uses the distraction to get into her car.

MR.DUDLEY

Maybe she is...

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Nell starts the engine, shifts into REVERSE, hesitates. She looks at the gate, some part of her aware it's a point of no-return. Mr. Dudley eases over to her window.

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She decides. She continues shifting down into DRIVE.

NELL
Please let me in.

Mr. Dudley gives her one last look, and goes to the gate. He produces a keyring and undoes the padlock, unwinds the enormous chain, heavy turn after heavy turn. The gates swing in. Dudley steps aside, and Nell rolls through.

NELL (cont'd)
Why do you need a chain like that?

MR. DUDLEY
There's people don't like this House.

And with a look of sudden realization, he begins to grin.

MR. DUDLEY (cont'd)
You don't know about this place do you? That's what it is, isn't it?

NELL
What?

MR. DUDLEY
You're an innocent. You don't know.
Oh, we like innocents around here...

And at that he just grins wider. Nell puts her foot on the gas, and pulls the car out from under him. He jerks back. Nell rolls the window up and locks the door.

She watches him in the rearview mirror. He stands there with his grin. A ferocious grin.

EXT. DRIVEWAY, HILL HOUSE - DAY

The car rumbles up the long drive, winding up the hill past enormous old trees, overgrown lawns untended and wild, thickets of briars and berries.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Nell grips the wheel. She realizes it's hurting and forces one hand free. It trembles down to a can of coke on her console, and she takes a sip.

She strains, trying to get a glimpse of anything through the trees. The car bams over a pothole, and she drops her can. She grunts in frustration, and with only one eye on the road, fishes for it at her feet.

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CONTINUED:

She doesn't see:

THROUGH HER WINDSHIELD:

The shroud of forest peeling away. A glimpse of stained stone.

Then she looks up.

And there before her, a grasping stone thing rising out of the earth as if from a grave, stoops HILL HOUSE.

RESUME

Nell stops the car. In the silence all we can hear is her breathing.

EXT. HILL HOUSE - DAY

The House stands brutal, stark, tortured. It sprawls in immense, multi-winged, multi-levelled chaos.

THE CAMERA JUMPS FROM ANGLE TO ANGLE:

Black, gaping windows, brooding Mansard rooflines, archways like screaming mouths come together in clusters.

RESUME

And as we look at it, we feel - more than we see - human heads all over the house. Heads from a Picasso. Distorted. Features out of place, wrong. All wrong.

And if the House is a Picasso... it is terror. It is despair. It is a *Guernica*.

At the center, the features of the oldest part of the House dwarf all others. Towering, eye-like windows. Courses of stonework like lines of muscle under skin. A face drawing back in a feral grin from the jaws of the Grand Entry and its twelve-foot, carved ebony doors.

The writhing design of the carvings makes the doors look like a mouth full of black, twisting, snake tongues.

Nell's car sits in front of the house, tiny, alone, its brake lights go off, and the Buick curves up the semicircular drive, stopping under a carport which extends out from the house like an arm.

From a distance the finger-like pillars of the carport seem like a hand pinning the car in place under the House's awful gaze.

EXT. GRAND ENTRY - DAY

Nell, suitcase in hand, climbs the steps to the front door. She pauses, chilled. On closer inspection, the snaking shapes of the carved doors depict a Garden of Eden. At center on the knockers, a tarnished silver Adam takes the forbidden fruit from his counterpart Eve.

Nell lifts Adam and knocks heavily. There is no answer. Nell backs away, glances over to her car. When she looks back the door is AJAR a fraction of an inch. The knocker must've done it. Tentative, she pushes it open into -

INT. GRAND ENTRY - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

- a vast entry towering away to a ceiling lost in shadow far above. Rays of light filter through scarlet floor-to-ceiling curtains and fall on a double grand staircase, its flight on either side of the entry curving up and away into the dim recesses of the house.

Magnificent animal heads carved on the balustrade and newel posts glare at her.

NELL

Hello? Mrs. Dudley?

Her voice falls dead against the dark wood panelling. Every piece of woodwork or plaster in the house is carved, filigreed, painted or ornamented in wild, ornate fashion. It overwhelms the eye.

She turns around, sets her suitcase on the marble floor. Doors lead off in a half dozen directions.

And then Nell hears a SOUND. Carrying through the empty halls from some distant place: a low, plaintive MOAN.

Nell freezes. The MOANING stops. Nell strains her ears. And then the MOAN again. It comes from the archway under the stairs. Nell starts for it. The Moan stops.

INT. GROUND FLOOR HALL, OFF ENTRY - DAY

Nell passes under the archway and slowly searches her way down the hall. It's dim, stale, lined with doors, pier tables, candelabra.

NELL

Mrs. Dudley?

The MOANING rises from the door at the very back of the hall. Nell takes a step toward it, and it CUTS OFF.

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NELL (cont'd)
Mrs. Dudley are you hurt?

She moves up to the door, puts a hand out to it. The MOANING rises. Nell pushes through in one fast move.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

She comes through into a vast kitchen. A woman in black with her back to Nell stands at a counter. The moaning comes from a disreputable old CAN OPENER.

Nell breaths, feels stupid. The woman senses her, turns from her cans of potatoes. She is MRS. DUDLEY, 40s, sallow, unsmiling.

NELL
Are you Mrs. Dudley?

Mrs. Dudley wipes her hands, regards Nell, nods.

NELL (cont'd)
I'm Eleanor Vance with Dr. Marrow's group. Guess they're not here yet.

Mrs. Dudley just stares with her sunken face. The same sort of face the Waitress had. It unsettles Nell.

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - DAY

Mrs. Dudley glides up the stairs. Nell follows, hoisting her suitcase after her. Nell pauses on the landing. OUT OF FOCUS, BEHIND HER it appears the landing lets into some strange vaulted room.

But as she turns and we COME INTO FOCUS we see a frame and realize the vaulted room is an ENORMOUS OIL PAINTING. In the painting stands a man, his features lost in the shadows above, only his enormous body visible.

The nameplate reads HUGH CRAIN. Nell looks around, sensing Mrs. Dudley waiting at the top of the stairs.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, NORTH WING - DAY

Mrs. Dudley leads Nell down a hallway, over aged Persian carpets and turns to a door on her left. She throws it open, stands back. Nell glances at her, then enters.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - DAY

Nell lowers her suitcase.

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MRS. DUDLEY
The Blue Room.

The room is spacious, with white rococo low-relief woodwork on the walls rising to a dark, coffered, ten-foot ceiling of carved mahogany. A queen bed, furniture, all in blue. An open door gives a glimpse of a bathroom.

Nell touches the bed, gazes about her. A large fireplace dominates one wall, an iron screen in front of it. Its mantle is carved with the faces of children, happy, at play, alive. Nell touches the wood, loving.

NELL
It's beautiful.

Mrs. Dudley peers at her. A beat. And then, cryptic:

MRS. DUDLEY
The House likes you.

That makes Nell awkward, but... pleased.

NELL
That's silly. Houses don't like people.

MRS. DUDLEY
I set dinner on the dining room sideboard at six. You can serve yourselves. I clear in the morning. Breakfast is ready at nine. I don't wait on people. I don't stay after dinner. Not after it begins to get dark. I leave before dark comes.

Nell nods, uncertain.

MRS. DUDLEY (cont'd)
We live in town. Nine miles. So there won't be anyone around if you need help. We couldn't even hear you, in the night.

NELL
Why would we --

MRS. DUDLEY
-- no one could. No one lives any nearer than town. No one will come any nearer than that. In the night. In the dark.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

And with that Mrs. Dudley grins, rictus-like, terrifying. She turns and closes the door after her.

Nell stands there a long moment, the room silent, heavy, old. She goes to the window, peers out.

It's a long way down to the grounds below, where overgrown rhododendrons surround what was once a patio. Beyond the patio, there's a long lawn and thick woods.

At the very edge of the woods is a faded white picket fence with a gate surrounding a small plot of some sort. No way to tell what it is from here. Nothing else for miles. The sun is setting.

Nell removes her windbreaker, opens her suitcase, takes out a blouse and skirt. Decent enough clothes, but cheap, the tags still on them.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, NORTH WING - DAY

Nell emerges from her room in her new clothes. The hallway dwindles into the distance, lined with massive, ornate doorframes like the one to her room.

Trying to get a better look, Nell searches the walls around her for a light switch, but can't find one. She follows the chair rail back to --

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

-- the top of the stairs. She searches in vain for a light switch there on the wall. And then she looks up.

There, across the open space of the stairwell, hangs the immense painting. But it is only from up here on the second floor that the FACE is visible.

Out of the darkness, powerful, mad, looms the visage of Hugh Crain. Despite the artist's discretion, the lines of the man's face, his eyes, his posture, cry of unspeakable sickness.

ANOTHER ANGLE, ON NELL

who takes a step back. And as the CAMERA CIRCLES AROUND Nell, it REVEALS in the far b.g., near the end of the hall, an OPEN DOOR. Just as it starts to come into view, and we're just starting to see it, it SLAMS. Nell jumps.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, NORTH WING - DAY

Nell stares down the long hallway. Which door was it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NELL

Hello?

No response. She starts down the hall, slow at first, then faster. As she speeds up the CAMERA NEVER LEAVES HER OR LOSES SIGHT OF THE DOOR near the end.

She passes door after door, through shadow after shadow, and as she nears the end of the hall, everything comes into FOCUS.

And there is no door here. Not within twenty feet of where we thought we just saw it. Nell looks around in consternation.

A WHISPER. Nell whirls, her hackles stand up. MORE WHISPERING. VOICES. Nell backs away from the end of the hall. And then LAUGHTER. Behind her.

Nell spins around. It's coming from the stairwell. Very real... and very human. Nell breaks into a trot.

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - DAY

Nell reaches the railing and looks down. Below Mrs. Dudley and a woman in a Vera Wang leather jacket, THEO, 30s, wrestle with a pile of designer luggage.

THEO

Come on, it won't bite.

Theo foists a very heavy bag off on Mrs. Dudley who looks like she's been handed a snake. That makes Nell smile.

NELL

Hi.

Theo stops and peers up. She's sexy in an amused, worldly way; her smile says she's seen and done it all.

THEO

Well hi, yourself.

Nell grins, comes running down the stairs.

NELL

I'm Eleanor, Eleanor Vance.

Theo struggles under her luggage to shake Nell's hand.

THEO

Nice to meet you. I'm Theo.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell, suddenly aware of all Theo's bags, takes one.

NELL

Oh, here, let me. You're here with
Dr. Marrow's group?

THEO

Uh huh.

Nell nods in visible relief. They continue up the stairs, Mrs. Dudley trailing them.

NELL

I'm really glad you're here. Really.
It's just I was beginning to think I
had the wrong place. It's --

She gestures around her, glances back at Mrs. Dudley.

NELL (cont'd)

-- it's not what I expected.

Nell looks to Theo, hopeful, happy. Theo glances sidelong at Nell, a little uncomfortable with her gushing, but then breaks into a generous smile.

THEO

Well, it is a little overstated.
(to Mrs. Dudley)
So Mrs. D, where'd you meet that
gorgeous hunk of husband?

Nell chokes a laugh, and she and Theo glance back at Mrs. Dudley who follows them, unsmiling. Theo looks over at Nell, gentle, smiles.

THEO (cont'd)

We're going to have fun, Eleanor.

Nell searches her face, happier than Theo could know.

NELL

My friends call me Nell. Used to.

INT. THEO'S ROOM - DAY

Mrs. Dudley opens the door, letting Theo and Nell into a large bedroom, a mirror-image twin of Nell's room, except it's decorated in rich reds and velvets.

THEO

Now we're talking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She dumps her stuff on the floor, grabs a banister on the four-poster bed, swings onto its high mattress.

MRS. DUDLEY

I set dinner on the dining room sideboard at six.

Mrs. Dudley sets Theo's suitcase on a luggage stand.

NELL

My room is right next door. I think we share a bathroom.

MRS. DUDLEY

I clear in the morning. Breakfast is ready at nine. I don't stay after dinner. Not after it begins to get dark.

Nell, back to Mrs. Dudley, rolls her eyes at Theo.

MRS. DUDLEY (cont'd)

I leave before dark comes. So there won't be anyone around if you need help.

NELL

We couldn't even hear you.

Mrs. Dudley looks up at Nell who mimics her scary smile.

MRS. DUDLEY

No one could. No one lives any nearer than town.

NELL

No one will come any nearer than that.

Mrs. Dudley smiles at Nell, but it's softer than before.

MRS. DUDLEY

In the night. In the dark.

Theo leans on the bed, musing at the exchange. And then Mrs. Dudley backs out of the room, shutting the door.

THEO

Okaaay...

NELL

When I got here she saw I was a little nervous and thought it was funny trying to scare me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

THEO

I better stay on your good side, Miss
Passive-Aggressive --

Nell starts to feel offended, but Theo presses on.

THEO (cont'd)

-- Personally I'm a cat-fighter, but
there's something to be said for the
subtlety and intelligence of a
talented passive-aggressive. Better
with guilt, that type of stuff.

Nell is too surprised to respond for a second, but then
grins. Theo pops a dress bag on the bed, unzips it.

NELL

You have no idea.

Theo undoes the buttons on her leather coat. She's only
wearing a black bra underneath. Nell reacts, turns away.
Back to the camera, Theo flicks off her bra, stretches.

THEO (cont'd)

How long did it take you to get here?

It takes Nell a second to hear the question.

NELL

Three hours.

THEO

Oh yeah? Where do you live?

The CAMERA focusses on Nell, as Theo selects a sweater
from her suitcase. Nell's face goes slack as she lies:

NELL

I have a beautiful little apartment of
my own. Near the beach. You can just
see the ocean, and at night, when the
wind comes in just right, I can hear
the buoys in the harbor.

Theo COMES INTO FOCUS as she pulls a silk sweater down.

THEO

So what are you doing here?

Nell peeks, sees Theo is decent, turns around.

NELL

I guess I needed a change.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

A slow smile spreads over Theo. She comes over to Nell, straightens Nell's seams, clearly knowing the clothes for what they are.

THEO

Change is my middle name. Come on, let's check this place out.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, NORTH WING - DUSK

The long hall is lost in shadow, its long rows of doors waiting in the deadening silence. A lamp on a pier table casts a small pool of light. The walls glow in rich tones, the low-relief carvings a worm's-wood of shadow.

THEO

Maybe we're going to be timed as we try to find our way around in it. Rats in a maze.

Nell runs her hand over a wall panel as Theo peeks into a neighboring room.

NELL

So much carving. It's everywhere. On everything.

Theo starts down the hall. Nell follows.

THEO

Those old fogies used to love this overblown stuff. Victorian style.

NELL

Actually, the style is Gothic Revival. Or some sort of weird cross between Gothic and Italianate. Victorian's the period.

(off Theo's look)

I read a lot about old homes.

THEO

Anyway, it'd sure be hell to dust.

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - DUSK

Theo stops at the top of the stairs, Nell behind her.

THEO

Jeez.

NELL

I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They stare out at Hugh Crain, the cracking and shadowing of the swirls of oil that compose his face. The figure is daunting, but dead. Just a painting. Nell pushes past Theo and heads down the stairs.

INT. GRAND ENTRY - DUSK

Theo joins Nell down in the entry. The half-dozen doors along the walls stand shut and silent in the stray light.

NELL

Maybe we should wait for them here.

Theo walks out, swings around.

THEO (cont'd)

Pick a door. Any door.

Nell looks from one to another. She doesn't want to. But she forces a smile and points to one on the left.

INT. SMALL PARLOR - DUSK

Theo breezes into a small parlor with heavy purple velvet curtains, panelled walls, rich settees. Other doors lead off the room. Nell follows.

THEO

Think the Dudleys do it in here?

Nell doesn't get it for a beat. Then she does, and is shocked. Theo turns on a wicked grin, pushes through another door --

INT. CONSERVATORY - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

-- into a music conservatory. Theo spins across the room to an antique piano. Nell drifts in after, taking in the big room's darkening windows, circle of couches and chairs. Theo runs her hand over the piano.

THEO

Oh, here, for sure.

Theo goes running for another door and is out. Nell, realizing she's being left behind, springs after her --

INT. STATUARY HALL - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

-- into a wide hall lined with niches and classical statuary. Various settees all about. Theo strides down it pointing left and right, bending over, straddling the pieces, provocative:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THEO
 Here. Here. Here.
 (under a leering gargoyle)
 Oh yes! Oh yes oh YES! Here!

Nell laughs - appalled and loving every minute of it.

THEO (cont'd)
 Can't you see it?

NELL
 Theo!

Nell getting agitated, takes the lead, throws open a double door --

INT. HALL OF MIRRORS - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

-- and crosses into a fantastic ballroom lined with mirrors and chandeliers. Rows of mirror-coated octagonal pillars rise to a vaulted, mirrored ceiling far above. Nell spins as she traipses out across the room, her million reflections waltzing with her into infinity.

Theo comes running in after her. Nell stops opens her arms, taking in the room around her, and pronounces:

NELL
 Here.

Theo does a slow turn on Nell.

THEO
 You're perverted.

Nell blushes... and they burst out laughing. They take off running, their reflections with them, stampeding for an archway on the far side of the room and out --

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLS (VARIOUS) - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

-- into yet another hallway. THE CAMERA RISES, TRACKING as they race down the hall, turn into another hall, then another, all dimly lit by the very last fading rays of day, all furnished in the House's dark, impossibly complicated, impossibly ornate fashion.

They spring up single steps, pass countless doors, priceless antique furniture, around a corner... and stop.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LOCKED ROOM - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They stand at the end of a long hallway to some one of the House's forgotten outlying wings. It is dark. Too dark. Nell and Theo catch their breath, regard the darkness.

At the far end of the hall stand a pair of ENORMOUS MAHOGANY DOORS, closed, almost black, oily-looking.

REVERSE ANGLE

On the two tiny women standing and staring from the opposite end. As if the doors are looking back at them.

ON THE DOORS

Carved, their wild mythological scenes of some ancient sacrifice forbidding entry.

RESUME

Nell goes cold. Theo holds herself.

NELL

We should go back.

Theo's nods. They turn around.

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLS (VARIOUS) - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

Nell and Theo retrace their steps. Suddenly something catches Theo's eye. She turns to a window, goes over. Her voice drops away in surprise.

THEO

We're on the second floor...

Nell comes over. She gives Theo a quick look. They should still be on the ground floor. Theo turns away from the window, takes an abrupt turn and opens a door.

INT. CONFUSING SERIES OF ROOMS - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

The look on Theo's face says this isn't whatever room it was she expected. She crosses, Nell following her. She marches through into another room. More of the wild, rococo same, but even more doors.

They open them left and right. And then they look at each other. Afraid.

THE CAMERA RISES, HOVERING, and as they take off through one of the doors, it CANTS with them, chasing...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Through one room after another, interlinking, wild, letting into blind halls, false doors, flights of stairs.

They speed up, beginning to panic as the rooms grow wilder and darker with the dropping night.

As they fly through room after room, losing their way in the labyrinth of old, dark rooms the set design seems to unfold away into insanity, and we feel in the bones how wild, threatening and vast Hill House really is.

NELL

Theo, I'm scared --

Theo flings open a final door and SCREAMS!

Marrow and **LUKE SANDERSON**, 20s, with a thin beard and mustache are right there.

LUKE

Whoa! I'm not that ugly.

They're standing on the other side in --

INT. GRAND ENTRY - NIGHT

-- the Grand Entry. Right back where Nell and Theo started their little excursion.

MARROW

Are you ladies okay?

THEO

Nearly gave me a heart attack.

MARROW

Sorry. I'm Jim Marrow. This is Luke Sanderson. You must be Eleanor Vance and Theodora Miles.

THEO

Theo.

They all get over the surprise. Marrow offers his hand to Theo, then Nell. Nell takes his hand, shy.

NELL

You can call me Nell, Dr. Marrow.

MARROW

Nell. A pleasure. And I'm just Jim.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NELL

Just Jim.

His smile is devastating. Nell reddens. Theo notices. She looks at Nell. Her face clouds up. Marrow doesn't notice as he checks his watch.

MARROW

Have either of you seen David Watts?

Nell and Theo shake their heads.

MARROW (cont'd)

Once he shows, we'll all be here. Let's get some dinner while we're waiting for him.

(beat)

Welcome to Hill House, everyone.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE OF DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Marrow leads the way down the hall. The others check out the furnishings as they pass.

THEO

So what sort of study is this supposed to be?

MARROW

Don't worry, I'll get into it after dinner when we're all here. So what do you think of the place so far? Get a chance to look around?

THEO

You could say that. It's awful. Who'd ever want to live here?

NELL

I would.

They all look over at her.

NELL (cont'd)

There's something about it. Like a thunderstorm. Scary. Beautiful. Powerful.

Marrow smiles at her. Impressed. Maybe even charmed.

MARROW

It is a grand old home, isn't it?

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A heavy chandelier hangs unlit over a long, ornate dining table. Its brass gleams dully in the light of candles on the table below. LAUGHTER. At the far end of the table Nell and the others sprawl over the remains of dinner.

LUKE

So Theo is standing there naked with only this boa constrictor on, but nobody in the audience realizes it's like, starting to crush her, and she can't get a breath to tell anyone.

Marrow and Luke are laughing. Nell stares in twisted fascination at Theo as Theo chuckles, swallows some wine.

LUKE (cont'd)

Now this is the part I don't really believe, but this is what she says. So this hundred and fifty pound snake is preparing her for lunch, she's turning blue, she thinks nobody gets the fact that this is no longer performance art, and this little old lady in the front row leans over to her little old girlfriend and says: I think it's really eating her. And the little old girlfriend says: Minnie, at fifty bucks a ticket for this shit, it better get to eat her.

There's a HOWL OF LAUGHTER, Nell covering her face, scandalized and loving it. Marrow wipes tears, manages:

MARROW

Not bad for a most-embarrassing moment.

Theo spreads her arms in a flourish and smile:

THEO

The show must go on.

The room is close, comfortable, despite the baroque furnishings, the heavy scroll work, dark furniture.

Nell slumps, chin in hand, on the table, fingering her water glass. She glances at Marrow's LEFT HAND: NO WEDDING RING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She smiles at the dead wine bottles and long-cleaned plates in front of the others: testament to the fact that dinner has been going on for hours.

NELL

. You didn't really do that.

THEO

I swear, babe, no lie.

(beat)

Doesn't beat Cool Hand Luke here's date with the sex-change guy-girl whatever, but what the hell.

Luke gestures at Marrow, then Nell.

LUKE

Okay, so you got caught cheating on your SATs. What's Nell's most embarrassing moment?

Nell glances at him, blushes.

MARROW

With all my skills as a psychologist I couldn't get it out of her.

LUKE

That's not fair. We showed you ours, you've got to show us yours.

Nell peers down at her plate as if she could hide in it.

NELL

It's just that... the most embarrassing moment of my life is now.

She looks up at the others, a desperate edge to her.

NELL (cont'd)

I know we've only known each other a couple of hours, but I'm really happy to be here with you guys.

The others are a little embarrassed at the serious turn. It could stop there with nothing more than a lapse in the conversation. But Nell presses on, killing the mood.

NELL (cont'd)

My mother died two months ago. I'd... I'd been taking care of her eleven years, since I was seventeen. I tried going to community college once.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Theo draws up, awkward. Luke shifts, acting blase, but uneasy. Marrow leans back into a professional reserve.

NELL (cont'd)

So now's my most embarrassing moment.
Because nothing's ever happened to me.

INT. RED PARLOR - NIGHT

The room is a lavish parlor, with the omnipresent panelled walls, lush red carpet, velvet curtains sweeping floor to ceiling, heavy pieces of furniture.

Nell hums her TUNE, paces from table to shelf to table, peering at various knickknacks.

In the b.g. Theo sprawls on a couch, DRUMS HER FINGERS on the arm rest. Luke balances on a chair. Three strangers who have run out of things to say to each other.

A GRANDFATHER CLOCK ticks away. The maddening drumming of Theo's fingers annoys Luke, and he gives her a look to show it. She smiles, sweet, and drums even louder.

But Nell stops humming. On one shelf, set way back in the shadow behind an old vase, sits some sort of book. Nell moves the vase aside, reaches back for it, feels its cracked leather hide, its age, and suddenly --

-- Marrow enters with a briefcase in one hand, cell phone in the other. He stuffs the cell phone in the briefcase in irritation.

MARROW

Guess Mr. David Watts is a no-show.

Marrow sits down in a wingback chair, opens his briefcase, pulls out folders for the others, passes them around. Nell finds her way to the couch next to Theo.

MARROW (cont'd)

All right, might as well get down to business. Here you go. Luke.

(beat)

My field of study is the psychology of perception. For the next ten days you'll be participating in a study on perception and cognitive style. It will involve a series of tests and interviews. I can't say any more than that until after the experiment is over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell and Theo are looking through their folders: sheets of paper, bizarre geometric puzzles.

MARROW (cont'd)

It is essential to the study to maintain a controlled environment. No visits to town please. There is no phone service to the House, and no TV. I have the cell phone for emergencies. We'll begin after breakfast tomorrow once you've acquainted yourself with the folders.

The others shuffle through papers, Nell intent on them, Theo interested but not overly so, Luke, bored.

LUKE

Too much excitement.

MARROW

Don't worry, Luke. Hill House has its... distractions.

Marrow leans back in his chair, a strange smile on his face, eyes unreadable, glasses reflecting the light.

MARROW (cont'd)

Some people say Hill House is a bad place.

The clock TICKS a full five tocks. Luke and Theo begin to smile. Nell doesn't.

LUKE

Haunted. Cool.

THEO

Let's hear it.

MARROW

Maybe tomorrow. We'd be better off spending the time reading through your folders.

Luke and Theo's voices rise together, objecting.

THEO

Naw, come on!

LUKE

Yeah, we really should know what's up in the attic.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Luke trails off, spooky-fun. Nell folds her arms, looks away from them, not wanting to hear this. Not wanting to hear it at all. Marrow sighs.

MARROW

Okay. So what do you know about the old mill communities of the Merrimack Valley around the turn of the last century?

LUKE

Company towns? Brutal sweatshops? All-powerful mill owners controlling everything, stuff like that?

MARROW (cont'd)

Right. Hill House was built in 1871 by one of these guys, a wealthy textile manufacturer named Hugh Crain. Crain had a bad reputation with the locals. Used force to crush early union movements, workers seeking to improve conditions in his factories. These guys like Crain thought of themselves like feudal barons and built lavish houses like this one throughout this part of New England. Crain began Hill House at the height of his wealth and power. But construction was beset with problems right from the start, as Crain insisted on re-drawing the architect's plans. It caused delays, cost overruns. Crain demanded an enormous chimney built to his specifications despite the advice of the masons. It collapsed during construction, killing four workers. The families blamed Hugh, and the bad blood between Crain and the locals reached a fever pitch. Speculation began about the increasingly fantastic design of the House.

Marrow pauses. They're following, silent.

MARROW (cont'd)

About that time Hugh married his wife, Carolyn, who was fourteen when he took her out of his mill. The stories about the House started. About why Hugh built Hill House the way he built it --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

THEO

-- a prison. That's what it is.
(beat)

Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater had a wife
but couldn't keep her...

NELL

... So he put her in a pumpkin shell,
and there he kept her very well.

MARROW

Yes. A prison for his young wife. So
the story goes. Straight out of the
romantic fiction of the time, if you
think about it. The reality is that
Crain was probably suffering from
Hadrian's Syndrome, a rare form of
dissociative paranoia where an
individual responds - tries to hide,
really - from overwhelming feelings of
persecution or guilt by building
incredibly complex structures. Like
the Winchester House in California.

Marrow considers them a long moment.

MARROW (cont'd)

Hugh had nine children, all of whom
died young except the last, a girl
named Hope. She was born after his
death.

LUKE

How do you lose eight kids?

MARROW

You don't. Not without the rumors
beginning. It became the talk of the
surrounding area that Crain inflicted
untold suffering on his wife. Wild
talk. Talk of horrible things. But
Crain's activities at Hill House went
unchecked until a gardener reputed to
be Carolyn's lover disappeared in
early 1897. The gardener had powerful
distant relations, and Hugh was
questioned about the disappearance.
Nothing was done, but immediately
after, Hugh went overseas on a
business trip and died there. In
1900, three years after Hugh's death,
Carolyn committed suicide, hanging
herself in the library.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Nell looks away in distress.

THEO

What happened to the child? The one born after Crain died?

MARROW

She was taken away and never heard from again. Crain didn't leave anything to his heirs. Instead, the House went into a trust with stipulations that it never be sold. And that's where it is today, the trust blindly going along with no purpose other than its own existence.

LUKE

It's like he took the House to the grave with him Pharaoh-wise. Cool.

MARROW

The law firm running the trust didn't even know what Hill House was, all the checks being cut by a computer at some paycheck company.

(beat)

But the locals, they know what it is. They don't come here after dark.

Nell reacts, affected.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY - NIGHT

Nell, Theo and Luke reach the top of the Grand Stairs. The painting of Hugh Crain, barely visible in the shadows, looms over Nell, chilling.

LUKE

The Professor and I are down that way around the corner. 'Night.

He heads off. Theo turns to find Nell staring up at the painting of Crain. Nell is pale, taut like a coiled spring. Theo puts a hand on her shoulder. Nell starts.

THEO

You're taking it too seriously. He was just having fun with us. Everyone likes being scared.

NELL

Not me.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell finishes putting things away in drawers. Theo watches, leaning in the doorway.

NELL

I mean, just because Crain was a bad man doesn't mean the House is bad. You can't blame the House, right?

THEO

Nell, you're not making any sense.

Nell stops, takes a breath, and looks about the room, visibly relaxing.

NELL

I know.

THEO

Good because what I want to know is how much do you like this guy?

Nell freezes, turns back to Theo. Is she that transparent? How could she... Nell blurts:

NELL

Who?

Theo snickers, shakes her head, Nell's deer-in-the-headlights look speaking volumes.

THEO

Oh, boy.

Nell knows she's caught, but won't give in.

NELL

Jim's... nice.

THEO

Long time taking care of your mother. Kinda leaves a girl out of practice, huh?

Nell turns away. It's a long moment before she can answer.

NELL

It leaves you out of a lot things.

(beat)

My Mother used to bang on the wall with her cane when she needed me.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NELL (cont'd)
I used to hate that banging. The
night she died she banged on the wall.
I didn't go to her.

Theo stares, moved, pitying.

NELL (cont'd)
I never told anyone. Does it make me
a bad person?

Theo shakes her head, brushes at her eyes.

THEO
Oh, Nell. You took care of her eleven
years. I'd have slipped the rat
poison in her Metamucil after a month.

Nell stands there a beat, dumb, unwilling to feel
anything. Theo begins to think she said something very
wrong. But then Nell smiles.

NELL
I know it must sound lame, but with
you guys... I feel like I have a new
family and Hill House is our new home.

Theo smiles sweetly at her, comes over. An awkward
moment, as the seriousness drains away.

THEO
Ever try putting your hair up in a
French twist?

Theo reaches for Nell's hair. Nell pulls away. Theo
pauses. Nell realizes she shouldn't have pulled back.

NELL
I'm not used to being touched.

She moves closer to let Theo examine her hair. Theo
takes Nell's hair, holds it up in a French twist.

THEO
It'd do you a world of good.

Being touched or the French twist? Uncertain, Nell peers
in a mirror at herself... and likes what she sees. Theo
lets Nell's hair drop. Theo moves for the door.

NELL
Good night, Theo.

THEO
Sweet dreams, Nell.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Marrow, sitting at a desk in a small study, speaks into a dictation recorder. His voice is cold, analytical.

MALLOW

Icebreaker exercise conducted over dinner, initial bond formation among subjects and experimenter. History of House relayed per local legend. Subject Vance appears most susceptible to suggestive history.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

As Nell steps OUT OF FRAME and starts undressing, the CAMERA finds the carved mantle, the densely-packed scene of children at play, their faces frozen in dark wooden smiles, their eyes blind but staring OC where we sense Nell changing.

Now in a long tee-shirt, Nell crawls up onto the high bed. Its headboard is heavy, dark, engraved with shapes that seem some sort of fan-like plants.

She draws the heavy, aged covers up about her and peers up at the ornate bedposts, a spiraling, counter-twisting motif like tree trunks rising almost to the ceiling.

She stares at the ceiling. Its impossibly complex low-relief draws the eye this way and that. Mythological motifs. Pure geometrical motifs. Geometrical motifs with plants, vines, leaves of a thousand variations.

Something about it bothers Nell, but she can't put her finger on it. She twists over on her side and turns out the light on the nightstand. For a moment, all there is in the darkness is her breathing --

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

-- then silence. Or almost silence. A vast great hall stands in darkness, covens of strange-shaped things consort in the shadows, things that in the day would be lamps, the stuff of life. But now, at the very deepest limit of human hearing, it is as if SOMETHING EXHALES.

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - NIGHT

In the dark. In the night. It is black at the top of the stairs. The carved animal heads on the balusters are all turned UP THE STAIRWAY, eyes starting in fear. Waiting for something to walk down out of that blackness.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE LOCKED ROOM - NIGHT

Eyes. Eyes of all the mythological figures, all the animals carved in the panelling. STARING down the long, black hallway. Awaiting something. Afraid.

At the end of the hallway, where all eyes are staring, the double doors, the ones that scared Nell and Theo stand shut.

That something gathering at the edge of our hearing RISES. Rises as if the House itself is breathing.

BANG.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

NELL. BANG. The sound thuds the stillness of the House. BANG. Bang. Bang. Deep, hollow, distant like a dream. Nell sits up, still asleep, body moving by reflex.

NELL
Coming, Mom!

BANG. The noise crashes into her consciousness, lighting up her mind, VERY REAL. Nell remembers where she is.

BANG. BANG. BANG. It's coming from somewhere far off in the House. Nell listens in cold dread.

THEO (OC)
Nell!

Nell spins to the bathroom door, goes through --

INT. NELL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

-- the unlit bathroom, out the connecting door --

INT. THEO'S ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

-- into Theo's room. BANG BANG BANG. Nell finds Theo right in front of her, hair wet, kneeling in the bed, clutching her covers to herself.

THEO
What is it!?

The BANGING grows louder, nearer, sharper. Out in the hall. Something immense smashing from side to side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell lunges at the door. Theo grabs to stop her, but a DEAFENING BANG rocks the room. Nell freezes in front of the tall door.

THEO (cont'd)

Nell!

Nell recoils to Theo's side in shock.

BANG BANG BANG BANG! The NOISE CRESCENDOS to an ear-splitting volume. Nell drags Theo out of the bed to the corner of the room.

ANGLE ON NELL AND THEO

staring out AT US in terror. BANG. BANG. Bang. The CONCUSSION hits us with all the force of THX. Nell and Theo's eyes travel over the walls, following whatever it is which now seems to be moving out here in the theater.

The BANGING moves along the wall to the right, reaching its loudest as it crosses the back of the theater, then seems to come down the left side.

RESUME

Theo shivers. Nell clutches her close. BANG BANG BANG. Nell writhes, the NOISE UNBEARABLE. She jumps up.

THEO (cont'd)

Nell!

Nell charges the door, screaming:

NELL

GO AWAY!

SILENCE. The banging goes dead. Nell blinks, looks back at Theo. But Theo is looking at her hands.

THEO (cont'd)

Cold. Oh, God. Feel it.

She looks up in horror at Nell. Their breath FOGS in the air. Nell holds her hand up in front of her, and as we watch HER HAIR PRICKLES UP, GOOSEBUMPS WITH THEM.

NELL

I just told it where we are.

Her eyes turn up to the door, and: BAMBABAMBAM BABBA BAM! The DOOR JARS in its frame, leaping from the blows of whatever's on the other side.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nell backpedals but slips on the rug, falls there on the floor right in front of the door. Theo SCREAMS.

Silence. The BANGING stops. And now there's a different sound. SOMETHING SCUTTling outside. Rasping over wood. Like a thing without hands trying to open the door.

ON THE DOORKNOB. A long beat. The metal creak as something takes hold of it on the other side.

Nell, mouth open in cold horror, sees the deadbolt. It's open. The doorknob TURNS, but just as the door starts to open NELL FLAILS FORWARD AND SHOOTS THE DEADBOLT HOME.

The door jams against it. Nell jumps back. Theo grabs her into the corner. A long, deadly silent moment. And then Nell's eyes turn to the door to the bathroom.

NELL (cont'd)

My room.

But their BREATH no longer fogs. Theo seems to notice the fact just as Nell starts for her room and... KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK.

LUKE (OC)

Hey! I heard a scream, are you okay?

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nell and Theo, wrapped in blankets, sit over mugs of tea at the kitchen table. Marrow, across from them, clicks off his tape recorder. Luke paces behind the women.

NELL

You really didn't hear anything.

Marrow takes his glasses off, rubs. Luke looks at him.

LUKE

Do you need me anymore? Cause I'm going to bed. They can stay up talking another 45 minutes if they want, but I gotta get some sleep.

MARROW

Go ahead.

Luke leaves the kitchen. Theo and Nell watch him go.

THEO

If this was some sort of joke, I'm going to kill him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NELL

You know it wasn't a joke, Theo.

Marrow watches the exchange closely.

MARROW

The cold sensation. Who felt it first?

NELL

Theo. I think. You've asked us that three times, Jim.

Marrow smiles at her, compassionate.

THEO

This thing sounded like a wrecking ball.

MARROW

Theo, I didn't hear anything. Now how do you feel about Luke's suggestion that it was just the old plumbing? Water hammer, something like that?

Theo and Nell look at each other in frustration. But Theo tries to get her mind around the question.

THEO

I did just take a bath. But...

NELL

It wasn't the plumbing.

Nell's tone makes the two of them look at her. She sits there, calm, certain... eerie.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Morning sun filters in through heavy drapes, falling on Nell at the dining table. She giggles as Marrow stabs his fork at a cherry tomato on his plate, missing it.

MARROW

This is ridiculous.

A final missed stab, and Nell reaches over to his plate, picks up the tomato.

NELL

I can't stand it anymore.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

A beat. Marrow opens his mouth. Nell places the tomato on his tongue... JUST AS Theo walks in the door.

Drawn, lines under her eyes, Theo takes the scene in. Nell wears MAKE UP, badly applied, and her HAIR IS UP in a French twist. Theo smirks, disbelieving... jealous. Marrow spots Theo, and Nell looks up, stops giggling.

MARROW
Morning, Theo.

Theo goes to the sideboard, starts helping herself to the breakfast laid out there.

NELL
How did you sleep?

Theo gives her a look. It's obvious.

NELL (cont'd)
I heard you trying the tub again, but I went right out.

THEO
That's all right. At least *you're* bright and eager this morning.

Nell pauses, not sure if she should feel stung.

THEO (cont'd)
What happened to your hair?

Nell turns red.

THEO (cont'd)
I mean, it looks good.

Marrow looks over Nell's hair, but she can't stand it. Theo comes over to the table, drops into a chair opposite Nell. Theo's long face turns into an artificial smile.

THEO (cont'd)
Your makeup too. Hell, in this light, you look positively radiant.

Nell turns her gaze to Theo's. Her voice retains all its sweetness, but instead of disarming, it has a cold, strange power. A power which makes Theo pause.

NELL
Maybe it's because I fit in here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Marrow senses the jealousy, isn't quite sure what to make of it, and intervenes.

MARROW

I tried Watts again a little while ago, got his machine. Why don't you get some breakfast? We'll be starting on the tests after. Can't afford to wait for the guy.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

CLOSE ON the complex PUZZLE of a field-cognition test. Nell scratches solutions, erases, and finally --

-- looks up in frustration. She sits alone, tiny, in the murk of the vast vaulted Great Hall. The fieldstone of an enormous chimney occupies half the wall at one end of the room. Carved panelling, doorways, paned windows.

Clusters of furniture - overwrought chairs with animal heads, splay-footed coffee tables, limbed lamps - huddle in strange, silent covens throughout the room.

Nell, in a plush wingback chair, lays the work on a table beside her. A CLICKING on stone. Nell looks up.

The fireplace looms just beyond her cluster of chairs, large enough for a man to stand inside it. The noise is the faintest CLATTER of stone on stone, like a piece of mortar come loose. As Nell stares at the chimney.

VOICE (OC)

Think it's the one that collapsed?

Nell JUMPS. She pops out of the chair. It came from a circle of furniture over by a window. Where a SILHOUETTE is sitting in a chair, almost invisible against the bright background of the window.

The figure stands and comes over out of the light. Nell's eyes adjust. It's Luke.

LUKE (cont'd)

Sorry. I've been looking around. Notice something about the carvings?

Nell shakes her head.

LUKE (cont'd)

Kids. Lots of kids. Fat little angel kids. Wild kids. Kids with furry little animals.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUKE (cont'd)

This guy Crain must've been a regular Captain Kangaroo.

NELL

I wonder who they're supposed to be.

LUKE

Maybe they're the ones that died in his mills.

Nell turns him a dumb look. An appalled look. He can't be serious.

LUKE (cont'd)

Child laborers. Ah, good ol' American history. George Washington and the cherry tree: I cannot tell a lie.

(beat, sober)

During the late 1800s the textile mills employed thousands of child laborers. Small hands to fit inside the machinery, you see. No labor laws back then. Mill owners like Crain got 'em from all different places. Poor families. Immigrants. Even bought kids from orphanages. Sometimes child workers would just vanish, and no one would ever know or care. Killed by the machines or... the working conditions. They died by the thousands to make America rich. You can imagine what else went on.

Nell stares at him, disturbed, cold.

LUKE (cont'd)

Maybe Crain put them in here, working out his guilt in some weird way like Sarah Winchester did. All those thousands killed by the guns her husband invented. Hell, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

Nell turns away from him, agitated. Luke gestures to the tests Nell's been working on.

LUKE (cont'd)

You finish?

NELL

Couldn't get the last ones. You?

LUKE

Yeah, but I've seen 'em before.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Nell looks at him, waiting for him to explain.

LUKE (cont'd)
Field cognition. Standard battery. I
do a lot of these.

Meaning experiments. He lowers his voice.

LUKE (cont'd)
Don't tell the Professor. He'd
probably throw me out. But you can
make okay money doing enough of 'em.
Course straight psych stuff doesn't
pay as much as the pharmaceuticals do,
or a good wound study. Check it out.

He rolls up his sleeve revealing large, livid SCARS at
intervals too regular to be anything natural.

LUKE (cont'd)
A thousand bucks per.

What a freak. Luke leers at her, expecting her to be
repulsed. Instead Nell looks placid, unimpressed... like
she has seen worse. Far worse. Luke leans back,
disappointed, but trying not to show it.

LUKE (cont'd)
Yeah, straight psych doesn't pay as
much, but at least there's some fun to
it, trying to figure out what's really
going on.

NELL
What do you mean?

LUKE
This test we just spent three hours
on. Experimental misdirection. He'll
probably throw it away. And all along
he's really looking at something else.
Like how a paramedic has you hold up a
pencil... and pow! While you've been
concentrating on it, he's set your
dislocated shoulder.

Nell looks at the test, tries to digest this.

LUKE (cont'd)
Yeah. I don't know what he's doing
yet. But like I said, that's the fun.
It has something to do with the House.
I keep thinking Prison Experiment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She doesn't get the reference, and Luke sees it.

LUKE (cont'd)

In 1971 a Stanford psychologist, Phil Zimbardo, converted the basement of the psychology building at Stanford into a prison. He assigned a group of subjects - ordinary students - to play the guards, another group to play prisoners. Within days, the participants took on the roles they were playing... for real. Guards became sadistic. The prisoners had nervous breakdowns, became violent. It got out of control. All from a simple suggestion. He was forced to call the test to a halt.

Nell stands up, glares at Luke, turns away. She shoots a look back at him.

NELL

Why does this remind you of that?
We're all friends...

LUKE (cont'd)

Situational psychology. The environment you conduct the test in is a major part of the experiment.

NELL

This isn't anything like that. This a beautiful old house. We're all friends. Like a family.

Luke just smiles, rises. We'll see.

He walks off, his footsteps echoing in the vast room. The door shuts after him.

Nell sags back in her chair. Then something catches her eye. On a table opposite, a SET OF KEYS. Nell rises, lifts them up. Car keys, house keys. Must be Luke's. She pockets them, thoughtful, but just as she does --

-- something MOVES in the fireplace. So fleeting Nell can barely see it, and we only catch a frame of it. But the iron MESH CURTAIN hanging in front of the hearth is STILL SWAYING.

Nell stands there FROZEN. The massive fireplace LOOMS before her, like a monstrous mouth, black as pitch beyond the black metal curtains.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

The swaying metal scrapes over brick floor. Its eerie, repetitive screep cutting to the nerve.

Nell sits paralyzed, rooted to the chair. SCREEP. SCREEP. SCREEP.

A SINGLE STRAND of NELL'S HAIR stirs toward the fireplace, and --

-- SOMETHING INSIDE THE FIREPLACE MOVES BEHIND THE MESH!

Nell CRASHES back over her chair, knocking over a lamp and table, tripping, stumbling out of the furniture.

Holy shit. Whatever moved in there was real. Big, dark, like something's head. It goes out of focus and we can't see it as we follow --

-- NELL flying away, across the room in headlong terror.

INT. GROUND FLOOR HALL, OUTSIDE OF GREAT ROOM - DAY

Nell slams out of the room, skidding on the marble floor as the door slams behind her. She sways up off the floor to run --

-- right into Marrow and Theo's legs. Nell aborts a scream, realizing who it is.

NELL

There's someone in there!

THEO

Nell!

NELL

There's someone in there in the fireplace!

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Nell and Theo stand behind Marrow and Luke at the end of the Great Hall opposite the fireplace. Silent.

Theo glances at Nell. Nell is terrified.

Marrow nods to Luke, and they start forward together, Marrow among the furniture to the left, Luke down the right side.

The iron screens hang silent in the fireplace. Black, impenetrable.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Marrow and Luke come up on either side of it, Luke ducking this way and that trying to get a glimpse through the mesh.

They stop before it, neither breathing, both listening.

Marrow steps forward and pulls one screen aside far enough to look in. DARKNESS.

Nell and Theo watch, apprehensive.

NELL

Jim...

Marrow sticks his head into the fireplace. For a long moment, nothing happens...

IN THE FIREPLACE

Pitch darkness. Marrow feels up the chimney.

AND THEN SOMETHING SWINGS DOWN RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIS FACE! Marrow doesn't flinch.

RESUME

He FLINGS back the screen, revealing the only things in the fireplace: two massive andirons, and the still-swinging FLUE. It's cast-iron, forged in the shape of a LION'S HEAD.

Luke throws back the other screen. Theo comes over. Nell follows. There's nothing else in the fireplace.

Luke and Theo stare at Nell. Marrow squats to study the hearth. The large iron ASH-DROP is coated in soot. Not a mark on it. He opens it. Inside, a glimpse of ASHES and CHARRED WOOD. Marrow stands, looks at Nell.

NELL (cont'd)

Somebody was in here. I saw him.

Marrow looks at her, not sure what to believe. Nell turns to Luke and Theo for help. Not from that corner. Then Nell remembers, reaches into her pocket and produces the KEYS. She holds them up to Luke.

NELL (cont'd)

Are these yours?

He shakes his head.

NELL (cont'd)

I found these right over there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LUKE

Who drives a Toyota?

Theo shakes her head. They aren't Marrow's. Marrow takes the keys from Nell, turns them over.

MARROW

We'll look around the House.

INT. STATUARY HALL - DAY

Marrow, Theo and Luke move down the hall, opening doors left and right as Nell stands at the center of it all.

The statuary peers down on her. Dead faces on busts. Blind marble eyes.

Marrow heads OC, and Nell, timid, follows. Luke, following them, stares at the back of Nell's head.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE LIBRARY - DAY

Marrow pushes open a magnificent towering door, letting into --

INT. LIBRARY - DAY (CONTINUOUS)

-- the library. Long shelves filled with books line the room. Dusty light filters in, hinting at vast spaces overhead. They enter.

LUKE

Looks like ol' Hugh Crain had a problem with those book-o-the-month club things.

THEO

Or Carolyn did, being stuck in this place.

They move out across the library, craning their heads up. Above rises one of the House's towers. Book shelves line it on three sides. The fourth is window. A rickety metal SPIRAL STAIRCASE winds up into the gloom, providing access to the shelves in the tower.

Luke starts for the stairs. Marrow points up to the top.

MARROW

Supposedly that's where she hanged herself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell goes still. Looks up to the top. Affected.
Strongly.

LUKE

Man, I gotta check this out.

Luke tramps a short way up the metal stairs, and the STAIRS MOVE. Luke lurches back to safety, but that makes the stairs sway in the other direction. They all REACT.

Luke vaults the handrail, drops to the floor. The forty feet of staircase ripple, groan, oscillate to a stop.

LUKE (cont'd)

Guess not.

Marrow grabs the railing and tests the staircase. It starts to sway again. Nothing supernatural about it.

MARROW

Let's have a look upstairs.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LOCKED ROOM - NIGHT

Luke, Theo and Marrow, strung out down the long hallway behind Nell, open doors, check rooms. Nell closes a door on the right, and then stops dead. Staring.

The shut, dark, carved double doors, the ones that scared Nell and Theo earlier, await them at the end. Ominous.

Nell approaches. Closer and closer. The doors near.

Nell wraps her arms about her, and her BREATH FOGS THE AIR. She doesn't notice it. But then she GAGS. With a look of horror she recoils from the doors, choking, covering her face.

MARROW

Nell! What's wrong?

Marrow, Theo and Luke run up behind her.

NELL

The smell! Oh, God.

Theo blanches, looks at Nell. She smells it too. Marrow and Luke approach the doors, sniffing.

LUKE

I don't smell anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW

Me neither.

Marrow turns back to Nell. Theo suddenly looks unsure herself. Before Nell's eyes, Theo regains her composure.

MARROW (cont'd)

Theo?

Theo shakes her head no. Nell breathes out forcefully, trying to see her breath, but now it DOESN'T FOG.

Luke looks over the wild carvings on the doors, disturbed.

LUKE

What's in here?

Marrow tries to open them, but they're locked. Luke gives it a try. Locked, not even any play in them.

LUKE (cont'd)

Try those keys?

Marrow glances down. No keyhole.

MARROW

Must be locked from the other side.

The men turn back to the women. Theo sighs, wheels, and walks away.

THEO

There's nobody here. Nell's just imagining things.

Betrayed, Nell can say nothing, just watch her go.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Marrow enters the kitchen. Mrs. Dudley, chopping carrots, stands by the counter. Only the slightest pause in the rhythm of her chopping says she's noticed him.

MARROW

Mrs. Dudley, were you in the Great Hall a little while ago?

Mrs. Dudley doesn't even look up.

MRS. DUDLEY

That room is Wednesdays. It's not Wednesday.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW

Do you know who these keys belong to?

MRS. DUDLEY

No.

MARROW

Is your husband around? I'd like to --

MRS. DUDLEY

-- No. He's in town.

Marrow turns to go, but before he does, he considers, looks back at Mrs. Dudley.

MARROW

Mrs. Dudley, there's a locked room up on the second floor, way back in the southwest wing. What's in there?

At that, Mrs. Dudley slowly turns to Marrow.

MRS. DUDLEY

We don't go in there. Nobody does.

EXT. REAR LAWN - DAY

Nell wanders alone across the lawn behind the House, glances back at it, hugs herself. Then the little white picket fence catches her eye.

EXT. FAMILY CEMETERY - DAY

Nell approaches the picket fence, paint long-peeled, a small swinging gate barring the way. She pushes through.

And finds herself standing in the tiny Crain family cemetery. Nine moss-covered headstones show the wear of a long century. Eight small headstones, one large one. The large one is Carolyn Crain's. The smaller ones are her children's.

Nell's heart is breaking as she moves among them: the various names. One reads NOAH CRAIN 1881-1888.

NELL

Seven years old.

She looks at the next one: ELISA CRAIN 1883-1890.

NELL (cont'd)

Seven.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell quickly moves to the next. WENDY CRAIN 1880-1887. Seven years old. Nell spins about, from one headstone to the next. Seven years, each one. Every single Crain child died at the age of seven.

Chilled, Nell backs out of the cemetery.

EXT. VERANDA - DAY

CLOSE ON

The spinning wheels of Marrow's MINIATURE TAPE RECORDER. The device is in Marrow's jacket pocket, CONCEALED from

NELL

who's sitting in an Adirondack chair on a long, covered porch running the length of one of the house's wings. Marrow, in a chair beside her, patiently watches.

Nell stares off across the lawn to the cemetery down the hill. She stares, unsure if she should say something.

MARROW

What did it smell like?

NELL

I don't know. My mother's toilet was by an old wooden table. It was the same smell that wood got by the end.

MARROW

Smell is the sense most closely linked to memory. Powerful associations.

(beat)

Try to tell me, if you can, what happened after you smelled it.

NELL

I looked at Theo. She had a look on her face.

MARROW

Like what.

NELL

Like she smelled it too.

MARROW

Then what happened?

NELL

It... made me more scared.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Marrow settles deeper into his chair. There's a look on his face. Something like satisfaction. Nell looks up at him. He smiles. Holds it, genuine, warm. Nell softens, and a smile comes over her too.

NELL (cont'd)
I'm sorry. I'm messing up the study.

MARROW
Well, you saw something.

Nell looks to him. He's sincere. He believes her.

NELL
Maybe I...

"Didn't" she almost says. She struggles, embarrassed.

NELL (cont'd)
I haven't been with people in a long time.

Marrow settles in his chair, looks out at the forest.

MARROW
I really haven't either.

Nell peers at him, doubtful. Is she being made fun of?

MARROW (cont'd)
I mean, I'm surrounded by people, day in, day out. Students, colleagues.
(beat)
But most of the time, even when I'm with them... you know...

Nell's face flushes with compassion. With longing. Marrow looks at her. He's vulnerable. Needing. She doesn't dare hope. The moment lasts a few heartbeats.

He looks away. A flicker of distress crosses Nell's face. And then she realizes Marrow is looking at --

-- Luke. Who's just coming up behind Nell. Luke stops. A shade pale? He summons up an amused smirk. But there's something to it not right. Something forced.

LUKE
Looks like somebody here's got the hots for Nell.

Nell turns scarlet. She thinks Luke is confirming her wishes, seeing something between her and Marrow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LUKE (cont'd)
You've got to check this out.

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - DAY

Luke, Nell and Marrow mount the stairs, climb up and up, Luke two steps ahead. They reach the landing. Luke cranes his head, looking at something in the gloom above.

They continue on, climbing, and halfway up Theo stands against the handrail staring at the wall. She turns and looks at Nell strangely.

Nell, confused, turns and looks at the wall where Luke and Marrow are now staring.

On the wall are dark stains. Black. Blue. Runny. Almost like something leaking from the roof has run down, or been splashed down. Up and down lines. A circle.

Nell steps back. WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL they are the letters N and O. Pulling back farther: part of the word ELEANOR. Nell is baffled.

NELL
My name.

She follows the streaking substance up, climbing the stairs to get perspective, blinking in rising fear as more running letters appear.

The word: COME. And higher up, the last: HOME.

NELL (cont'd)
No...

But the substance doesn't come from the ceiling. Nell turns, following a swath of the stuff ACROSS the wall to -

- the PAINTING OF HUGH CRAIN. It is as if the oils themselves have been boiled by a heat gun and blasted off, running down from there. Hugh's face is gone. In place of the face, the underlying ivory of the canvas glares out... like a skull.

INT. RED PARLOR - DAY

Nell, panic rising in her voice, confronts the others.

NELL
How does it know my name? Why me?
There's something here in this house.
Something that knows who I am!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Luke turns Marrow a concerned look.

LUKE
Nell, chill. We'll figure it out.

Nell whirls from Luke to Theo.

NELL
One of you did it as a joke!

Luke shakes his head. Theo starts getting pissed. Marrow stands there, arms folded, observing.

LUKE
No, Nell. You know we didn't.

NELL
Well, who did!?

Theo smiles sweetly.

THEO
Maybe you did it yourself.

Nell spins on her, speechless.

NELL
What?

THEO
Poor Nell, center stage for the first time in her life. Doesn't know that deep down everybody hates the prima donna.

Nell gapes in rage. But nothing comes out.

NELL
You... monster!

Theo darkens, is about to retort, when Luke BEGINS TO LAUGH. Nell stares.

LUKE
She's trying to make you mad. You were losing it there, talking like this place was really haunted.

Nell looks at Theo. Theo smiles. But says nothing. And Nell knows Theo wasn't just trying to make her mad. Nell paces, sullen, glancing over at them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NELL

If whoever did this apologizes now,
we'll all have a little laugh and
forget about it.

Theo, Marrow and Luke look at each other. But nobody
speaks up. Nell grabs for the door to leave.

NELL (cont'd)

Must be the ghosts then.

She flings open the door. MONSTROUS arms seem to grab
her as she exits. But it's only a wild-looking coat rack
in the hallway.

EXT. 2ND FLOOR BALCONY - DAY

Nell stands at the railing of a stone balcony on the
house's second floor. The air stirs her hair. She peers
up at the House's roofline, its clusters of misplaced
windows and other features like so many screaming heads.

Chilled, she pulls her sweater closer. Marrow comes out
onto the balcony from twin French doors behind her.

MARROW

Mrs. Dudley's taking care of it.

(beat)

Nell. I'd love to show you something.

Nell turns to face him, still upset.

MARROW (cont'd)

Something I think you'll like.

INT. GREENHOUSE - DAY

Marrow lets Nell into a long, Victorian-era greenhouse.
It's overgrown, lush, the leaded-glass panes above
stained with years of condensation and pollen. Vines and
trees climb up the sides. Beds of flowers and plants
line narrow footpaths of brick.

Nell loves it. It takes her breath away. And her fear.

NELL

Beautiful...

Nell makes her way among the plants, her fear forgotten.
Marrow watches her as she moves about, takes a heavy,
ripe bloom in hand, lifts it to her face.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

For the first time since we've seen Nell, there is something to her which is simply... erotic.

Marrow stares, feeling it.

Nell looks over her shoulder at Marrow. Then moves on.

Marrow follows her down one of the footpaths.

NELL (cont'd)

I feel so stupid. Somebody's playing a mean trick on me. That's all.

She smiles back at Marrow as he trails her. She reaches a transept in the greenhouse, and as she turns down it, there's the slightest sway to her gait.

MARROW

Maybe it wasn't supposed to be mean. Maybe it was supposed to be fun, and whoever did it won't own up after they saw how you took it.

Marrow follows her around the corner into the transept. At the far end the wall is completely overgrown.

Nell looks up through the ceiling at Hill House looming grim outside, distorted in the old glass.

NELL

People sometimes do bad things.

MARROW

People sometimes make mistakes. Slip up. But it doesn't make them bad.

It hits her straight in the heart. Nell wheels to him, emotional. Marrow is surprised by the sudden change.

NELL

But how do you know? How do you know what are flaws and what is... bad?

Marrow gropes for a moment.

MARROW

You mean evil? Big question, Nell. You just know. Experience. You learn the ways of the world. Whoever did that thing to the painting --

NELL

-- I'm not talking about the painting.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Marrow looks at her, feels the untold weight she's carrying.

MARROW

We all have our prices. We all have our limits. And learning them - experience - is the way we become strong in ourselves. The way we become able to resist that thing called evil.

Nell peers away, out the stained glass. The blurred line of the cemetery fence can just be made out.

NELL

The innocent don't have a chance.

MARROW

No. They don't. Not in the real world.

Nell glances at him, and for that split second she is raw, passionate woman. She walks away, the sway in her gait aching, powerful.

NELL

I want to be experienced.

Marrow stares as she comes to the overgrown end. Nell reaches out to the hanging vines, pulls them aside...

... and A FACE stares out. Ghastly. White. Nell takes an involuntary step back, a little gasp.

The face is marble. Blind eyes stare from stained cheeks. It is a STATUE OF CRAIN. Marrow comes over.

It's an enormous stone tableaux of Hugh surrounded by cherubim. The plants have attacked it as if trying to wipe its funerary presence from the greenhouse.

NELL (cont'd)

Hugh. Can't seem to get away from him.

She laughs a little at herself. Marrow joins in. He helps her pull the plants back to reveal more of it.

She reaches out, touches the marble cheek. Then daring, grins, and begins to hum her TUNE.

Marrow steps back to watch her do a slow-dance to her tune with an imaginary partner.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She moves sensually, pirouetting, her hips sliding past... hypnotizing Marrow.

MARROW

What is that tune?

NELL

I don't know. A lullaby I guess. My mother used to hum it to me. And her mother before that, and so on.

(to the statue)

Hugh Crain, would you care to dance?

She hums another two notes, and BANG! The door behind her SLAMS OPEN in a gust of wind, jolting Nell. She stops and stares. Marrow does too. A beat, and then he goes over and shuts it. When he turns back --

-- Nell is just vanishing around the corner, her rapid footsteps echoing in the vaulted room.

The tension goes out of Marrow. He exhales, and then spots something on the ground: a small plastic white card with a magnetic strip. As he stoops to pick it up, the statue of Crain leers down over him, inanimate, cold.

Marrow REACTS to the card, and then we REVEAL it is a DRIVER'S LICENSE. The photo of a plain-looking, 30ish man: DAVID WATTS.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, SOUTH WING - DAY

Nell stands before a towering bay window looking down on the rear grounds, the patio. Luke, Theo and Marrow saunter along it, Theo and Luke laughing, but not fully audible through the window.

They look comfortable with each other. Normal. Like they belong together. And Nell doesn't. She feels it acutely.

They move out of view. She follows to the next room.

INT. CRAIN'S STUDY - DAY

Nell enters a tall dusty room, velvet curtains drawn shut, only a sliver of sunlight showing through. As her eyes adjust, she makes out the furnishings of a late-nineteenth century office.

She paces to the curtains and peeks through.

HER POV

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Theo, Marrow and Nell pass by below. Theo puts her hand on the small of Marrow's back. They go out of sight.

RESUME

Nell turns away, mad. Only now do we really get a look at the room she's in. Off to the side is an enormous desk. Leather chairs. A man's things. On a bookcase on the wall, scores of leather volumes: business ledgers.

As Nell takes this in, her jealousy fades away. She realizes this must be:

NELL
Crain's study.

She moves behind the desk. On it sits a set of ledgers marked with mill names - Lowell, Haverhill, Manchester - and years: 1872, '73 and so on. She flips one open.

THE LEDGER

is a payroll account. Names upon names of workers rendered in sepia by Crain's severe cursive. Notations in the column beside it indicate man, woman, or child and the appropriate wage for each class of worker. Many of them, at least a third, are children.

NELL reacts. Disturbed by it.

She turns the page. Columns indicate pay, and so on. But one column, at the very center of the book, hidden in the binding, is unlabeled. In its place, occasionally marked, are ASTERISKS.

Nell follows them back, eyes searching across the ledger.

She turns the page, pushes the book down revealing that final concealed column, more asterisks. And more. Her eyes flick back and forth. The asterisks are paired with entries for CHILD.

NELL (cont'd)
They only go with children...

Nell turns the pages. More and more asterisks. Dozens. Scores. Hundreds...

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - NIGHT

The House is dark. Nell, carrying a sandwich wrapped in a napkin, stands at the bottom of the grand staircase.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She peers up into its gloom, not wanting to go up, not wanting to see the terrible painting.

She looks down at her feet and begins to climb. Step after step, averting her eyes from the portrait even as it looms for us, out of focus in the background. She turns on the landing... and stops.

The painting is behind her now. She doesn't want to look. The wall to her right she can't help seeing... and noticing that the writing has been scrubbed away. She sniffs at the scent of turpentine.

Nell continues on up the last flight to the second floor. And there she stops.

She spins around.

The painting of Hugh Crain hangs there above the landing, enormous. A black sheet hangs from the frame, concealing the disfigured face. Yet the sheet almost makes it more frightening.

Nell turns and hurries off to her room.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell slips into her room and finds Theo sitting there at a mirrored vanity with a bottle of wine and a couple of water glasses. Theo, in a silk robe, doing her nails, glances at Nell in the mirror.

THEO

We missed you at dinner.

Nell shuts the door, stands there, gauging Theo.

THEO (cont'd)

I know you don't drink, but we really do need a little wine...

CUT TO:

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Nell lounges on the bed in her sleeping tee-shirt and undies. She giggles, scooting down so her feet hang off.

NELL

I can't believe I'm going to let you do this.

Theo sits in a chair at the foot of the bed, pedicure set beside her. Theo hands her the bottle of wine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THEO

Here.

Nell takes it, tops off her glass, spilling. Her face is red. She grimaces as she tosses back a big swallow.

NELL

Luke. You really think it was him?

Theo holds bottles of nail polish up next to Nell's bare feet, testing the colors.

THEO

Well, it wasn't me. And Mrs. Dudley sure looked pissed up there on the ladder cleaning.

(beat)

You said the good Professor was with you.

Nell pauses, takes a drink.

THEO (cont'd)

Red. Plain old red. Okay, you ready?

Nell makes a noise of discomfort and pleasure and rolls over to watch Theo. Theo smiles and takes Nell's foot gently in her hand. She begins to paint her toenails.

THEO (cont'd)

See, being touched isn't that bad.

Nell looks down her long legs at Theo.

NELL

I'm sorry I was mad at you, Theo.

THEO

Me too. You can be a pretty decent bitch.

Nell shoots down the rest of the glass of wine.

NELL

I'll take that as a compliment.

(beat)

Did you know all of Crain's children died at age seven?

THEO

No. That's weird.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NELL

I saw it down at the little cemetery.
I think some terrible things happened
here.

Theo's face draws up, hard. Personal. Hidden from Nell.

THEO

Well. Abusive fathers... and husbands
aren't new.

NELL

Guess not. But I've never had either.
(beat, changing the subject)
Where do you live?

THEO

In the city. Apartment.

Nell looks away, tries to make it sound casual.

NELL

How many bedrooms?

THEO

Two --

NELL

-- I --

THEO

-- one for me, one for my roommate.

Nell, looking away from Theo, tries to hide her
disappointment, retreats.

NELL

-- I've kinda been thinking about
getting a new place. A roommate too.

Theo looks up, understands what she's asking.

THEO

You don't want to live with me, Nell.
Roommates aren't all they're cracked
up to be. I'm mad at mine. That's
part of the reason I came here - to
piss her off and make her worry.
Besides, why would you want to leave
your beautiful little apartment?

NELL

I don't know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Nell lies back, arms spread, lets the glass roll out of her hand. Theo paints Nell's toenails one by one, carefully guiding the brush strokes in along the skin.

Nell lets out a sigh. Theo peers up at her... and gently, her hand moves down the arch of Nell's foot. Caressing. Nell lets her.

Theo finishes Nell's last little toe, and then with the brush out of paint, runs it gently up the inside of Nell's calf. Nell sighs.

Theo lowers her face near Nell's toes, licks her lips: soft, near, red. She blows.

Nell raises herself up, peers down at Theo. Sees the want on her face. A long beat.

Nell breaks the gaze, looks away, blinking. Theo reads Nell's look, and releases her foot. She sits back in the chair. For a moment Nell doesn't know what to do.

NELL (cont'd)

I think I'm going to go to bed now.

EXT. HILL HOUSE - NIGHT

The stark gables and towers of Hill House MOAN in the wind. Faint light streams through the lace curtains of one room. Nell's.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Alone, Nell sits at the vanity brushing out her hair for bed. Her motions are languid in the light of the single small lamp, off-balance with the wine.

Her HAIR brushes out in long, even strokes. The brush moves through it, lifting it and letting it fall.

IN THE MIRROR

The brush draws through Nell's hair, but as it does, the hair divides in its wake LIKE FINGERS RUNNING THROUGH it.

Nell freezes. She's not sure what she just saw. She runs the brush through again, and again it is as if something pulls it back from her head.

Again - fast- she runs the brush through her hair, and this time the hair SPINS UP IN A KNOT.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell flinches, dropping the brush, knocking the shade of the lamp on the vanity a-wobbling.

RESUME

She's out of the chair in a flash, grabbing her own hair, staring at the space behind her. Nothing there. A beat.

She steadies herself, feeling the alcohol. Gets control.

The lampshade rocks back and forth. The light plays across the fireplace and mantle on the far wall. And something there catches her eye.

Nell feels her way across the room, not sure of what she's seeing. Over the sound of the wind outside, there's something at the very highest edge of hearing.

She stops five feet from the mantle. The swaying light catches the rich tones of wood. Then darkens. Illuminates it again. Darkens. The carvings of the playing CHILDREN in the wood SEEM TO MOVE.

Nell stares in drunken fascination. And as the first fear begins to rise in her throat, the wind dies down and in its place there is the FAINTEST TRACE OF CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER. Nell's reaction changes... to awe.

Tentative, she approaches the mantle. Her hand goes out, shaking... and touches the wood.

It is hard and still. No movement whatsoever. Silence. But the FACES engraved in the wood all seem to be peering up at her, hands outstretched for her, hopeful.

EXT. HILL HOUSE - NIGHT

Hold on Nell's WINDOW, the light shining dim through the gauze curtain. It goes out.

The CAMERA PULLS AWAY, REVEALING the window staring from an arrangement of other windows, stonework and doors... like an eye with a cataract in a face howling in horror.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell, her breathing heavy, lies tangled in her heavy blankets, asleep, but restless. Her feet hang off the end of the bed.

ANGLE OVER NELL, BED LEVEL

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the b.g., the door to the bathroom is shut, barely visible in the faint light from the window. HOLD on it.

Silently, it begins to OPEN. The gap WIDENS, yawning, pitch dark beyond. A long beat. And then a THUMP. A SLIDING SOUND. Something drags itself across the floor.

BUMP. SLIDE. Our line of sight is blocked by the bed. But the sound is getting louder, coming closer.

ON NELL

Bump. Slide. Nell grinds her teeth in her sleep, pulls the blankets about her tighter. Bump. The sound stops. And her BREATH BEGINS TO FOG.

Whatever has just come in the room is right there, hovering just OC. We can feel it.

Without warning Nell BOLTS upright, GASPING into consciousness. The CAMERA PEELS AWAY from her, sweeping back in a circle to reveal:

Nothing. Just the dark room. And the bathroom door OPEN.

IN THE BED

Nell stares at the door, knows she shut it. Now it's open. She breaths fast, feeling the cold, knowing something's in here with her.

She stops breathing, strains her ears. Silence. A long moment. Then she notices her feet, hanging out from under the covers.

They are black. Feel slick. Nell turns on the light by her bed and looks down.

HER FEET ARE COVERED IN GORE. Where Theo had been painting. Nell SCREAMS.

INT. NELL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

SCREAMING, Nell spins the tub faucets on full blast, sticks her feet into the spray.

THEO (OC)
Nell? Nell!

Weeping, Nell scrubs the gore off her feet - red, black like old clotted blood.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NELL

I hate you. I HATE you, you BITCH!

The door to Theo's bedroom is shut. The handle rattles, urgent, but it won't open. It's LOCKED.

THEO (OC)

Nell, what's wrong? What's wrong?

The blood or whatever it is on Nell's feet comes off, is sucked down the drain.

THEO (OC) (cont'd)

Nell, it's locked, let me in!

NELL

You know what you did. I hate you.

Nell, squatting in the tub, sobs as her feet come clean, and there are NO WOUNDS. Theo rattles the door.

THEO (OC)

Nell, the door is locked. Open it.

Nell, her feet clean, turns to Theo's door, steps out of the tub, and looking like she could kill, moves for it.

She grabs the handle, tries to turn it, but realizes what Theo has been trying to tell her: it's LOCKED. Perplexed, Nell finds the key in the hole, and turns it.

The door rams open, Theo behind it, terrified and clearly just awoken.

THEO (cont'd)

Nell...

Nell stares at her, hair tangled, tear-stained, doubtful. Water splashes in the tub, faucets still running.

The LIGHTS flicker as one in the connecting rooms. Theo has time to look up at the bulb in the bathroom, and they all GO OUT. The darkness swallows them up. Stray moonlight from the windows, reflecting in the mirror silhouette them standing there.

THEO (cont'd)

Nell, the tub!

Nell stoops in the darkness, and the faucets squeak shut. Theo bumps her way out of the room.

Nell moves to the doorway following her into --

INT. THEO'S ROOM - NIGHT

-- Theo's room. Theo's form moves by her bed, and with a snick, her cigarette lighter lights up. Theo holds it above her head, its tiny orange flame glistening off polished wood in the shadows. Nell steps toward her.

Drip. Drip. From the bathroom. Theo's eyes widen.

THEO

Oh, God, your breath...

And sweeping over them a SHOCK OF COLD. Their breath.

NELL

Shh.

Nell shakes her head: don't say anything. Nell turns around, the darkness almost impenetrable, its shapes alien, threatening, any one could be some... thing. Drip. Drip.

THEO

It's here.

Nell looks down at Theo's bed, then at Theo who moves closer to Nell. Nell gives the bed a wide berth. Together they back toward the wall with the fireplace.

They stare out at us, eyes trying to adjust, afraid. Behind them looms the fireplace and in front of it, a metal cage-like fire screen. A beat.

BAM! SOMETHING LUNGES out of the fireplace but is caught in the screen, hitting Nell and Theo in the back.

Theo's lighter goes flying in that very instant, and we never see what's hit the screen. Neither do they.

Theo falls SCREAMING. Nell manages to whirl, embrace the cage and slam it and whatever's inside back into the fireplace. The screen JOLTS hard against Nell, almost knocking her over.

NELL

HELP!

Theo still SCREAMING, lying on her back before the fireplace, rams her feet against it. The screen HAMMERS at Nell and Theo. They can't run or it'll get out.

Theo's screaming is suddenly drowned out by a HORRIFYING, INHUMAN SOUND from inside the fireplace.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Theo's scream goes dead in breath-stealing horror.

Nell recovers.

NELL (cont'd)

No! Go AWAY!

The screen punches out at them, denting the mesh. And then all the air in the room seems to be SUCKED into the fireplace in one THUMP. The door to the bathroom slams. And then it's gone.

They sit there in the darkness, panting.

INT. GREENHOUSE - DAY

Nell, at the center of the greenhouse, stares at the tableaux of Hugh Crain down at the end of the transept. In the morning light it seems inert, cold, just a statue.

Theo enters. Nell doesn't seem to notice her until she comes right up. Holding herself, Theo sits down on the edge of a planter.

NELL

What did he say?

THEO

Same as last night. He says Mrs. Dudley says all the fireplaces in that wing connect to the main chimney. Thinks the flue was open, and with the windstorm, some freak air current --

NELL

-- What do you think?

Theo considers, then looks at her, severe.

THEO

I think he's responsible.

Nell starts to react, get upset.

THEO (cont'd)

I know you don't want to hear it. All these things. I think they're some sort of part in his experiment. Luke thinks so too, he's like some sort of professional Guinea pig, you know.

Nell turns and walks away, angry. Theo gets up, follows her, grabs her arm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THEO (cont'd)

Nell, with Jim you're looking for something that isn't there.

Nell stands there, not wanting to believe it, but it's getting to her.

NELL

Why should I listen to you? You're jealous.

Nell dares Theo to refute her. Theo stews.

THEO

You wanting things doesn't make them real, Nell.

NELL

Jim's not doing these things.

But there's a desperate, rising edge to Nell's voice. Theo's, in response, is quiet, sober... certain.

THEO

Come on, Nell. Deep down, if you really thought it wasn't Jim, why wouldn't you be leaving right this second? Why wouldn't you be afraid? Really afraid.

NELL

Because home is where the heart is.

Nell leaves. Theo stands there chilled by an answer which would only make sense to someone out of her mind.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Nell sits at the desk, alone in the study, scribbling answers to more PERCEPTUAL PUZZLES. She pauses, and in a sudden fit, sweeps the papers off the table. She slams her pencil down, sobs once. Suddenly she sees something.

Forgotten by a reading chair to one side of the room. Barely visible. Marrow's BRIEFCASE.

Nell considers, then dismisses it. She picks the test off the floor. A beat, and she looks back at the briefcase. She looks over her shoulder at the door.

Nell goes to the briefcase, knowing she shouldn't look, but unable to help herself. She stands over it. Marrow's tape recorder glints out at her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell takes it out, and presses play. A hiss. Nothing. She looks up at the door. Any minute he could come back in here looking for it. Hiss... still nothing. In her anxiety she hasn't rewound it, and realizes it.

She stops, rewinds, and presses play again. This time Marrow's voice rings out.

MARROW (VO)

...the discussion in the hallway about last night's fireplace incident concluded at three a.m. Subject Vance again appears to be the initiator in the reinforcing dissociative loop with Subject Miles. Initial sensory experiences - smells, auditory hallucinations - appear to precipitate the loop. Subject Vance continues her alienation of all study members and the experimenter with paranoid behavior, accusations of our involvement in the phenomena, and physical withdrawal. It remains unclear whether Subject Vance truly believes she is not responsible for defacing the painting. Interview with Subject Vance in greenhouse yesterday to ascertain extent of her self-delusion inconclusive due to Subject's efforts to sexualize encounter with experimenter...

Marrow's voice continues on in his assessment, but Nell isn't hearing anything anymore.

She is dying, her world turned upside down. She draws a breath to weep, but can't. The recorder in her hand droops to her side, and all we can hear of Marrow is the cold, analytical tone, his garbled jargon. And then --

MARROW (OC)

Be back in a minute!

-- it's Marrow, for real, about to open the door. She clicks off the recorder, drops it into the briefcase. The door swings open. Marrow starts, not expecting Nell to be sitting right there in his chair.

MARROW (cont'd)

Nell.

She can only stare at him, eyes dead, not wanting to believe what she's just heard. Not able to at all.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Marrow's eyes travel from hers to the briefcase and back.

MARROW (cont'd)
I didn't know you were in here.

Nell can't answer. Marrow comes over.

MARROW (cont'd)
How are the tests going?

Nell rises, staring, emotionless. Betrayal just beginning to find a hold. She turns away from him, goes back to her table and slides her work in front of her.

Marrow looks at his briefcase, then at Nell, knows she's been in it. He wheels from her, picks it up, and with a final, sorry glance at her, exits.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE OF STUDY - DAY

Nell emerges from the study, looks about her, lost. Her feet start moving, as if on their own.

INT. GRAND ENTRY - DAY

Mrs. Dudley, coat in hand, opens the front door just as Nell enters from the hall behind. Mrs. Dudley notices her. Nell, numb, gazes from the open door to Mrs. Dudley. Nell could walk out right now. But...

Mrs. Dudley smiles a knowing smile. An all too knowing smile. Then leaving for the day, she shuts the door on Nell. Final. Fate-sealing.

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLS - DAY

Nell drifts down a long hall, a vacant shade of herself, humming her TUNE.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE RED PARLOR - DAY

Nell's hand brushes the woodwork as she moves, as if guided by some alien braille. She turns into the doorway of the Red Parlor, and her humming stops.

INT. RED PARLOR - DAY

Nell stands there in the room, struggling, groping her way back. Trying to find a feeling, any feeling. The one that comes to her summons is rage.

NELL
How can he think I'm doing this!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

She snatches a heavy floor lamp, popping its cord, and hurls it like a throwing hammer at the nearest shelves, smashing it, bringing down the vases, knickknacks. The leather album crashes to the floor.

She stalks around the room, and then slows, staring at what she's done, the rage draining out of her before our eyes. And maybe if she could do something like that...

NELL (cont'd)

No. No, I couldn't do those things.
I didn't do those things.

She turns in place, desperate, helpless...

... and sees the old leather album precariously tilting on one of the sprung shelves. It's open.

One of the leaves flips over on its own, gravity and the weight of its own pages TURNING IT.

Nell approaches, stepping over broken ceramic. SLIP. Another page turns. Nell hovers over it, holding her breath so as not to make the book flip over and fall off the shelf in one instant.

SLIP. Another page turns. The book is a PHOTO ALBUM of the late nineteenth century, bound with ribbons, the aged Daguerreotypes in pressed vellum frames.

Nell peers closer. It's open to a faded, gray image of a family taken long before it became the convention to smile for a photograph: a young WOMAN sitting in a chair with THREE SMALL CHILDREN around her.

And standing behind the chair, a fearsome presence in a black coat, his face hollow, malevolent. Hugh Crain.

Nell shivers, and SLIP, the page turns on its own.

An image of Hugh and his wife, Carolyn, a look of deathly loss on her face. There are NO CHILDREN. Behind them looms the fireplace of the Great Hall. The page flips.

Hugh and Carolyn, unsmiling, showing a PREGNANCY. The page turns again on its own, and now --

-- Carolyn is standing before the fireplace ALONE. Pregnant, her hair up in a FRENCH TWIST. On her face, a sense of self-assurance. And the FAINTEST of SMILES.

The album begins to slide down the shelf, and Nell grabs it up, open to the picture of Carolyn.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

She turns the page. Carolyn, more pregnant.

CLOSE ON THE BOOK

Nell TURNS PAGES FASTER AND FASTER, and as she does, it is as if the pregnant Carolyn Crain swells before our eyes in some sort of ragged animation.

Carolyn's SMILE grows wider, her hair dishevelled, her eyes insane, finally MOUTHING what looks like... ELEANOR.

RESUME

Nell fumbles the book onto the floor. It stares up at her, open to the last page.

It is an image of Carolyn Crain, eyes lit in grinning insanity, holding a SMALL BABY in the crook of one arm. Her other hand seems to be POINTING at the gaping maw of the GRAND FIREPLACE.

Nell bolts from the room.

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLS (VARIOUS) - DAY

Nell races through the house, past the staring, carved figures, through archways, gets turned around, backtracks. And as she does, she slows...

...taking in the labyrinthine arrangement of the halls, as if sensing some grand design for the first time, some method to the House's madness. She seems to feel where she is, goes through a door and --

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LOCKED ROOM - DAY

-- is at the end of the long hallway opposite the terrible doors of the locked room. Nell stops.

NELL

It makes you come here. It's designed to make you come here.

And as understanding begins to find its horrific way into her mind, she takes off running.

INT. GREAT HALL - DAY

Nell bursts into the Great Hall and stops. At the far end of the room broods the vast fireplace, its chain curtains hanging like the veil to some hellish sanctuary.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell stares at it daunted. What is it that Carolyn is trying to show her? The fireplace beckons, and Nell, against her will, walks over to it. It looms closer, closer, its heavy stone now towering up over Nell.

And Nell stops before the curtains. She finds a hooked steel poker hanging by it, and takes it down. She uses it to slide one of the chain curtains open. She steps into its soot-black mouth.

IN THE FIREPLACE

Nell pauses, peers up the chimney. A faint moan of air breaths up it. She sticks the poker into the darkness, scratches around, nothing.

She turns her attention to the back of the fireplace, thwacks it. Sooty stone chips away, with the sound of metal on solid rock.

The mechanism for the ash drop catches her eye. Nell grabs the heavy, iron lever. She pulls, but can barely budge it. It finally screeches back, and the iron door in the floor of the fireplace SWINGS DOWN.

Nell looks in. Two feet down it looks like a gray blanket of ash, a charred timber or two sticking out.

Sick with fear, Nell stretches the poker down into the ashes and prods. Nothing. Just charred wood.

She thrusts the poker down deep. It vanishes in the ash up to her hand. CLACK. She rakes through the ash, shoving her arm in up to her elbow. CLACK clack a-clack. She gets hold of something, lifts the poker, and dredges up a strange bulbous shape on its hooked end.

Ash sifts from the object's cavities. She turns it to get a better look. And freezes in horror.

The shape is TWO HUMAN SKULLS. A small one, a child's skull, reamed through the top by the poker, the other an IMMENSE skull with brooding brow, hooked by the eye.

Nell fights back the scream welling in her throat, and lets the poker drop. It bangs off the door, falls in the ash drop, its handle hitting a spring. Nell recoils as the trapdoors SNAP SHUT like a pair of jaws.

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALLS - DUSK

Nell stumbles through the hallways, crying out, weeping in fear.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

NELL
 Theo. Jim. Help.

She blinks back her swimming vision, disoriented, and goes through a door.

INT. GRAND ENTRY - DUSK

Nell bursts into the Grand Entry and stops. Standing there by the grand staircase are Marrow, Theo and Luke, stricken silent by her entry.

Looks of shock on their faces. Nell just stands there. A beat. And then it pours out of her, hysterical.

NELL
 He hunted all those children in here
 and burned them up and then she killed
 him to save her baby oh God to save
 her baby that wasn't his oh God all
 those ones he killed --

She takes a breath, and turns gray. Before anyone else can react, her legs go out from under her, and she lands sitting. Luke and Marrow get to her side fast.

NELL (cont'd)
 -- in the fireplace where he burned
 them up burned them after he killed
 them he made her watch what he did--

Marrow grabs her face. It's gray, her eyes glazing, lips tinged blue.

MARROW
 Get a blanket!

Theo races up the stairs. Luke, scared looks at Marrow.

MARROW (cont'd)
 Shock. Come on.

He starts to lift her. Luke takes her other side.

NELL
 -- she had to kill him had to to save
 her last baby --

Nell is ugly, sprawling, in shock, as the two men shuffle her to a padded bench on one side of the entry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW

Nell, listen to me. Experiment's over. I'm pulling the plug.

NELL

-- but he's not staying dead he made her kill herself and now he's --

Marrow grabs her face.

MARROW

Nell!

Theo rushed down the stairs with a blanket. She and Luke get it on Nell.

MARROW (cont'd)

Look at me, Nell. Look at me!

Nell manages to focus on him, her breath laboring.

NELL

Hugh Crain. It's Crain. He didn't die overseas. She killed him here. He's in the house. He's still here...

Marrow looks at her in pity, can't bear it and looks away. He looks back, full of regret. And calm.

MARROW

Nell, you have to hear me. Let me explain what's happening to you.

(beat)

In over-simplified terms, you're participating in a study on hysteria, Nell.

Everyone but Marrow REACTS.

MARROW (cont'd)

I've given you a powerful suggestion that you're in a haunted house. I picked Hill House because it fits expectations of what a haunted house should be. And then I spun you this story about Hugh Crain.

Theo glances at Luke: he's been right all along. This was never about perception. Luke manages a small smile of admiration despite his concern for Nell. Nell trembles, stretched out under Marrow.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NELL

Why?

MARROW (cont'd)

I've been observing how the three of you have been reacting and how your interpretation of the environment is affecting Theo's and Luke's. I've been trying to see exactly how... non-factual ideas take hold and spread among people, and how those ideas grow and change.

LUKE

Modelling small-group dynamics in the formation of narrative hallucinations...

Luke loves it. Marrow shoots him a look: shut up.

MARROW

Luke.

(to Nell)

But the important thing is this: there's no such thing as ghosts, Nell. No such thing as haunted houses.

Nell bucks in his arms, furious, desperate.

NELL

This is real, I'm not making it up!

MARROW

Yes, Nell. It's real. Real to you. Come on, let's talk it out now. It's important we talk it out.

NELL

Theo saw it! She was there - the banging and last night. You, you all saw the painting!

MARROW

Nell, what you experienced with Theo fit the expectations suggested by the house and my story.

NELL

-- but the painting!

She cuts Marrow off. He looks away. Nobody says anything. Nell grows agitated in the silence.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NELL (cont'd)

I know you think I did that. I didn't! Damn you! Go in the great hall and look in the fireplace. Look!

She starts to laugh. Theo glances at Luke, a sudden cold feeling on her. Marrow gently presses Nell down, tucking the blanket around her.

MARROW

Why would we want to do that, Nell?

NELL

Because that's where he burned them up, his victims after he was done hunting them! Because that's where their bones are! And he's in there with them where Carolyn put him!

(beat)

Don't you see? He didn't just kill his children, he killed *hundreds*. The child laborers from his mills. He took them here and he killed them. That's why he built this place so strange! To hunt them. It's not some stupid expression of his guilt. It's his hunting ground. The House *makes* you go to that locked room. It's designed to lead you there. That's where he killed them, and now their bones are in the fireplace!

Nell begins to sob. The others exchange looks at this. It sounds so hollow, so delusional, so out-of-the-blue.

MARROW

There are no bones in the fireplace. Luke and I looked in it yesterday, even looked in the ash-drop. Maybe some charred wood that looks like bones, but --

Nell SPASMS trying to fight her way up, but the startled Marrow and Luke manage to hold her down. Nell begins to wail in helpless rage.

MARROW (cont'd)

Nell! If we look in that fireplace it'll just upset you more. And when there are no bones there, you'll say they got up and walked away. It'll play right into the ghost story you're creating.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

LUKE

Man. Oh man she's bad off.

Theo pushes them back and grabs Nell's hand, gently brushes Nell's face.

THEO

Aw, shhh Nell.

Theo turns up to Marrow, serious, intense.

THEO (cont'd)

You just said you spun this story about Hugh Crain. Tell her there can't be any ghosts or bones because you made up the story about Hugh Crain. Tell her!

MARROW

I made up the story about Hugh Crain... for all practical purposes.

That wasn't the unequivocal statement Theo needed him to say, and when Luke and Theo shoot looks at him, he knows it, wishes he didn't. Nell jumps all over it.

NELL

What does that mean, 'For all practical purposes!?'

Marrow stops and lays it down. Lays it down with every bit of authority he has. Lays it down like law.

MARROW

It means what I told you about Hugh Crain is not true. He really was the man who built Hill House. He really was a big textile baron. But that's it. The rest I got out of a sociology paper on folklore written 20 years ago. All the lurid history is just gossip, the stuff that the local oppressed underclass heaped on the rich guy with the big house. These people lost their kids in Crain's mills and projected this... bullshit on him.

(beat)

You see, there has to be a Monster in the Labyrinth. We make 'em up. That's how we deal with the things about everyday life that are too terrible to deal with.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Nell's hysterics have stopped. She stares up at him, lost. Searching inside herself. Maybe she is crazy...

MARROW (cont'd)
Like losing someone. Like being
alone.

Marrow reaches down to put a hand on Nell's shoulder, but she flinches back. Theo glares up at Marrow, shielding Nell. Marrow pauses, remorse in his eyes.

MARROW (cont'd)
I'm sorry, Nell. I'm really, really
sorry I did this to you.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell lies in her bed, shivering, as Theo sets a hot mug of tea on the bedside table next to her.

NELL
I don't want to be by myself tonight.

Theo spreads an extra blanket over Nell.

THEO
Okay.

Theo spots a small candelabra with strings of crystal beads on the bedside table. She fishes in her pocket for her lighter and lights the two candles.

THEO (cont'd)
Finish that off and go to sleep. I'll
be up in a little while.

Theo goes and turns out the light. Nell lays there watching the flicker of the candles play in the crystal.

ANOTHER ANGLE

Eddies of heat from the candles mingle up the frost-covered glass of the window behind the candelabra. Small streaks of frost begin to melt...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Luke eats chips. Theo stirs coffee by the counter. Marrow stands by the door, arms folded, matter-of-fact.

MARROW
The Dudleys'll be here in the morning
to unlock the gates.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW (cont'd)
We'll be finished with the debriefing
by lunch. Then you're free to go.

LUKE
We still get our money for the whole
ten days, right?

MARROW
You get your money. Nell asleep?

THEO
Should be. I promised her I'd stay
with her tonight.

Luke crunches chips. Marrow turns to leave, gathering up
his briefcase from the counter. He pauses.

MARROW
Have either of you found anything
around the House like personal
effects? Like those keys, that type
of thing?

Luke and Theo shake their heads.

LUKE
Why?

MARROW
Never mind.

He turns and leaves.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

Marrow makes his way down the hall, lit only by the far-
apart glow of electric wall sconces. He glances up as he
passes the door to the Great Hall. He looks back down
the hall and then goes and opens the door.

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT

Marrow steps into the dark, vast room, his glasses
glinting. He feels around for a floor lamp, turns it on.
It makes a tiny island of light. The faint outline of
the fireplace on the far wall looms in the darkness.

Marrow approaches it. The mesh screen is still open
where Nell left it. Marrow stands there a moment. Then
looks in.

He squats by the lever which opens the ash-drop, takes
hold of it, and pulls. It doesn't budge; it's jammed by
the poker Nell dropped in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Marrow considers it. Then shakes his head, feels stupid for even coming in to check. As he starts to leave, his CELL PHONE RINGS. He digs it out of his briefcase.

MARROW

Hello?

(beat)

Yes, this is Dr. Marrow.

(beat)

Oh, hello. Thank you for returning the call for him.

(beat)

No. You mean he hasn't returned?

(long beat)

No, we haven't seen him. I did find his driver's license, though. I assumed he came by and left. I was going to put it in the mail. Can you tell me what sort of car he drives?

(beat, reacting)

A Toyota...

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Theo puts her cup in the sink as Luke dusts crumbs off his shirt.

LUKE

The design was obvious. Should have seen it. I did, kinda, when I started thinking Prison experiment. Telling us we're in a haunted house and then watching what we did with the suggestion. I don't know where Nell came up with that stuff about Crain being a nineteenth-century John Wayne Gacy complete with fun house.

THEO

I'm going up to bed, check on her.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell lies in her bed asleep, the room dark except for the last, guttering end of one of the candles.

A FAINT SOUND. LONG, LOW, like the inarticulate murmur of a dozen madmen.

Nell stirs. Her eyes open. She hears the sound.

HER POV:

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The wall on the opposite side of the room catches the pale gloom from the window. The twisting figures in the plaster, the low-relief, the shadows they make seem to COME TOGETHER AS AN EYE. Black. Not human. The woodwork around it like some half-face.

The GIBBERING begins to RISE.

RESUME

Nell begins to shake in fear. Her mouth moves. She manages to form words, but it's just a whisper.

NELL

No. Theo...

OUT OF THE CORNER OF HER EYE she can see a FORM beside her in the bed. Nell reaches out under the covers, her HAND stopping, suddenly grasped.

THE EYE on the wall stares. The babbling, liquid, deep voice mounts, and as the shadows move ever so slowly, the EYE roams over the room as if searching for Nell.

NELL (cont'd)

Oh, God. It's looking for me.

And then the babbling stops. Nell pants in the silence, grimaces in pain. Tries to look at Theo, but it's far too DARK right there beside her.

NELL (cont'd)

Theo, my hand. You're hurting me.

And in the place of the babbling, another sound. High-pitched, drawn-out. It starts like the sound a settling house might make, but then mounts into a CHILD'S CRY.

Nell's head snaps back over to the wall. The cry wails louder, coming through the wall. It's a wail of agony. A wail not of this earth. Nell struggles, racked between the pain in her hand and the tortured child's cry.

NELL (cont'd)

A child. No. No! I'm right here!

The EYE focusses on her. Dead on her. Nell stops. And with sudden violence, she's WRENCHED out of the bed by whatever's beside her. Nell hits the floor with a scream.

She grabs at the table on this side of the bed, pulling a lamp down on her, yanking at its chain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

The room FLASHES into brilliance. Nell stands up, panting beside the bed...

There is nothing in it. No Theo. She looks at her hand.

The eye on the wall is gone. Nell snaps around.

And there on the window, SPREADING before her eyes the frost on the glass is melting into a HORRIFYING FACE. The face of CRAIN.

Nell recoils in prickling fear. Living fear. She comes face to face with evil.

Her fear turns to rage. In the blink of an eye there's a heavy wedgewood ashtray in her hand, and then it's flying at the window.

The window BASHES out into the night, the face vanishing with a HOWL of air.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, NORTH WING - NIGHT

Nell explodes from her room, a flying fury of hate.

NELL

I will not let you hurt a CHILD!

She breaks into a run down the hall. The child-cry sounds from farther off. Nell chases after it.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLS (VARIOUS) - NIGHT

Nell winds through the pitch-dark halls, rooms gaping black left and right, searching for the cry which seems to come from just around the next bend, leading her around corner after corner.

The hallways peel past Nell as she runs, slamming through doors, ever darker. The House's hellish carvings glare as she passes, grinning, taunting. She rages on, oblivious until she rounds a final corner --

INT. HALL OUTSIDE LOCKED ROOM - NIGHT

-- into the long, dark hall leading to the LOCKED ROOM. It makes Nell stop.

She regards it. The rage begins to subside. Now she's got control of herself. And the fear begins to return. The CRY comes from the far end.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Nell eases down the hallway, the fear welling back on her like a tide. Open doorways gape dark on either side. She stops, but then the CHILD-CRY forces her on. She reaches the enormous CARVED DOORS.

Gaping cold and stench hit her. She gags.

The CRY comes from under the door. Present. Real. Right there. Nell shudders. And turns her back on the door.

The CRY grows louder, desperate as she walks away. She shuts her ears to it. The CRY rises to fearsome rage, not sounding like a child anymore. Not sounding like anything human at all. Nell glances back at the locked room in horror and takes off running.

INT. CROSS HALL - NIGHT

Halls sprawl away into darkness in all directions as Nell tries to feel out where she is, and realizes she's lost. Just like Theo and she were before. But now it's night. And she's alone. She's been tricked.

Bang. Nell's head jerks around. That sound.

Bang. Bang. Bang.

Which hall is it coming from? No way to tell. But it's growing.

BANG BANG BANG BANG... Nell turns in horror and runs.

INT. STATUARY HALL - NIGHT

The banging chases Nell into the statuary hall. Nell turns to face whatever it is that's coming after her. The BANGING CRESCENDOES... and then begins to recede, like the thing following her has taken a wrong turn.

The STATUARY peers down on her. Dead faces. Blind marble eyes. As she turns, the CAMERA swinging around her, the heads and eyes turn imperceptibly with her.

For a frame or two the EYES are real, just a subliminal glimmer. But the instant the CAMERA pauses to catch the movement, the illusion, it isn't there.

Nell backs away, staring at the doorways all around her, not knowing which one to take, which one will lead her further away from the banging and back to the others. She pushes through doors into --

INT. HALL OF MIRRORS - NIGHT

-- the hall of mirrors. Nell is halfway across it before she slows, realizing where she is. Bang bang bang bang bang...

Nell darts in among the octagonal, mirror-lined pillars to hide. Moonlight from the opaque skylights far above catch her, casting and re-casting her reflection from mirror to mirror, throughout the room.

Nell is everywhere in plain sight, but hidden by the very infinity of her images.

THE CAMERA shifts from Nell to image of Nell, to another. We no longer see the real Nell. The BANGING grows louder. Nell, emboldened by her invisibility shouts:

NELL

Why is it you want me? What's so special about me?

The BANGING ceases. And then we see the real Nell standing there. She turns around. Her REFLECTIONS around the room all TURN with her.

EXCEPT ONE. For a long moment, we see it but Nell doesn't. And then she does. The REFLECTED NELL stands there, hands hanging, silent.

Nell exhales in shuddering fear. And, then as if in answer to Nell's question, the Reflected Nell MOUTHS as the real Nell whispers with it:

NELL (cont'd)

Welcome home Eleanor...

(beat, louder)

Home? What do you mean home?

With that the Reflected Nell grins and her STOMACH BEGINS TO SWELL before our eyes, pregnant just like Carolyn Crain.

In horror Nell looks down at herself, grabs her own stomach -- nothing. And then Bang BANG BANG. She runs.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE LIBRARY - NIGHT

Nell races down the long hall, bare feet flying, looking over her shoulder as the BANGING hammers after her. She turns right, stumbling into --

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

-- the library where she slips on the marble. She kicks the door shut behind her, scrambles up to her feet. Nell backs away from it realizing where she is.

BANG BANG BANG BANG. The awful sound rises, deafening, outside the door. And suddenly stops. Nell stumbles back across the library. She stands there, finding the presence of mind to turn on a table lamp.

The DOOR stands there shut. Silent. Solid. And then something begins to happen to it. Nell takes an unintended step toward it, unsure of what she's seeing.

The GRAIN of wood in the door seems to MOVE, grain sliding past grain with a god-awful creaking GROAN. And then some sort of thing begins to SWELL in the center of it, protruding, horrifying, reaching out.

Nell is rooted to the floor ten feet away, can't move.

The protrusion sticks out of the center of the door like it's reached its utmost for Nell, but can't get to her. And then in a lightning-fast shot the thing LICKS OUT like an obscene TONGUE and SNAPS back into the door.

It shocks Nell back, careening into the spiral staircase, her horror driving her up and up it, setting the rickety thing swinging.

Nell climbs for her life, higher and higher into the tower, into its dark reaches above, oblivious to the swaying danger.

AT THE TOP

Nell reaches the landing. She lays down, trying to hide as the stair case rolls back and forth beneath her. From up here the door is out of sight. She pants, and... BAM! The door slams open below.

MARROW (OC)

Nell! Nell, are you in here?

Nell gasps in relief, and whimpers.

LUKE (OC)

Look, the stairs!

Nell drags herself up on the hand rail, looking down, smiling an insanely happy smile as Marrow, Luke and Theo rush into view below.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They all react to the sight of Nell at the precarious top, grinning. They think she's there to kill herself. Just like Carolyn Crain.

They all freak out in a chorus of 'Nell! No, Nell!'

MARROW

Nell! Don't move.

Nell couldn't anyway. She just grins madly, tears running down her face. Marrow grabs for the stairs, but they shift under Nell's movement from up above.

LUKE

It's not going to hold your weight.

MARROW

Just stay there, Nell!

Marrow mounts the stairs. The metal support rods sing out under his weight. And the whole thing pitches, rolling around as he goes up. Five feet. Ten feet. Fifteen feet up. The sway gets wilder as he goes.

At twenty feet, with twenty more to go to reach Nell, he stops. The stairs buck, sway out dizzily. He can't go on. Marrow tries to grab the support rods to slow the movement. Luke sees the effect it'll have:

LUKE

Don't!

The sudden change in the period of the standing wave makes the BOTTOM half BULGE out hard. Marrow sees it in time as --

-- the support rods CREASE and then the whole enormous column of steel from where Marrow is standing to the ground BURSTS from its supports.

Luke shoves Theo aside, dodging with her while the bottom half of the stairs spiral out in a massive, deafening COLLAPSE. Steel shatters marble floor halfway across the room, drowning out their shouts and screams.

The top half of the stairs remains, still hanging from the ceiling. Nell grips the railing at the top.

In shock, Marrow hangs by one hand from the last stair. It takes him a second to realize where he is, that his cheek has a long, nasty slice leaking blood. He blinks down at the razor tangle of steel waiting for him below.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

And decides not to die this way. He flails out with his open hand for the bookshelf these stairs were meant to provide access to. He gets a hand on it. Then a foot. Then with a final heave, swings himself over to it.

Shaking, he gets his breath.

MARROW

Nell? Are you up there?

He risks a glance up, and his glasses fall off. He sees her, and continues climbing the bookshelf like a ladder.

Luke and Theo watch from below, horrified. The top half of the stairs SWAYS like a severed umbilical. Marrow is nearly at the top.

Then he's there. Nell stands a mere arm's length from him just on the other side of the railing.

MARROW (cont'd)

Nell. Come on, Nell. You have to climb over and step out to the bookcase.

Nell barely seems to hear him. Instead she looks at the DEFORMING SUPPORT RODS around her.

MARROW (cont'd)

Nell! Now!

She refocuses on him and then gingerly climbs over the railing. She hangs there on the landing, forty feet to the tangled steel below. She looks down...

MARROW (cont'd)

Nell. You will come here now.

Nell looks up at him, hazy. She puts her foot out into thin air. Stretches forward... and reaches the bookcase. She grabs on. Marrow guides her, works an arm around her waist.

With a metallic POP POP POP the support rods spring from their anchors and the rest of the stairwell drops to the ground in a catastrophic shattering of sound.

MARROW (cont'd)

Nell. You're going to come down with me.

Nell opens her eyes, searches Marrow's face, and nods.

INT. THEO'S ROOM - NIGHT

Marrow and Theo stand in the doorway to the shared bathroom watching Luke in the other room finish taping a plastic trash bag over Nell's broken window. Nell lies in her bed, asleep or unconscious, it's impossible to say. Luke finishes, comes over. Marrow's voice is hushed, grim, exhausted.

MARROW

Somebody stays awake the whole time,
keeps an eye on her.

Luke nods, moves past them.

MARROW (cont'd)

There's one other thing.

Theo and Luke both look at him.

MARROW (cont'd)

It's possible there's somebody else
here in the house.

LUKE

What?

MARROW

Watts. Those were his keys Nell
found. I found his driver's license
yesterday. His roommate called a
little while ago and said Watts left
when he was supposed to.

LUKE

Jesus. If you're saying there's some
sort of psycho loose --

MARROW

-- I'm not saying that. He probably
just left before we got here.

THEO

You're a piece of work. Blaming
what's happening to Nell on someone
else. You're responsible for Nell
trying to kill herself. When we get
out of here, you're going to make her
well.

All of Marrow's professional reserve, all of his
authority is gone. He's just a plain, scared man.

INT. NELL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Luke sits on the closed toilet and watches Nell in the adjoining room. Light from the bathroom falls across her fetal, curled form in the bed.

The door to Theo's room is open too. Luke glances over. Theo lies in her bed. Marrow slouches in a chair, breathing heavy, eyes closed.

Luke yawns, settles back against the wall.

INT. THEO'S ROOM - NIGHT

The CAMERA moves past Marrow asleep, finding Theo. Theo breathes hard in the grips of some awful dream.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell lies asleep, the ornate headboard looming behind her, black with its strange plant-like splay of leaves.

Nell draws a deep, sleeping breath... and her EYES OPEN. She lies there, her breath still in her lungs, not moving, but sensing something. A long beat.

When she lets her breath out, we can see it in the cold.

INT. NELL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Luke's head rests solidly on the wall. His eyes are closed, unaware his breath is fogging too.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

Nell lies there afraid to move, afraid to make the faintest sound. From the darkness above WOOD CREAKS. Nell looks up. At first it seems like someone is walking on the floor above.

But it is coming from somewhere nearer than that. It's coming from within the room.

ON THE CEILING

The CARVINGS on the ceiling, the impossibly elaborate woodwork, ARE MOVING. Incredibly slowly, with incredible subtlety: turning inside out, some of the forms lengthening, some shortening. Carvings changing here, changing there - the ceiling coming alive - with some grand design we sense but cannot yet see.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The wood grows out of the ceiling, eating its way down into the tall bed POSTERS as Nell lies there paralyzed. It crawls down the posters, straining the sinewy baroque curves, swelling them...

The CREAKING begins from the darkness of the wall opposite Nell. Nell inclines her head to see.

Out of the wall two enormous BULGES grow, side by side.

From behind Nell, now. The headboard GROANS, its shapes moving, the fan-like plant designs thickening and SPLAYING wide.

Nell can't move, her mind refusing to understand what's going on. The bulges in the wall DROOP to the floor.

And then we BEGIN TO SEE: they are like a pair of KNEES.

The POSTERS of the bed flex like ARMS. The shapes in the HEADBOARD, it's HANDS.

Understanding starts to show in Nell's eyes. She looks up at the ceiling. And now all the movement, the design behind the awful transformation of the ceiling is clear.

It is a HEAD. A visage of madness, of absolute horror, eyelids sealing shut its blind face.

Silence. Nell's breath comes ragged. Unable to speak, but trying to call out.

ON THE HEAD. The EYES OPEN. A SCREAM tears out of Nell's throat.

INT. NELL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Luke is shocked awake in time to see Nell's room CONVULSE on her just before the DOOR SLAMS in his face.

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT

The entire ROOM RAMS itself at Nell, jolting her hard into the headboard. THUMBS FOLD OUT of the woodwork, pinning her by the shoulders against it. As the room lowers itself toward her, she SCREAMS out of her mind.

INT. NELL'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Marrow lunges into the bathroom, thrown from sleep as Luke stares in impotent shock. Theo is there behind Marrow an instant later.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW

What is it?

Luke can't make any words come out. Marrow shoves him aside, grabs the doorknob and thrashes at it.

MARROW (cont'd)

Help me!

He braces Luke up, and then they lunge together, shouldering the door. It splinters out of its frame --

INT. NELL'S ROOM - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

-- and stumble into Nell's room. Marrow's mouth opens. Luke stands speechless. They're stricken in their steps by the sight before them:

Nell SCREAMS, held by the headboard as the deformed ceiling dips over her, the room THRUSTING at her rhythmically.

LUKE

Oh, Jesus.

Marrow recovers, starts for Nell. He reaches out for her, and the FACE in the ceiling turns on him, ceases its terrible bucking. The look stops Marrow in his tracks.

He looks up into its gaping face and knows its presence. It's real. Somehow, it is Crain.

Luke appears from out of nowhere on the other side of the bed and SMASHES off one of the wooden thumbs with the ceramic toilet tank cover. Nell screams in surprise, but Theo has her by the hand and out of the bed.

The head turns to them. They flee. Marrow backs away in awe and fear, tripping as he crosses the threshold to the bathroom. He gets up and runs.

INT. GRAND ENTRY - NIGHT

Luke and Theo drag Nell down the stairs into the entry. Marrow brings up the rear. They retreat as a group across the entry. Marrow stops, looks back up the stairs and listens.

MARROW

Wait a second! Wait!

All there is are the sounds of Nell, Luke and Theo making for the door. The House is silent.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUKE

No way, man.

Luke gets the door open, goes out. But Nell pauses, stopping Theo with her.

The House is quiet. Marrow's hand still outstretched.

Nell looks around the room. There are heads everywhere, faces: animal heads, humans, gods, all staring from the woodwork, the carpets everything.

Nell's breath comes faster. Theo looks to her. Marrow turns, noticing her distress. Her voice limp, disoriented, yet aware...

NELL

They're all in here. All the ones he killed. He wants me in here.

THEO

Nell, stop it!

Nell's eyes roll up in her head. She turns to Theo. Her voice drops, horrific.

NELL

Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater has a wife and wants to keep her.

Theo REACTS, stepping back in terror. Suddenly Marrow is there between them. Nell passes out, and he grabs her.

MARROW

Get out.

EXT. GATE - DAY

Four cars sit behind the massive, locked gate, as far from Hill House as possible.

Marrow paces past the fence, staring out, the road beyond leading out of this place, so close...

Luke digs with a pen knife at the marble footing below the gate. No easy way under it. He stands and gazes up at the razor wire in the spikes twenty feet up. There's no way to climb this.

Theo gets out of her sports car, checks her watch.

THEO

Where the hell are the Dudleys?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW
Should've been here hours ago.

THEO
There's got to be another key. Maybe
back up there.

Luke stares at the suggestion. Marrow doesn't even spare her a glance.

MARROW
Think we'd ever find it?

LUKE
There's that ladder in the landing.

They all look at the glass mortared in the top of the stone walls.

MARROW
For that matter, my cell phone's in there too.

Theo turns and walks back to Nell's car.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Nell sits in the passenger seat of her car, wrapped in her jacket. She stares out at the gate, at Luke and Marrow consulting. Theo appears in the window, squatting beside her. She smiles in.

THEO
You okay, babe?

Nell nods, smiles back, perfectly calm. Lucid. Yet something about her is very different. Very not right.

EXT. GATE - DAY

Marrow checks his watch. Four o'clock. When he looks up from it Nell is right there. She startles him.

NELL
Why did you bring me here?

Marrow shakes his head, doesn't fully understand.

NELL (cont'd)
Why did you call me and tell me to look in the paper for the ad?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW

Nell. What are you talking about?

(beat)

I never called you.

Nell stares, dismayed, but Marrow is dead serious. Her dismay becomes a cold, terrifying understanding, and she turns and stares back up the drive to the House.

NELL

Then who called me?

Luke comes out of the brush to the side of one of the gates. He shakes his head, gestures at the wall.

LUKE

Goes way the hell back, all the way around the property.

MARROW

Okay.

They turn, look back down the drive at Nell's car.

MARROW (cont'd)

Okay, it's going to be dark soon, and no sign of the Dudleys. Nell --

LUKE

-- how much is this car worth?

EXT. GATE - DAY

Theo pulls Nell away from the drive. Marrow stands back from Nell's car where Luke belts in behind the wheel.

Luke eases the car forward to the gate. He advances until the car's bumper makes contact. And then without further ado, REVS the engine.

The Buick grinds into the heavy steel bars. The chain tightens around the two halves of the gate, but shows not the slightest strain.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Luke grimaces, shifts into low, pours on the gas.

EXT. GATE - DAY

The car fishes back and forth against the gate, hurling a shower of gravel on the other cars off to the side of the road. Marrow, Nell and Theo move back.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

One of the Buick's headlights breaks. The grill mashes in. For a long moment the car struggles against the Gate. No good. Luke eases up.

Theo looks at Marrow. Luke puts the car in reverse.

LUKE

Get the hell out of the way!

They back way up. Luke vanishes up the drive in the car. And then the Buick comes around the corner, accelerating, slicing down the gravel road.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Luke sits way back in the seat, grits his teeth, floors it, aiming at the gate...

EXT. GATE - DAY

The car SMASHES into it... and is STOPPED, collapsing, twisting in a deafening hail of steel and glass.

The massive gate is BENT outward, severely, but IMPASSIBLE.

INT. NELL'S CAR - DAY

Luke gasps for the seat belt, the wind knocked out of him, steering column pushed to his chest. Marrow runs up outside. Luke sees him, sees he's not getting any closer than ten feet, and he's looking back at the gas tank.

Luke gets the seatbelt off, tries to open the door but it's warped shut. He struggles to get out from behind the wheel. Gas shoots out of the fuel pump onto the shattered window. He knows he's in trouble.

MARROW (cont'd)

Hurry. There's a lot of gas.

Finally Luke gets free of the wheel. It's agonizing to watch... The passenger door is jammed shut too.

He squirms into the back seat. The rear doors are in the same condition as the front. But the rear window is blown out. He crawls out through it onto the trunk.

EXT. GATE - DAY

Marrow hurries around the back of the car, staying clear of the lake of gas spreading about it. Luke rolls off. Marrow helps him up, and gets him away a safe distance.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LUKE
I'm okay. Okay. Just my chest. Just
my wind knocked out.

Marrow looks up at the gate. It is even more impassible than before with the gasoline-saturated wreck in it. No way to try another break-out either.

EXT. WALL - DUSK

Marrow and Luke, tire irons and hub caps in hand, hurry along the base of the massive, moss-covered stone wall. Theo leads Nell along after them. Nell looks about, staring off through the trees.

HER POV:

Hill House stares down from its heights. The shadows of its towers growing longer in the last light of day.

RESUME

The others look up, and they all know it'll be dark soon.

MARROW
Okay.

Marrow suddenly gestures to a spot at the base of the wall, and he and Luke drop to it.

LUKE
Wall this high, footing's probably
four, five feet.

Marrow passes Theo a hub cap and starts digging with the tire iron...

EXT. HILL HOUSE - DUSK

The House's many windows, gables and doors darken in the falling gloom, like mouths open in screams which no one can hear. Or almost no one.

EXT. WALL - DUSK

Luke, Marrow and Theo dig frantically in an open pit four feet deep. Luke suddenly ducks down, calls out:

LUKE
We've got it. Bottom of the footing.

Marrow thrusts out his hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW

Nell, hand me the jack.

But Marrow's hand just remains stuck out there. He turns around. The others do too.

Nell's coat is lying there at the base of a tree where she'd been sitting. Right next to the jack.

No Nell. Luke and Theo look up. Mute dread. Marrow scrambles up out of the pit. No Nell anywhere.

MARROW (cont'd)

Oh, no.

EXT. HILL HOUSE - DUSK

Nell stands there in her nightshirt before the outstretched car-port hand of Hill House, looking up into its vast, sick, gaping maw.

She glides toward it. Its shadow consumes her.

EXT. WALL - NIGHT

Luke rages as Marrow throws on his coat, grabs a tire iron.

LUKE

Maybe she went back for the phone, man! Maybe that's all!

MARROW

She doesn't know where it is.

Theo grabs up her coat and stands with Marrow.

MARROW (cont'd)

I'm going to get her. You can stay out here by yourself and keep digging if you want, or you can come with us, grab Nell and the phone real fast, and save us a long walk once we're out.

Luke hates it, HATES it, but doesn't want to stay alone. He gets out of the pit and grabs up a tire iron...

INT. GRAND ENTRY - DUSK

The massive black door swings silently into the dim, vaulted entry. Marrow pauses there, looks about, and then enters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Luke and Theo follow. Moving carefully across the floor as if afraid to awaken the House. Luke takes off his jacket, wads it up in front of the door as a doorstep.

Marrow eyes doors opening left and right. Through them, rooms let on to rooms let on to more rooms. Nell could've taken any one of them.

Marrow gestures to the stairs rising up before them. Luke closes his eyes, getting control, and follows Marrow and Theo to them.

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - DUSK

They stay to the outside of the stairs, padding silently up, trying to get a glimpse of the floor above. It's shrouded in darkness.

They turn at the landing, eyes riveted to the top of the stairs. They start up.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, NORTH WING - DUSK

Marrow, Luke and Theo pause at the top of the stairs and peer down both long, empty directions of the hallway.

Then Marrow turns toward Nell and Theo's room. A stray slipper lost by Theo, the broken toilet lid still lying there on the floor... in front of the open door.

The rooms draw nearer, closer. Not even the sound of their breathing.

ON THE DOOR

Ajar. Marrow places the tire iron against it and pushes. The room lies in silent disarray. Normal disarray. The bed normal. The walls and ceiling normal. No Nell.

RESUME

Marrow and Theo REACT and enter the room. Luke lingers out in the hall a moment. And just as he steps in after them we HOLD on the long, empty hall --

-- and a FIGURE glides across. Far down at the other end. She disappears. It was Nell.

INT. DARK HALLWAY - DUSK

Nell comes down a long, dark hallway, past the gaping door to empty rooms, calm, in control. Carved faces watching her pass.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE LOCKED ROOM - DUSK

Nell stands before the threshold of the horrific doors, once locked, now inexplicably OPEN. The mythological frieze on the door split in half, a world cut in two, a seal broken. Like something has come out of its tomb.

Nell steps into the blackness and fades in the shadows.

INT. THEO'S ROOM - DUSK

Marrow comes out of the bathroom, joining Theo by the window next to her bed. Luke stands in the doorway.

MARROW

Was sure she'd be in here.

He looks at Theo. Where should they look now? Theo looks back out the window.

HER POV

The final red sliver of sun descends into the cold autumn hills. It glints off the greenhouse.

THEO (OC)

There. Sun's almost down.

RESUME

Theo turns back to Marrow. They don't have much time.

INT. GREENHOUSE - DUSK

Marrow, Luke and Theo enter the greenhouse, the heavy growth forbidding in the gathering dusk. There could be anything in here. They spread out on the parallel walkways.

THEO

Nell?

She could be anywhere in here, in the foliage, hidden, and they'd never find her. They reach the transept, turn down it toward the statue of Crain at the end looming white in the dusk.

Theo squints at it. It doesn't look right. Something about it is different. But she's the only one who sees it as Marrow and Luke peer into the bushes on either side of the walkways.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Dead silence. As Theo nears the end, the gloom gives up its secrets and the statue's horrific change stares at her. Theo SCREAMS.

The men are rooted to the floor. For protruding from the alabaster are REAL HUMAN HANDS. Erupted from Crain's stomach is a MAN'S HEAD, black blood staining white stone.

She grabs Marrow who, with Luke, stands there horrified by the man-imbedded statue leering at them like some ghastly Hindu demon.

MARROW

Watts. It's Watts.

LUKE

We gotta get the phone. Gotta get it, call the cops.

Marrow pulls Theo away from the awful sight, and they run from the greenhouse. Luke lingers just a beat longer, appalled, before he takes off after them.

INT. LOCKED ROOM - DUSK

Nell stands there in the darkness, sensing the expanse of the room, turning... and kicking something on the floor.

It is a wooden toy train. Then she sees a rocking horse by her feet. It is a NURSERY. Turn-of-the-century.

And as Nell's eyes adjust, as she tries to see what else is in here in the dark, she begins to make out WHITE SHROUDED SHAPES.

Against the wall. A bed covered in a sheet. A table beside it. A HAND BELL. A CANE.

Just like Nell's sick room at home.

Nell realizes it, covers her mouth.

The furniture is in EXACTLY the same position, though the sheets covering the pieces are stained, FAR OLDER.

And on the wall, something in a frame is covered with a piece of sheet.

Nell approaches it in trepidation and removes the cloth.

For a long beat, all we see is her face as it goes slack. Understanding.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The framed thing is a stitchery. It says:

A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING IN ITS PLACE.

Just like the one at home.

INT. STUDY - DUSK

Marrow barges into the study, Luke and Theo behind him. He moves over to the desk, searching behind it. Marrow looks up -

MARROW
My briefcase...

It's not there. Glass-eyed ANIMAL HEADS watch them tear through the room looking for it. Luke is about to freak, but Marrow cuts him off.

MARROW (cont'd)
Okay. Not here.

LUKE
Think! Where'd you leave it?

Marrow stops, calms himself, and then opens his eyes.

MARROW
Right. Nell was in here. I took it out. It's up in my room.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLWAY, NORTH WING - DUSK

They hustle down the hallway, not bothering to check the rooms as they go.

LUKE
We're never gonna find her in here.
Especially if she doesn't want to be found.

Marrow and Theo look at him. It's what they've been thinking, but haven't had the courage to say. Theo stops suddenly. Turns around. The men notice, and pause.

LUKE (cont'd)
What --

Theo puts up her hand, stopping him. Then they hear it. What she is hearing. Faint. Floating down the hall. Nell's TUNE. It doesn't sound right, but it's hard to tell as it's coming from so far away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

They look at each other, start out after it.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLS (VARIOUS) - DUSK

Theo leads them through hallway after hallway, winding through the house, trying to follow the sound. They follow it around a final corner --

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE LOCKED ROOM - DUSK (CONTINUOUS)

-- and stop. Abruptly. Just as abruptly as the tune has. Theo, Marrow and Luke stand at the end of the dark hallway. They stare at the gaping doors to the nursery at the far end.

And instead of Nell's tune, there's a repetitive CREAK. CREAK. CREAK. Coming from the room.

In rising dread, Theo starts forward.

It takes Marrow and Luke a moment to come after her. The CREAKING gets louder, unnerving.

They get to the doors, Theo first. She pushes them wide.

INT. LOCKED ROOM - DUSK

They stop there, staring into the shadows.

THEO

Nell?

And there in the darkness, a shape against the shadows, is Nell. Hunched over something, turning a crank of some sort. The cause of the repetitive CREAKING.

MARROW

Nell.

Nell straightens from whatever it is she was doing and turns to them. Theo steps toward her, afraid for her.

THEO

What'd you come back for, babe?

NELL

Just had to be sure.

LUKE

Come on, Jesus! Let's go!

Marrow shuts him up with a vicious gesture, stays back himself as Theo approaches Nell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

THEO

Let's go, hon. Don't you want to go back to your little apartment where you can hear the buoy out in the harbor when the wind is just right?

Nell smiles at Theo. She's holding something in her hand, something connected with the thing she was cranking.

NELL

Oh, Theo. You know I don't have an apartment.

THEO

Then let's go get you one.

Nell's smile softens even more. Her voice is reassuring.

NELL

Don't worry about me, Theo. I'm wanted. Right here. I'm home.

A CHILL of fear cuts through Theo as Nell looks deep into her eyes.

NELL (cont'd)

After all...

(beat)

I'm family.

The thing in Nell's hand is a NEEDLE, the thing she's been cranking an ANCIENT PHONOGRAPH. She lowers the needle to the spinning record. And HER TUNE, the one she hums all the time, begins to play.

The others are frozen where they stand. Marrow's mind reels at the implications of what he's hearing.

MARROW

No.

NELL

My mother used to hum this to me. Like her mother hummed it to her. And her mother, hummed it to her. Right here.

Nell turns back. The others stand there speechless.

NELL (cont'd)

It's me he wants. Cause after a fashion, I'm the one who got away.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NELL (cont'd)

(beat)

You better go. It's going to be dark
any minute...

And that, finally, galvanizes the others into action. Marrow sweeps past Theo, grabs Nell hard by the arm, and swings her for the door.

MARROW

Come on.

NELL

No --

THEO

Please, Nell, just see us out.

Luke closes in on Nell, with Marrow, and there's nothing she can do but let herself be pulled along.

INT. 2ND FLOOR HALLS (VARIOUS) - DUSK

They rush through the halls, silent, grim, as fast as Nell allows.

The LIGHT in the windows FAILS before our eyes as we go, MENACING SHADOWS being born from the walls, the doorways, the strange shapes of things along the way.

INT. GRAND STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Down the stairs they come, Luke out in front now, bounding down a half flight ahead. Marrow and Theo support Nell between them.

Nell looks up at the hooded painting of Crain, but is spun around and taken down the next flight.

INT. GRAND ENTRY - NIGHT

Nell, Marrow and Theo reach the bottom of the stairs and pause. Luke is halfway across to the front doors, looking back to make sure they're with him --

-- and Nell digs her heels in, jerking Marrow and Theo to a stop. She stares. The others follow her gaze.

She's looking at the front door. Open.

Outside, it is without doubt, full-blown night. They are too late.

NELL

In the night...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The DOOR BAMS SHUT with a concussion that rocks the entire room, sweeping Luke's jacket under it. The HANDLES TURN, LOCK DOWN.

Stunned. All stunned.

And with that, Hill House awakens.

A RUSH OF AIR. The House EXHALES. Silence. And then CREEEEAK. They cast their eyes back up the stairs. BUMP. BUMP.

Far-off sounds, hair-raising, of infinite variety, carry down the halls.

NELL (cont'd)
In the dark.

Luke YELLS and throws himself at the doors. He grabs them. Marrow runs over to help him.

MARROW
Get the jacket out! It's jamming it!

They struggle at the handles, try to free the jacket jammed in the frame. Marrow shoves the wedge of the tire iron between the doors and PRIES. Luke grabs hold with him, but together they BEND the iron lip. Marrow throws the useless thing down and stands back.

Marrow SHOULDER BLOCKS the door hard, bounces off. Luke joins him, and they SLAM it together. But this door is MASSIVE. There's no way.

LUKE
No you bastard! Break!

He roundhouse kicks it, hurts himself. Nell and Theo grab each other. Marrow spots the settee off to the side, starts to pick it up. Luke grabs the other end.

Together they rush the doors. IMPACT. It's hard. Wood shatters, and Luke goes down in pain. The doors are scratched. That's it.

Marrow looks around, puts his hand up to shush everyone. The HOUSE MOANS, the BUMPING growing, searching.

MARROW
Come on.

He rushes down the hall, Luke right beside him, Nell and Theo in their wake.

INT. GROUND FLOOR HALL, OFF ENTRY - DAY

Marrow skids around a corner past the kitchen.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

Marrow sprints down the hall. DOORS to the rear portico on the left. He and Luke try them. No use. Shoulder them. Just as hard as the main doors. Nell and Theo come around the corner, hand-in-hand.

Marrow lurches across the hall and flings open the door --

INT. GREAT HALL - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

-- to the Great Hall. Big windows all along the wall. Huge windows. They all follow him in, Luke's fear turning into a vicious smile as he sees the towering windows.

Nell and Theo are right behind in time to see Luke and Marrow scooping up a table and chair respectively.

LUKE

Watch out!

The men rush the same window, side-by-side, and let the heavy pieces of furniture fly from ten feet.

The WINDOW SHATTERS, dozens of panes blown out into the darkness beyond. But the metal LATTICE remains, the chair's legs stuck in it.

Marrow and Luke pause, taken back a beat. They hustle over to it. Theo and Nell stand a few feet back.

Luke grabs the chair, levers it, tries to pry open the metal. Marrow reaches through, knocking loose glass, trying to find some sort of handle on the other side.

THEO

Hurry!

Theo watches the door behind them in fear. But Nell...

Nell stares at the dark void of the FIREPLACE.

Luke pries at the half inch of metal between him and freedom. It bends but won't break. Marrow, his shoulder against the window, arm all the way out, fumbles for a latch, anything.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MARROW
They don't open!

Marrow slips on the broken glass and catches hold of the lattice SEVERING his ring and little finger. With a startled cry of pain, he lands on the floor. His HAND is TORN, spouting blood.

MARROW (cont'd)
Ohjesus my hand.

Nell and Theo fall to the floor to help him. Luke throws down the chair, giving up on the window.

LUKE
Shit!

As Luke and Theo race from window to window, looking for a place to break out, Marrow moans, and Nell grips his injured hand in hers. Fast, like she was born a trauma doctor, Nell clamps off the blood with her fingers.

NELL
Give me your shoelace.

Marrow tugs at his shoe, in shock, and looks at Nell. She's calm. Terrifyingly calm. And in that moment, he realizes she's not out of her mind. She just understands things beyond what he could possibly begin to understand.

MARROW
What'll happen to us, Nell?

NELL
He'll put us in his pumpkin shell and there he'll keep us very well.

Nell cinches the shoelace tight around his wrist.

Luke YELLS at the house, scared, furious, his movements jerking at adrenaline speeds.

LUKE
Come on out, then, if you won't let us go! Get out here, you sonofabitch!
(beat)
Maybe this'll get your attention!

Marrow, Nell and Theo look up as Luke stops at the far end of the room and flicks a LIGHTER out of his pocket.

MARROW
Luke!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Before anyone can stop him, he LIGHTS one of the towering curtains on fire.

He races from one to the next, lighting them. Theo and Nell help Marrow up, back away as Luke shoots by.

All the curtains along the wall of windows are ON FIRE. BLAZING up like torches.

At last, his rage spent, heaving, he moves to join the others at the center of the room. They stare at him, appalled, afraid. Knowing he has done something wrong.

Luke stops. Maybe fifteen feet away. He sees their looks.

LUKE .

What?

Nell looks over at the burning curtains. Heat breaks panes up at the top of the windows. Flames lick out at the carved ceiling, blackening the figures there. Its ruddy light casting deep shadows throughout the room.

LUKE (cont'd)

We'll get out after this wing burns down. Come on, let's go.

But there's no need. As the curtains burn, they're consuming themselves too fast to ignite the walls or ceiling. They all realize it. And as the last flaming scraps of curtain fall to the floor and go out, there is utter silence.

Luke looks at them helplessly. An awful, impending beat. And then without warning, the huge PERSIAN CARPET he's standing on JERKS. Luke falls. Theo lets out a cry.

Luke is stunned by the drop. The carpet slides fast for the FIREPLACE. Luke seems to understand what's happening, tries to get off the carpet too late.

The carpet whips up to the hearth and stops, sending Luke flying into the fireplace.

The others can do nothing but watch as Luke lays there on the ashdrop. A long moment. We're expecting him to burst into flames or something. But he recovers enough to get up, realize where he is.

NELL

Get out!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Luke has time to give her a look.

And then the LION'S HEAD FLUE drops open behind him. Luke looks back into its iron eyes --

-- and with SHOCKING SPEED the FLUE snaps shut again, taking Luke's head off his body.

The decapitated corpse falls back in the fireplace like a puppet with its strings cut.

Nell, Marrow and Theo stand there. Not sure of what just happened, their minds unable to accept it.

A sound comes up in Theo's throat. A sob. A horrified whimper. Marrow and Nell stand there speechless for a long moment. It's as if saying the obvious will make it real:

MARROW
It just killed him.

BANG. The blood-splattered LION'S HEAD drops open. Luke's head falls out.

Theo SCREAMS. Nell backs away with Marrow, almost has the presence of mind to leave, but --

-- CLANG! The ASH DROP OPENS. The sudden sound stops them in their tracks.

As they watch, it's as if the House INHALES. And then BOOM!

Out of the ash drop EXPLODES a hail of BONES, SKULLS, FLYING ASH.

Nell, Theo and Marrow throw themselves back against the wall as TONS OF INCINERATED HUMAN REMAINS vomit out the fireplace, blasting across the floor, knocking over furniture with shocking violence. Skulls bounce over wood. Hundreds of them.

Nell covers her face as shattered bits of bone, loose teeth pelt her and the others.

A CLOUD OF GRAY ASH hangs in the air, over everything.

Silence. They're backed against the wall farthest from the chimney by the sheer mass of remains, the full scope of Crain's horror. Paralyzed. Except for Nell.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

NELL

Come on.

They edge their way for the door, gingerly stepping over blackened skulls, shattered arm bones as if they might reach out and grab them. It's painstaking. Silent. And then they're to the door.

INT. HALL OUTSIDE GREAT ROOM - NIGHT

Nell leads Marrow and Theo out into the hall.

THEO

Oh God oh God there's no way out! We can't get out! What do we do?

NELL.

We play hide-n-seek.

Marrow stares at her, trembling. He glances around at the winding labyrinth of house. Impossible.

MARROW

We can't hide in here! We won't make it til morning.

Nell looks at him, pitying. Infinitely sad.

NELL

I know.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

They enter the dining room.

THEO

Under here!

Nell and Marrow crawl after her under the table.

UNDER THE TABLE

Theo grips Nell's hand. Marrow faces them, panting. For a long moment all we can hear is their breath. Silence.

And then from far off, a BUMP. They stare at each other. GROAN. CREAK. A presence is moving through the House.

Nell watches the door from under the table. Her breath begins to FOG. The shivering creak of wood trembles a painting on the wall, moves along the wall, and seems to go by.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Then like a rush of air, the presence is gone, the groaning ascending away into the heights of the House.

Theo looks to Nell. Their breath no longer fogs. Then Nell sees a pool of BLOOD from Marrow's hand well over and begin to run along a seam in the floorboards.

RESUME

POV from the ceiling, through the chandelier of the tiny black rivulet making its way out from under the table.

ANOTHER ANGLE

as if drawn by the scent, the ceiling around the ornate, wild-limbed CHANDELIER swells. The swelling moves down into the arms of the chandelier, brass flexing, liquefying, becoming ALIVE.

UNDER THE TABLE

Nell, sensing something wrong, but unable to see, looks from the blood to Marrow. He sees it too and begins to dab at the pool with his sleeve.

RESUME

Silently the 500-pound chandelier writhes on its chain, and then the chain starts to LENGTHEN. It lowers like some insane, horrific spider, and settles onto the table.

UNDER THE TABLE

Nell hears something, looks out, and in a BRASS floor vase sees the distorted reflection of the thing on top of the table.

NELL

No!

RESUME

Chairs fly as Nell, Theo and Marrow roll out from under the table. The chandelier JERKS at Marrow, limbs flailing horribly. Theo screams, but the thing can't get Marrow as the chain holding it to the ceiling won't let it reach him.

They scramble up, slam at the door, and the chandelier mindlessly flings itself at them.

INT. 1ST FLOOR HALL - NIGHT

Nell slams the door right before it hits. The wood cracks from its blow. They take off running.

Nell leads Marrow and Theo down the dark hallway, the twisted woodwork along the walls frozen, but seeming poised to reach out, trip someone, grab a sleeve.

It is a nightmare House. Doing what it was made for.

The BUMPING at the door they've left behind seems to vanish up and into the ceiling. The BUMPING gives chase, on the floor above. Nell keeps looking back. And every time she does the BUMPING seems to get more firm, MORE LIKE A FOOTSTEP.

NELL

Hurry!

The FOOTSTEPS upstairs come faster; whatever's up there moving better, more naturally.

Theo and Marrow turn LEFT through an archway.

Nell looks back and up at the ceiling. The thing's moving fast up there.

She dodges toward the archway where Theo and Marrow went, and STOPS. It's a wall. Solid wall. There's no archway here! Nell backs away in fear. Alone.

INT. HALLWAY OF TABLES - NIGHT

Theo and Marrow race down a long hallway lined with carpets paintings and TABLES of all varieties: pier tables, sideboards, tilt-top tables and so on. Marrow glances over his shoulder and stops.

MARROW

Nell.

Theo stops with him. They have time to realize they've lost her, and then the FLOOR at the far end of the hallway GROANS and swells.

And just as quickly, it vanishes. Marrow gives Theo a look. They start to back-track, but the floor at this end of the hall rises up. Theo and Marrow stop, watch.

The floorboards creak and undulate back and forth across the hallway, as if something under the floor is searching back and forth like a dog.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

It's at the other end of the hall too. In a panic, Theo climbs up on a heavy pier table. Marrow climbs onto a long, narrow side boy across from her.

The LIGHTS GO OUT. Everything below waist-level, on the floor is steeped in complete darkness.

Now a SLIDING SOUND. Slipping over the floor, dragging itself. Unseen.

Theo covers her mouth as FROST seeps out through the gaps between her fingers and crouches there in silence atop the table. Nearby tables rock as the wood rises underneath them.

Theo can't take it anymore. She forces herself to stand on the table. She unscrews her eyes, looks across at Marrow who gestures to the far end of the hall. Theo glances at the line of tables that will take her there.

And steps off onto the next one. Hesitates. No reaction from the sliding thing on the floor below. Marrow follows suit on the other side of the hall. Theo steps off to the next table, a tiny one, and its rickety legs threaten to throw her. She steps off it fast to the next table, but as the tiny table topples over behind her --

-- Marrow's foot stops it. For a beat he straddles the darkness, then tips the table back to its upright.

Theo gives him a look, and then in the silence, steps off to the next table. Marrow does the same. One table after another. The SLIDING SOUND seems to follow. Marrow looks back. Whatever it is, is right there.

Marrow jumps to the floor and runs, swinging Theo off the last table by the door and OUT.

INT. WINTER PARLOR - NIGHT

Nell passes the towering French windows in a winter parlor. Long white gauze curtains flow down from the high ceiling. One of them is FLUTTERING in a breeze from AN OPEN FANLIGHT.

Nell stops. The Fanlight is definitely open, big enough for someone to squeeze through if one could climb the twelve feet to it. Nell turns her back on the window, calls out:

NELL
Jim! Theo!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

No answer, and as she steps toward the CAMERA, hoping for them to answer, the CURTAIN BILLOWS OUT behind her, and in its movement, becomes for a split second, the image of CRAIN, GRABBING for her.

Nell, oblivious, steps just OUT OF REACH, and as the breeze fails, the contours and patterns of the billowing curtain dissolve into chaos. Nell glances back at it, just sees curtain, and looks up at the open window.

She turns from it, determined, and starts out to find her friends.

INT. FIRST FLOOR HALLS - NIGHT

Nell feels her way through the dark, interconnecting halls, lit only by the stray moonlight. A far-off GROAN carries through the halls. Nell steps back into a niche in the hall. She peers down the hall.

CLOSE ON THE CARVED WALLS

by her head, an elaborate scene of hunters, satyrs, nymphs and goddesses. The black, slick-looking wood begins to move in oily silence.

Nell doesn't see the scores of TINY ARMS fold out of the wall, horrifyingly alive, TINY HANDS reaching for her hair. We're screaming as they almost have her... and Nell steps away.

RESUME

Nell moves out of the niche. Down the hallway is a door at the far end, ajar.

The CREAKING GROAN comes from somewhere upstairs and down the hall. Nell looks up, then moves for the door.

INT. GRAND ENTRY - NIGHT

The door lets into the Grand Entry. It's open A CRACK. The CAMERA pushes closer, finding Nell's EYE.

NELL'S POV:

The entry towers in terrible darkness, the arms of the double staircase reaching up to the landing, then joining as one as they reverse direction up to the next floor. Only a sliver of gilded wood, the frame of the painting of Crain, glints in the darkness on the landing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The terrified animal heads on the balustrade, eyes turned up the stairs, flashing in fear.

IN THE LOW-RELIEF WALL CARVINGS:

Cherubim, afraid, clasp hands.

Gods and men pay unwilling witness to what is now coming down the stairs, along with...

NELL

All we can see is the glisten of her eye. And then...
CREAK... CREAK... CREAK...

THE UPPER FLIGHT OF STAIRS

strains under the weight of the thing coming down, over our heads, coming down, down... and now at the landing. The sound stops.

NELL'S BREATH

escapes through the crack in the door, visible in the cold.

ON THE LANDING

Darkness against darkness. Something BLOCKS the glint of the gilded frame up there. Something huge. A beat.

Then it GLIDES down out of the darkness, fast, FILLING THE STAIRS. It's almost as if a cloud has passed in front of the moon outside, sweeping the scene with impenetrable shadow. But it's not.

Before our eyes the most subtle variation of shadow begins to bring FORM out of the darkness. And then it is there.

It hulks there at the bottom of the stairs.

NELL

can't breath. Trembles.

THE SHAPE

stands there, tall, eight or nine feet, in the proportions of an enormous man with his head bowed, shoulders stooped. Black. As if covered with a black sheet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

NELL

goes rigid in horror, not breathing, not seeing anything but the awful presence. She is spellbound. BANG.

A door at the far end of the hall under the stairs opens, and Theo and Marrow come out.

NELL

No.

The Shape SNAPS around to them, Theo and Marrow unaware of it. And in a flash the Shape is moving at them.

Nell steps out from behind the door in horror.

Theo and Marrow look up.. It's a sight that makes the blood stop. The Shape rushes them like a bounding beast, vanishing as it crosses the pools of moonlight, reforming darker as it hits shadow again, its wake like a shockwave cracking panelling, demolishing furniture.

Everything it touches seems to mutate, turn inside out, or come alive for a second.

Theo SCREAMS. Marrow stumbles back. And then Nell's voice rings out:

NELL (OC) (cont'd)

Is this where she bashed your brains in?

The onrushing presence STOPS. Seems to turn its attention back to --

-- Nell, standing there before the towering front doors.

NELL (cont'd)

When you came in the door? The last thing you expected?

The SHAPE slowly glides back down the passage toward her.

NELL (cont'd)

Good ol' great grandma Carolyn. Saved her lover's child.

Nell shows no fear. There's a ferocious edge to her voice.

NELL (cont'd)

Guess she wasn't so innocent like you thought.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

NELL (cont'd)

Guess she decided she wouldn't put up
with your shit anymore. Showed you
who was boss. Tough little bitch, eh?

The SHAPE hovers there under the stairs. Silent. Air
and shadow distort around it. The wooden balustrades
ripple on either side. The carved animal heads on the
newel posts loll back and forth, alive then not-alive.
Pieces of furniture try to animate themselves but can't
find limbs that work.

NELL (cont'd)

If you think she was bad, kill me and
see what happens to you. Come on.
Let's find out who's gonna be boss
around here now...

The SHAPE SCREAMS, knocking everyone out of their seats.
It flies across the floor at Nell as Nell OPENS WIDE HER
ARMS in an EMBRACE.

It's ON HER, but just as it seems to hit, it SPLITS like
she went right through it or it jumped over her. The
SHAPE and all the debris in its wake IMPACTS deep in the
enormous doors.

The carved WOODWORK seems to suck it all in cracking,
groaning. And then all the SCREAMS are cut off.

Nell stands there with her arms spread. A long moment.

She opens her eyes.

And then the woodwork LASHES OUT, grabs her from behind,
slams her back against the doors. THE BLOW HAS KILLED
HER.

We feel her bones break as she crumples, is drawn into
the woodwork.

And without a drop of blood. Without a trace. Without a
thing to have ever marked her being here, Nell is gone.

Theo lets out a horrified cry. Marrow steps out of the
shadows in terror and awe.

THEO

NELL!

The HOUSE INHALES. And BOOM!

The front doors blast wide. Every door in the entry
slams open.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MARROW

Come on!

He shoves Theo for the front door.

EXT. HILL HOUSE - NIGHT

Marrow and Theo dash out to the drive. They look back. Every window and every door in the House is open.

And then every door and every window BAMS shut. Final.

Theo begins to cry. Marrow steers her for the road.

INT. BANQUET HALL - DAY

ON MARROW'S HAND

Long-healed, scarred where his fingers were taken. He holds a speech. Tapping nervously.

RESUME

He's sitting behind a podium in a posh banquet room before a well-heeled **AUDIENCE** as an **EMCEE** introduces him.

EMCEE

...and so, ladies and gentlemen, for showing us the keys to mass delusional behavior, for bringing light to an aspect of the human condition which has plagued us for centuries, I present Adelson Professor of Psychology, James Marrow, this year's Kippinger Award winner...

The Audience **APPLAUDS** as Marrow gets to his feet. And it is only the most observant that catches the look on his face: a sick look. Sick at the jaded irony of it all.

EXT. BERKSHIRE HILLS - DAY (AERIAL)

The summer hills lie green, passing fast underneath. Clearings loom out of the forest ahead. And there, its sprawling stone in the sunshine, rises Hill House.

EXT. HILL HOUSE - DAY

Sun plays off the windows. Bright. Shining. The front doors stand wide to the cool air. Theo moves **INTO FRAME**, daunted by the House. But the House, for lack of a better word, looks... happy.

