

THE HAUNTING

S01E01:
"Steven Sees a Ghost"

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EXT. HILL HOUSE, THEN - NIGHT

Dense, New England woods, lit only by the moonlight. The leafless branches crossing our frame like skeletal hands.

STEVEN (V.O.)

No live organism can continue to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality, which is why all conscious things - man, child, and beast - must sleep. And dream.

The camera moves beyond the trees and branches to REVEAL:

A sprawling family home in the woods, all by itself. Large, striking, and brimming with history.

Huge windows, brick and iron, with hints of the Gothic in its architecture. The longer one stares, the more off-kilter the house seems to be.

All around, the signs of a RENOVATION IN PROGRESS. Scaffolding, tools, abandoned to the late hour. Someone is working hard on this house.

LEGEND: **HILL HOUSE. THEN.**

STEVEN (V.O.)

Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within. It had stood so for a hundred years before my family moved in, and it might stand for a hundred more.

INT. HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

We float through the halls. Past the grand staircase. Past the large, ornate windows. The architecture is old, but the dressing is clearly 1990's.

Small HOME IMPROVEMENT projects throughout the house. Fresh paint on some elements, absent from others.

STEVEN (V.O.)

Within, walls stood upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm. Silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House...

We linger on details: CHILDREN'S TOYS, abandoned to the late hour. Patched dry-wall, corners of the bannister in the midst of renovation.

FAMILY PHOTOS of the CRANES: HUGH (late 30's), his wife MARY (late 30's), and the children: STEVEN (11), SHIRLEY (9), THEODORA (7) and the twins, LUKE and NELL (5).

STEVEN (V.O.)
 ... And whatever walked there,
 walked alone.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVEN'S ROOM, HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

A boy's room, with all the expected flourishes of the nineties: a TV, video games. We float toward the boy, asleep in his bed, moonlight on his face. He is YOUNG STEVEN (11).

We come to rest on Steven's face, as he's stirred from sleep by a sound...

The sound of a CHILD CRYING. He blinks, sitting up.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY, HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

He steps into the hallway, looking smaller against the sheer size of the home. High ceilings, archways.

The crying is LOUDER now.

He sees his sister YOUNG THEO (7) standing by her door, rubbing her eyes. The crying woke her too.

YOUNG STEVEN
 It's okay Theo, go back to bed.

YOUNG THEO
 Should we wake mom and dad?

YOUNG STEVEN
 I've got it.

He moves past her, toward the last door in the hall. He pushes it open.

CUT TO:

INT. NELL'S ROOM, HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

He moves into the room. In the soft glow of the night light, he sees YOUNG NELL (5) perched at the foot of her bed. Crying her little tears, clearly afraid.

YOUNG STEVEN
You okay Nellie?

She shakes her head "no."

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)
You scared?

She shakes her head "yes."

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)
That's okay, I get scared too
sometimes.

He steps into the room, and looks over to the bed on the other side, where Nell's twin brother YOUNG LUKE (5) sleeps soundly, despite his sister's cries.

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)
Luke sleeps through anything, huh?
What was it?

YOUNG NELL
(beat)
The bent-neck lady.

YOUNG HUGH (O.S.)
Oh, her again.

They turn. Standing in the doorway is YOUNG HUGH CRANE. In his pajamas, eyes tired - but still managing a gentle smile.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Where was she?

Nell POINTS to the foot of the bed, almost where her brother is standing. Hugh smiles, stepping into the room.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Oh boy, let's take a look.

He moves to the spot.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Here, huh?

She nods.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Your big brother must have scared
her away. Big brothers are good
like that.

YOUNG NELL
What if she's hiding?

YOUNG HUGH
Well let's make sure she isn't.
Where could she go?

Nell's eyes go to the foot of the bed. Hugh follows her gaze,
and crouches to look underneath the bed.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Anyone under here? You better come
out, or you're in trouble.
(beat)
Hmmm. Not there...

He looks up at Nell, who points toward the closet.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Ah.

Steven steps aside, watching as his dad goes through the
motions for Nell. He smiles, watching close. Learning how.

Hugh opens the closet door, moving the clothes to the side.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
You better come out, bent-neck
lady. Stop scaring Nellie.
(beat)
Nope, she's long gone.

Nell relaxes a little.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
And now, everybody can go back to
bed.

Steven heads for the door, turning to watch his father tuck
Nell back into bed.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
There we go. Do you remember what
we talked about before? About our
dreams?

YOUNG NELL
They can spill.

YOUNG HUGH
That's right. Just like a cup of
water spills sometimes. And a kid's
dreams are special, they're like -

At the door, Steven smiles. He remembers this part...

YOUNG STEVEN
(very softly)
An ocean.

YOUNG NELL
An ocean.

YOUNG HUGH
That's right. Sometimes the big
dreams can spill out.
(turns)
Back to bed, Stevie.

Steve smiles, and walks away. Hugh turns back to Nell.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
I know the bent-neck lady is scary,
but that's all she is. Just a
little spill. You know that, right
Nellie?

She stares at him.

YOUNG NELL
How long do we have to live here,
daddy?

YOUNG HUGH
Well, I've got to finish fixing the
house. And then, somebody has to
buy it.

YOUNG NELL
And then we can go?

YOUNG HUGH
(smiles, feels bad)
Yep, then we can go. Just like the
last house.

She nods. A little relieved.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
I love you sweetie. Sweet dreams.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY, HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

Hugh gently CLOSES Nell's door. Smiles to himself. He starts down the hall, stopping at another door. Hand-drawn letters reading SHIRLEY, clearly decorated by a little girl.

Behind him, we can see NELL'S DOOR, CLOSED, in the BG.

From inside, he hears A SOFT VOICE SPEAKING. He pushes the door open. The soft light falls on YOUNG SHIRLEY (9), asleep in her bed. Her eyes are closed, but she's mumbling.

YOUNG SHIRLEY (O.S.)

(softly)

Dancing in the red room. Don't step so loud.

YOUNG HUGH

(smiling)

You're dreaming, Shirl.

YOUNG SHIRLEY

The pandas aren't dreaming.

YOUNG HUGH

Pandas, huh?

YOUNG SHIRLEY

(trailing off)

Pandas don't eat macaroni...

YOUNG HUGH

Noted.

He closes Shirley's door. He's about to walk away, but turns to see -

NELL'S DOOR IS OPEN AGAIN.

Odd, he just closed it...

He walks back, looking inside. Nell is lying motionless in bed, on her side. She hasn't moved since he last saw her.

Hugh frowns, and gently closes the door once again.

He walks away, leaving the upstairs hallway empty and dark.

We linger for a few extra moments, scrutinizing those shadows. Wondering what they're hiding...

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, HILL HOUSE, THEN - MOMENTS LATER
Hugh CRAWLS back into bed. His wife MARY (30's) stirs.

MARY
Everyone alive?

YOUNG HUGH
Nellie had a nightmare and
Shirley's sleep-talking again.

MARY
Anything good?

YOUNG HUGH
Pandas don't like macaroni, Mary.

Mary smiles as Hugh kisses her, and settles back into sleep.

Then, a SOUND. Like a GROANING, muffled. From within the
walls. Mary's eyes open.

MARY
Again?

YOUNG HUGH
You're kidding.

He sits up, sighing.

MARY
I thought you replaced the pipes -

YOUNG HUGH
Gotta be something else, then. Or
the guy fucked it up.

Another GROAN from the walls.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Fix one problem, find five more.
This house is a contractor's dream.

MARY
Then how come they keep quitting?

They listen. All is quiet again.

YOUNG HUGH
(beat)
Nellie's ready to go.

MARY
She's not alone. I miss the city.

YOUNG HUGH

This flips how I think it will,
I'll buy you a penthouse off the
park.

MARY

With a doorman.

She settles back onto her side to sleep.

MARY (CONT'D)

(chuckles)

Pandas don't like macaroni.

He settles back into his pillow, closing his eyes.

CUT TO:

INT. NELL'S ROOM, HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

Nell lays in her bed. She hugs her plush bear to her chest. She rolls upright, looking at the spot by the foot of her bed again.

There's nothing there... though we note the DOOR IS OPEN again.

Nell rolls onto her side. Facing her brother's bed. He's still sound asleep.

YOUNG NELL

Luke?

He SNORTS a little in his sleep, and rolls onto his side, away from her. She frowns.

She stares at the NIGHT LIGHT, plugged into the wall. It casts WARM COLORS and SHAPES on the wall above it. She fixes her attention there. Her eyelids getting heavy...

She closes her eyes. We watch her try to sleep for a few long moments. And then...

Something SHIFTS in the frame behind her. OUT OF FOCUS, IN THE DARK, it's been there this whole time but we're only now REALIZING IT -

The silhouette of a WOMAN.

NECK BENT AT A HORRIBLE ANGLE.

CUT TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

OVERHEAD CU: A smart phone voice recording ap. A finger moves into frame, and hits "record."

Legend: **SACRAMENTO. NOW.**

MRS. WALKER (O.C.)

Carl was driving on Rural 86 during the storm. Do you remember that storm? Course not, you were in LA. It was a bad one. Cats and dogs, worst I've seen in ten years.

REVEAL MRS. WALKER (50's), seated on her sofa. The sunlight pouring in through the windows. She looks TIRED, bags under her eyes. Absently holding a cup of tea in her hands.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

He was out there in the boons and he lost control of the car. He went over the guardrail, down a ravine. The car flipped over and you couldn't see it from the road, especially with the rain. Couldn't even see the lights.

Reveal STEVEN CRANE (now grown up, in his mid 30's, a patient expression on his handsome face.) In front of him, his phone records her story.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

Took me an hour to figure he was late. Almost three hours for someone to start looking for him. And I kept thinking maybe he just stopped off, waited out the weather.

She sips her tea. Steven watches, patient.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

He was, um... he was hanging there, that whole time. Hours. Upside down, tangled up in his seat belt. They said he could reach the horn, but he couldn't hold it long because - see, his arm was broken.

(beat)

And that's how he died. Upside down, pressing on that horn whenever he could stand to.

Steven nods, scribbling a NOTE in his notebook.

STEVEN

So when did it start?

MRS. WALKER

The night after he died. It started with drops of water. I'd be asleep, in our bed, and I'd be woken up because I'd feel... rain, I guess. Raindrops, falling onto my face. I'd wake up, there'd be nothing there. But my face would be a little wet, and my pillow.

She leans forward.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

It got worse. I'd hear a car horn. Short bursts. Distant, I think, but close enough to wake me and then, finally - this was right after the funeral itself, the night after he was buried, you see -

Her voice quiets to almost a whisper.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

I felt the water. On my cheeks, and I heard the horn, and I looked up at the ceiling and... there he was. Hanging there, upside down.

She makes eye contact with Steven, shaking her head.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

I could see the water dripping off his hair, his face was a deep purple, like the blood had all just - pooled - in his cheeks.

(beat)

It's funny, you think you'd scream when you see something like that, but you don't. You just stare. You just stare at it like an idiot, like your brain just... *tripped*.

She swallows. This is hard for her to talk about.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

So it was dripping off him, the rain and blood too, and he was just staring at me and then his mouth dropped open. But instead of a scream it was - a *car horn*. Coming out of his mouth. So loud.

(MORE)

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

So loud I fell off the bed. *Then* I screamed. I screamed because I hit the floor and it startled me, and it was like I only just remembered - "oh, right. I can scream. I should probably scream."

Steven nods, smiling gently.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

So I screamed all right, and then I ran. Tripped in the hall and looked back and he was gone, and I laid there and I cried and that was... that was the last time I've slept in that room.

Steven nods. Waits, but it seems her tale is over. He reaches forward, and TURNS OFF THE RECORDER.

STEVEN

That's a very interesting story, Mrs. Walker.

MRS. WALKER

Irene.

STEVEN

Irene. This is what I'd like to do. I'd like to look around your house, and I'd like to set up some equipment. I'd also like to sleep in that room tonight.

MRS. WALKER

Goodness -

STEVEN

I'll be fine. I can't promise that I'll include your story in my book -

MRS. WALKER

Of course -

STEVEN

But it's possible. And I thank you for sharing it with me.

MRS. WALKER

Well... thank *you*. For listening.

CUT TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - LATER

Steven moves through the house, taking it in. Taking a moment to look at the PHOTOGRAPHS of Mrs. Walker with her husband, CARL (60's). Happy photographs, of a normal couple in their golden years.

He pauses at one showing Carl by a NEW CAR. Probably the one he died in. Steven notes it, and moves toward the bookcase, glancing at what's on the shelves -

HE STOPS.

We see one of the titles that has caught his eye:

THE HAUNTING OF DANVERS. BY STEVEN CRANE.

Next to it, more books. Similar fonts to the titles.

THE HAUNTING OF ARLINGTON CEMETERY. BY STEVEN CRANE.

THE HAUNTING OF ALCATRAZ. BY STEVEN CRANE.

He sighs, not surprised to see the first book, the thickest book:

THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE. BY STEVEN CRANE.

He reaches out, picking it up. On the cover is a photograph of HILL HOUSE, as we saw it in the beginning. He turns it over, and on the back -

WE SEE THE FAMILY PICTURE from 1992, the faces now familiar to us. Young Hugh, Mary, Young Steven, and his brothers and sisters...

MRS. WALKER

I'm sorry, I should have told you.
I'm a fan.

He frowns, looking up. There are at least another EIGHT BOOKS, "THE HAUNTING OF..." series. All written by him.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

(off the one in his hand)
That's my favorite, the first one.
"Silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone."

(beat)

I can't imagine what it was like...
growing up there. The most famous
haunted house in America -

STEVEN

In fairness, it wasn't famous when we moved in.

MRS. WALKER

I remember seeing your dad on TV, during the trial. I always wondered how he kept it together, with all the media, the tabloids -

STEVEN

Well he didn't exactly hide from the media.

(beat)

It was a long time ago.

He stuffs the book back onto the shelf.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

And besides, you've got me beat.

MRS. WALKER

What do you mean?

STEVEN

I mean if you actually saw your husband hanging upside down over your bed, you've seen more than I ever have.

(beat)

I've never seen a ghost.

MRS. WALKER

But your books -

STEVEN

Not at Arlington, Danvers, Alcatraz, the Queen Mary, or in Williamsburg. And not in Hill House.

MRS. WALKER

Oh. The way you write, I assumed -

STEVEN

Other people's stories. People like you, Irene. I give them the right voice, is all.

Mrs. Walker is a little disappointed.

MRS. WALKER

Well I hope tonight is a game changer for you.

STEVEN

How so?

MRS. WALKER

Maybe my Carl can finally give you a story of your own. You were one of his favorite writers, so maybe... that's the reason. For all of this.

She smiles at him, hopeful. He feels sorry for her.

STEVEN

You know, I can tell you one thing about Hill House that isn't in the book.

MRS. WALKER

(lights up)

Yes, please!

STEVEN

All those years, trying to understand what happened in that house, you know what I never found?
(beat)
A reason.

MRS. WALKER

(changing the subject)

How are your brothers and sisters? I've wondered, since the book. How are they doing these days?

His PHONE RINGS in his pocket. Saved by the bell. He turns, fishing it out. The call is from NELL.

It rings for a beat... and he DECLINES THE CALL.

MRS. WALKER (CONT'D)

You know who I wish would write a book? Your dad. I'd love to hear what he says about that night...

STEVEN

(beat)

You and me both.

He steps away, looking further into the house.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM, LOCATION UNKNOWN - DAY

We watch as the outgoing call to STEVEN ends. Reveal NELL (mid 20's now), looking down at the phone in her hand.

The hotel room looks CHEAP, the curtains are DRAWN tight, keeping light out of the room.

Nell herself is ON EDGE. Pale, disheveled. Unkempt... and clearly FRIGHTENED.

She shakes her head, frustrated -

And dials another number: SHIRLEY.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARRIS FUNERAL HOME - AFTERNOON

A humble, stately independent funeral home. The sign out front reads HARRIS FAMILY FUNERAL HOME.

Legend: **MASSACHUSETTS.**

INT. HARRIS FUNERAL HOME, CONSULTATION ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A hand holds a phone. The incoming caller is NELL. A moment, and then the call is DECLINED.

REVEAL SHIRLEY (early 30's now, kind and genuine.) Sitting in a chair, across from a GRIEVING FAMILY. It's a funeral INTAKE. Her husband RYAN (30's) sits beside her.

SHIRLEY

I'm sorry. So are you saying you'd prefer not to do a viewing?

GRIEVING FATHER

No, we want to, it's not that.

RYAN

It's part of your mother's pre-need, so it's already taken care of.

GRIEVING MOTHER

And we want to. It's Max, I think he's just a little...

Shirley turns to MAX (8 years old), who is COLORING by the end table, near the CASKET CATALOGS.

SHIRLEY

A little nervous about it?

GRIEVING FATHER

I'd say "adamantly opposed."

In the nearby OFFICE, the LAND LINE rings. Shirley glances at Ryan, and he stands to answer.

RYAN

I'm sorry, excuse me a moment.

Shirley smiles, getting up from her chair. She crouches next to little Max.

SHIRLEY

Hi Max. I'm Shirley.

He looks up at her, smiling shyly.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

I know this might be a little weird for you, but I promise this is all normal. There's nothing to be scared of, not a single thing.

RYAN

(in background)

Harris funeral home... she's with clients, can I have her call you back?

He looks back to his drawing.

SHIRLEY

The reason mommy and daddy are here is that it's important to say goodbye to Grandma. A viewing is just a way to do that, to see her one last time and tell her you love her.

Ryan smiles at Max's parents. His wife is good at this, and he knows it. Loves her for it.

MAX

I don't need to say goodbye.

RYAN

A lot of people feel that way at first, but they feel much better when they do.

MAX

That's what mommy said but she was wrong. Grammy keeps sitting on my bed at night and touching my hair. She doesn't say anything. She doesn't talk, even if I yell at her. She just stares at me. And her eyes must hurt.

SHIRLEY

Why?

MAX

Because she doesn't blink.

Shirley frowns.

CUT TO:

INT. HARRIS FUNERAL HOME, FOYER - LATER

Shirley and Ryan stand with the parents, looking out the front door where Max plays with a toy on the steps.

SHIRLEY

We see things like this from time to time. He's what, eight?

GRIEVING MOTHER

That's right.

SHIRLEY

He's still a little too young to really understand death. Kids fall back on memories to help them process it. Whatever their strongest memory is, or their most recent, they'll pull it up. Replay it. Imagine them doing the things they did in life.

The parents exchange glances, unsure.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

He'll be fine. You'll find the funeral helps.

They nod.

GRIEVING FATHER

Thank you.

(beat)

(MORE)

GRIEVING FATHER (CONT'D)
 I don't mean to embarrass you, but
 my wife and I were talking, and we
 wanted to ask...

Shirley forces a smile. She already knows the question.

GRIEVING FATHER (CONT'D)
 You're... Shirley Crane, right?

SHIRLEY
 (beat, smiles)
 It's Harris now.

She reaches out, taking Ryan's hand.

GRIEVING MOTHER
 I thought so.

GRIEVING FATHER
 But I told her she was probably -
 makes sense, I guess. Your career
 choice.
 (realizes)
 I'm sorry, I don't mean offense.

SHIRLEY
 I'm used to it. We'll talk
 tomorrow.

They watch them head out the doors, into the sun. Ryan puts
 his arm around his wife.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
 Who was on the phone?

RYAN
 Your sister.

CUT TO:

INT. HARRIS FUNERAL HOME, SHIRLEY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Shirley sits at her desk, checking voicemail on her cell.

NELL (V.O.)
 It's Nell - I need you to call me.
 It's hard to explain. Everything's
 so dark and it's hard to understand
 it but...
 (long beat)
 It's about Luke. Just call me.

Shirley sighs. She dials Nell back, waiting. It rings. And rings. And rings. And then goes to voice mail. She sighs.

Ryan enters, carrying a LARGE FRAME and a hammer.

RYAN

It's here!

Shirley looks up. He holds up the photograph - it's of Shirley and Ryan, and THEIR TWO CHILDREN (eight and six), the HARRIS FAMILY FUNERAL HOME sign behind them.

SHIRLEY

That's great.

Ryan goes to the wall, pulling down an older, smaller photo, this one without the family.

RYAN

I think it sends the right message.
I sent it to Billy, he'll update
the website, and I think it could
work great for print, too. If
people still read papers, that is.

He starts HAMMERING a new nail into the wall. Shirley watches, the BANGS of the hammer jarring her -

CUT TO:

INT. HILL HOUSE, DOWNSTAIRS, THEN - AFTERNOON

Young Shirley moves through the house. Around her, we hear LOUD BANGS. LOUDER AS SHE APPROACHES...

She rounds the corner just in time to see Young Hugh taking aim with a sledgehammer.

He's targeting a wall, already stripped and opened in several places.

He swings, THE LOUD BANG as the hammer connects. It punches a BIG HOLE, and a BURST of dust BLOWS OUT at Hugh's face. He's COUGHS, stumbling back. Laughing a little.

YOUNG SHIRLEY

You okay daddy?

YOUNG HUGH

Yeah sweetie, just taking out this wall.

(wiping dust from his
face)

(MORE)

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
House isn't too happy about it, I
guess.

YOUNG SHIRLEY
You're too loud.

YOUNG HUGH
Sorry honey. This is gonna be
great, you'll be able to see right
into the dining room. A little
counter here, see?
(remembers)
Hey. I found something for you.

He reaches into his pockets, and pulls out AN OLD METAL KEY.
Shirley's face LIGHTS UP.

CUT TO:

INT. HILL HOUSE, TOP OF THE STAIRCASE, THEN - AFTERNOON

Young Shirley heads up the stairs. Just beyond the landing,
Mary stands in the hall, looking confused.

MARY
Shirl, come here a sec.

Shirley has somewhere else she wants to be.

SHIRLEY
But Nellie and I are -

MARY
Just for a second.

She heads toward her mother.

MARY (CONT'D)
Stand here... is it cold? Do you
feel cold?

YOUNG SHIRLEY
(stands)
Yeah.

Mary takes two steps to her right.

MARY
Not here though.

Shirley follows suit.

YOUNG SHIRLEY

Nope.

MARY

(stepping back)

But here... you feel that?

Shirley shivers, nodding.

MARY (CONT'D)

No vent, no windows - but there's a draft, right?

YOUNG SHIRLEY

Maybe Daddy's making more holes.
Can I go play now?

MARY

(lost in thought)

The hell is that coming from?

Shirley takes that as a "yes," and bounds down the hall, toward the next set of stairs.

CUT TO:

INT. HILL HOUSE, ATTIC, THEN - CONTINUOUS

Shirley steps into a LARGE ROOM off the attic. Young Nell is already there, playing on the floor in front of a -

LARGE RED DOOR.

Nell GIGGLES, on her hands and knees, eyes close to the door.

YOUNG SHIRLEY

I got it!

YOUNG NELL

(eager)

Open it!

Shirley rushes to the red door, the key in her hand.

YOUNG SHIRLEY

Daddy says this is a master key.
It's supposed to open any of the doors in the house -

YOUNG NELL

What do you think is in there?

Shirley pushes the key into the lock.

YOUNG NELL (CONT'D)
 What if it's a cotton candy
 machine?

YOUNG SHIRLEY
 (working the key)
 That'd be something.

YOUNG NELL
 Or a pony.

YOUNG SHIRLEY
 Not a pony. This isn't working.

YOUNG NELL
 You don't know that, it could be a
 pony. Something was moving, I saw
 the shadow under the door.

YOUNG SHIRLEY
 Daddy said this door's been locked
 for years and years and years, so
 if there's a pony in there, it's
 dead.

Nell's face falls into a horrified shock. Shirley jiggles the
 key, but no luck. The door isn't opening.

YOUNG SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
 This one doesn't work either.

YOUNG NELL
 (pouting)
 Where's the freakin' key!

YOUNG SHIRLEY
 (chuckling)
 Don't say that word.

YOUNG NELL
 You say it.

They sit back, staring at the red door.

YOUNG NELL (CONT'D)
 The keys never work. Can't he just
 use that big hammer?

YOUNG SHIRLEY
 He says he's gonna finish
 downstairs before he starts up
 here.

(beat)

(MORE)

YOUNG SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
 We'll find the key. I wanna see
 what's in there too.

YOUNG NELL
 If it's candy, I'll share it with
 you fifty and fifty.

Shirley smiles at her, brushing the hair from her face.

YOUNG SHIRLEY
 Come on. Let's see if daddy has any
 more keys.

They SCAMPER out of the room. The camera LINGERS on the red
 door. It may just be our imagination...

But we swear we see A SHADOW MOVE silently underneath it...

YOUNG NELL (O.S.)
 Daddy! We need more keys, it's an
 emergency!

CUT TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Steven holds the phone to his ear as he hooks up an INFRARED
 CAMERA, pointed up to the ceiling above the bed.

STEVEN
 (distracted)
 I know you don't need me to tell
 you this, but literally everything
 is an emergency with Nell.

He hits a button on his LAPTOP, and we see the CAMERA FEED on
 the screen. He tests it, recording a few seconds.

INT. HARRIS FUNERAL HOME, FRONT PORCH - INTERCUT

Shirley holds the phone to her ear. Behind her, the new
 picture is displayed prominently.

SHIRLEY
 I know, but she sounded rough.

STEVEN
 Shirl -

SHIRLEY
 Rougher than usual. She said it was
 about Luke.

STEVEN

So call Luke.

He leans over the laptop. A few more KEYSTROKES and the footage is logged.

SHIRLEY

I did. Someone else answered.

STEVEN

So he sold his phone, or traded it, which means he's using again, which means we stay out of it. I can't deal with this right now, I'm working.

SHIRLEY

(with an edge)

Yeah? You working?

Steven shakes his head. There's something here, we can almost sense the fight they're *not* having, underneath their words...

STEVEN

That's right, Shirley. Something else you want to add?

SHIRLEY

(beat)

Fine. I'll just handle it, shall I? That's why everybody dumps their shit on me, isn't it Steve. I'm the oldest, it's my job. Oh wait - that's you.

She hangs up. Steven puts the phone down, shakes it off. Takes a breath, and goes back to setting up his equipment.

MRS. WALKER

Tea?

He turns, smiling. Mrs. Walker stands in the doorway, clutching a mug.

STEVEN

Sure, thank you.

She hands it over. He takes a sip, nodding his gratitude.

MRS. WALKER

So does this stuff... you know. Capture the supernatural?

He turns, smiling a little.

STEVEN
Don't believe in that word.

MRS. WALKER
(confused)
Oh...

STEVEN
(smiles)
I'm just talking about the word
itself; "supernatural." There's
"natural" phenomena that we
understand, and then there's
"natural" phenomena that we don't.

He adjust the camera.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Primitive humans used to die of
fright during an eclipse. They had
no idea what it was. The eye of an
angry god, an evil spirit - nothing
supernatural about it, though. Once
we understood it, well... it was
just "natural."

He sips his tea, sitting on the bed.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
I prefer "preternatural." Natural
phenomena that we don't quite
understand yet.

MRS. WALKER
(beat)
So will it capture that? The
preternatural?

STEVEN
This just captures infrared light.
(beat, smiles)
But you never know.

CUT TO:

EXT. WALKER HOUSE - EVENING

Steven has the phone to his ear as he opens the trunk of his
car. A BEEP as it goes to voice mail.

STEVEN
It's Steve. Missed your call. Been
a minute, hasn't it.
(MORE)

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 Listen, I'm working but if it's
actually an emer -

He closes his eyes, realizing he needs to change his tone.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 I'll be around tomorrow if you
 still need to chat. I... I hope
 you're well, Nellie. I mean that.

Steven shuts his trunk, throwing his overnight bag over his shoulder. He looks up at the unassuming house he'll be spending the night in.

He leans against the trunk, pulling a cigarette from his pocket. He lights it, drawing deep. Takes a few moments, and we can tell something is nagging him. Another drag...

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 Goddammit.

He lifts up his phone. In his contacts, we see:

SACRED HEART SHELTER. A number already programmed. He dials.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
 Hey, it's Steve Crane... yep, and
 how are you? I wanted to see if
 Luke's been staying there lately.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

The club is THUMPING. Colored lights, loud music, lots of young people dancing the night away.

Close on a MARTINI being set on the bar.

A WOMAN'S HAND reaches into frame, wearing a thin DESIGNER GLOVE. She picks up the drink, and lifts it to her lips.

She's THEO (late 20's now, dark mascara. Effortlessly sexy, but intentionally unapproachable.) She smiles at the bartender, taking a healthy sip of the drink.

She turns her back to the bar, leaning on her elbows. Looking out at the dance floor. Her wandering eyes (and her tight clothes) tell us she's on the prowl.

Across the way, a HANDSOME GUY gives her a smile. Theo rolls her eyes, sips her drink. Not interested.

Then, someone catches her eye...

TRISH (20's, very pretty), leaning against the bar. Theo watches, interested. Slowly TAKES OFF ONE OF HER GLOVES.

Trish can feel someone staring at her, and looks. Theo's staring right at her, a smile on her face. Trish looks away, playing it cool.

After a few moments, she turns back to where Theo was leaning. Theo is gone.

THEO (O.S.)

Hi.

She turns. Theo's just a few inches away, having closed the distance undetected.

THEO (CONT'D)

Theodora.

Trish smiles.

TRISH

Trish.

INT. NIGHT CLUB - LATER

Theo and Trish DANCE. The music blasts, the lights dance across them. Theo is aggressive, confident. Pulling Trish close, lips inches from hers as they writhe together.

The dance is very sexual, Trish giving into it as she ARCHES HER BACK, throwing her head back -

CUT TO:

INT. THEO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

- Trish's head is thrown back, her back arched above the mattress -

And she COLLAPSES, EXHALING. Smiling wide, her hair and face glistening with sweat.

Seconds later Theo appears from below frame, still wearing a tank top, flopping next to her. They catch their breath.

TRISH

(out of breath)

Jesus, where did you come from?

Theo looks up at the ceiling, satisfied. Smiles, but we can tell she doesn't feel much like talking.

TRISH (CONT'D)

How did you do that?! It was like you knew exactly what I -

THEO

Haven't been with a lot of girls, have you.

TRISH

No, that's not it, it's just -

Theo rolls over. Sits up, reaching over to the night stand. Finds what she's looking for:

A joint. She lights it.

Trish rolls over, propping herself up.

TRISH (CONT'D)

So what's your story?

THEO

What do you mean?

TRISH

I mean, who are you? What do you do? Where are you from?

Theo takes a drag off the joint. Smiles at her.

TRISH (CONT'D)

I'm here for grad school. Sociology. The program is brutal but I love Boston, it's such a great town. Do you venture into the city much or stay out here in the 'burbs?

Theo starts PUTTING HER GLOVES back on.

TRISH (CONT'D)

(off the gloves)

What's that about?

THEO

I'm kind of a Germaphobe.

TRISH

(beat)

That's okay, none taken.

Theo turns, resting her gloved hand on Trish's thigh.

THEO
That was good.

TRISH
(leaning closer)
Damn right.

THEO
I've got to work. Early.

TRISH
Oh. Oh! Okay.

She sits up, a little confused. Watching as Theo pulls her jeans back on.

TRISH (CONT'D)
Okay.

CUT TO:

INT. THEO'S BEDROOM, FRONT DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

We realize Theo's apartment is a STUDIO. The bedroom we were just in is actually most of the room. A small kitchenette, a bathroom. It's more of a GUEST HOUSE.

Theo OPENS the door to let Trish out.

TRISH
Was it something I did?

THEO
Nope. Just not much more to say, we did what we came here to do, yeah?

TRISH
(disappointed)
Okay then.

Theo lets her out, and then walks over to the fridge. Opens it up, and takes out TWO BEERS.

CUT TO:

EXT. HARRIS FUNERAL HOME, FRONT PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Shirley is sitting on the front porch, looking out at the stars over the trees. She hears footsteps coming from around the side of the house, and looks over to see -

TRISH, walking away from THE GUEST HOUSE. Heading up the driveway, toward her car. She stops as she sees Shirley watching her.

Shirley waves, casual. Trish waves back, and gets in the car.

Shirley smiles a little, and looks back just in time to see Theo emerge from the front door of the guest house, beers in hand.

Heading her way.

THEO
(holding out the beer)
Figured you could use one.

Theo sits next to her sister, watching as the car pulls away.

SHIRLEY
New friend?

Theo just sips her beer.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)
She gonna come back?

THEO
Oh, no. Sweet enough, but she's got a pile of issues. Dependency, abandonment issues, so much confusion...
(beat)
She was a good kisser though.

SHIRLEY
You know what amazes me? It's always one date. One date, and you think you know everybody's life story. One night, and they're codependent. Mommy issues. Emotionally abusive.

THEO
They are.

SHIRLEY
Those aren't things you glean off someone in a few hours, Theo. You've got to actually get to know them! People are tough, they take time to show you their true colors.

THEO
Not necessarily.

SHIRLEY

Yeah? How old were you when you came out? Twenty five? Because we didn't have a clue. None of us. And we've known you your whole life.

Theo shrugs it off.

THEO

Once there's a deal breaker, I don't waste their time. Or mine. I think that's kinder.

SHIRLEY

You're like a guy! You're worse than a guy. You're like a frat guy. When I said you could live here, I wasn't expecting the pussy parade.

Theo chuckles, swigs her beer.

THEO

So what's bugging you?

SHIRLEY

How did you know something was bugging me?
(Theo waits)
Nell called me today.

THEO

So?

SHIRLEY

She sounded bad.

THEO

Because it sucks to be Nell.

SHIRLEY

She call you?

THEO

Nope, she knows better. Haven't talked to her in three months -

SHIRLEY

Theo -

THEO

If she apologizes, maybe - *maybe* - we can talk. But until she does, forget it.

(MORE)

THEO (CONT'D)

(beat)

What's wrong with her?

SHIRLEY

I don't know.

THEO

One foot in crazy and the other on a banana peel. Her whole life. That's just Nell, the worst thing you can do is let yourself feel responsible for her state of mind.

SHIRLEY

She said it was about Luke. I don't know, something about it scared me.

Theo nods, taking another pull off the beer.

THEO

He'll show up. When he needs money.

SHIRLEY

I just keep thinking, what if he doesn't... or if he does, it's the last time I'll ever see him -

THEO

I feel that way every time I see him.

RYAN (O.S.)

You ladies okay?

They turn as Ryan steps onto the porch.

SHIRLEY

Hey sweetie. Yeah, we're okay.

Theo finishes her beer.

THEO

The beer has gone and so must I.

They stand.

SHIRLEY

Thanks for the company.

She hands Theo her beer, which is still HALF FULL. Theo takes a sip as Shirley steps inside.

RYAN
(smiling)
And how're you doing?

Theo turns her attention to Ryan. Not sure why he's lingering.

THEO
I'm pretty nifty, Ryan. How are you?

RYAN
I'm good.

Theo waits.

RYAN (CONT'D)
Really good. Your sister and I are talking about shutting the business down for a week, maybe getting out of town.

THEO
Scandalous.

RYAN
Not sure if it's happening yet, just a heads up.

She finishes the beer, putting the bottle down.

THEO
Well keep me posted, handsome.

She turns, walking away. Ryan picks up the bottle, and goes to head back inside...

LINGERING for just a moment in the doorway. Watching Theo walk away, in those tight jeans...

THEO (CONT'D)
(without looking back)
Good night Ryan.

Startled, Ryan pulls the door open.

RYAN
Good night!

CUT TO:

EXT. HUGH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A small, humble house, nestled in the suburbs. Palm trees abound.

Legend: **FLORIDA**

INT. HUGH'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

HUGH CRANE (in his 60's now) is asleep in his bed. Silence and darkness in the room...

We sense the mattress DEPRESS next to him, as though someone just climbed into bed with him.

Hugh's eyes SLOWLY OPEN.

He waits. Nothing. After a few long seconds...

A WOMAN'S ARM SILENTLY REACHES AROUND HIM.

Spooning him. Pulling herself up against his back.

HUGH DOESN'T MOVE.

Just lays there, eyes open. Not making a sound.

Her arm hangs around him, and finally GOES LIMP, as if she's just GONE TO SLEEP.

VERY slowly, Hugh looks down at the hand dangling in front of him.

He swallows. Holds his breath.

VERY SLOWLY... so as not to wake her... he begins to ROLL OVER, TURNING TO GET A LOOK AT HER FACE...

Slowly he turns, careful to be as SILENT AS POSSIBLE.

As he passes the halfway point, almost to the point he could just begin to see her face -

SHE SCREAMS -

DIRECTLY IN HIS FACE, A HIGH, SHRILL SCREECH -

HUGH'S EYES FLY OPEN.

HE BOLTS UPRIGHT IN BED. HE'S ALONE... NO ONE ELSE IS THERE.

The SHRILL SCREECH is just his RINGING PHONE.

He catches his breath, letting the nightmare recede. The phone keeps ringing, and he finally lifts it off the night stand.

IT'S NELL.

He answers the phone, shaken, slowly waking up.

HUGH
Nell?

NELL (O.S.)
Daddy...

HUGH
Honey? You okay? What time is it?

He starts to shuffle in the bed, getting comfortable, settling back down.

NELL
(beat)
Do you remember the bent-neck lady?

HUGH SITS UP IN BED.

Staring ahead, very still now. The color has DRAINED FROM HIS FACE. He takes this VERY SERIOUSLY.

HUGH
(quietly)
Yes.

NELL
She's back.

Hugh swallows. Catches his breath.

HUGH
Okay. Okay.
(beat)
Where are you?

CUT TO:

INT. NELL'S CAR - INTERCUT

Nell is behind the wheel of her car. The engine isn't running. It is VERY DARK outside, she's surrounded by OVERGROWN TREES. No street lights AT ALL.

NELL
I'm at home. In bed.

Like she's parked in the MIDDLE OF THE WOODS.

CUT TO:

INT. HUGH'S BEDROOM - INTERCUT

Hugh sighs.

HUGH

Okay, stay there. Listen... I want you to go to Steve and Shaye's. I can drive to Orlando, get a flight to L.A. in the morning. Steve's the closest, you go to him, and -
(beat)
I'll meet you there, sweetie.

Nell smiles a little. Sadly.

NELL

Okay. I love you, daddy.

Something about the way she says it doesn't sit right with Hugh.

HUGH

Are you okay?

INT. NELL'S CAR - INTERCUT

Nell smiles, sadly. Tears fall down her cheeks, but her voice doesn't betray her feelings.

NELL

I'm fine. I'm sorry to wake you.
Good night, daddy.

She hangs up. Takes a deep breath. Looks forward, at something we can't see, in the darkness beyond the front of the car.

Then, she GETS OUT OF THE CAR, leaving the DOOR OPEN... and walks into the darkness.

CUT TO:

INT. HUGH'S BEDROOM - INTERCUT

Hugh stares at the phone in his hand. Looking around his room, taking deep breaths. THIS MAN IS AFRAID. He shakes his head, this isn't possible...

Finally, he gets up. Goes to his closet, pulling his bags down.

He QUICKLY PACKS HIS THINGS, throwing just what he needs in the suitcase.

Bag in hand, he PULLS THE BEDROOM DOOR OPEN -

CUT TO:

INT. STEVEN'S ROOM, HILL HOUSE, THEN - NIGHT

- YOUNG HUGH BURSTS through Young Steven's door, startling the boy.

YOUNG HUGH
Get up. Stevie, get up.

YOUNG STEVEN
Dad? What's -

YOUNG HUGH
Get up, we have to get out of here.
Right now.

YOUNG STEVEN
Why? What's -

YOUNG HUGH
Quietly.

He pulls Steven up by the arm, moving him toward the door.

YOUNG STEVEN
My shoes -

YOUNG HUGH
Shhh.

Hugh pokes his head out into the hallway -

AND QUICKLY PULLS IT BACK, as though he SAW SOMETHING.

Slowly, silently, he PULLS THE DOOR CLOSED.

He keeps one hand on the doorknob, and raising a finger to his lips with the other. "Shhhh."

Steven nods, confused.

He stares at his father. Hugh is SWEATING, PALE. PANICKED. Steven studies him, he doesn't know why his father is acting like this.

Then he hears -

FOOTSTEPS IN THE HALLWAY. Moving closer and closer. Slow, almost SHAMBLING.

Hugh holds the door knob, reaching up to gently PUSH THE BUTTON LOCK.

They wait in silence as the footsteps REACH THE DOOR.

Nothing for a few seconds...

AND THEN THE KNOB STARTS TO TURN. Softly, exploring.

Hugh RELEASES HIS GRIP but keeps his hand hovering around the door knob, watching it turn softly.

They wait, HOLDING THEIR BREATH...

And the footsteps BEGIN TO WALK AWAY.

Further and further down the hallway they go, until all is silent again.

Hugh turns to his son.

 YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
 (whispering)
 We're going to run.

 YOUNG STEVEN
 Dad, what's happening -

 YOUNG HUGH
 Quiet.

He reaches down for the doorknob, and slowly -

TRYING NOT TO MAKE A SOUND -

 TURNS THE KNOB UNTIL THE LOCK DISENGAGES.

He takes a breath, and then silently PUSHES THE DOOR OPEN. He pokes his head into the hall, looking both ways.

After a moment, he STARTS BREATHING AGAIN. He turns to Steven.

 YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
 I'm going to carry you.

 YOUNG STEVEN
 What? I can -

YOUNG HUGH

Hold on to me, very tight. Keep your eyes closed. No matter what you hear, don't open them. Do you promise?

YOUNG STEVEN

I -

YOUNG HUGH

Do you promise?

YOUNG STEVEN

(beat)

I promise.

Hugh SCOOPS him up, which is tough. He's not a little kid anymore. Steven awkwardly wraps his arms around his dad's neck, hooking his legs around his hips.

Hugh WINCES from the weight, but manages to support him.

YOUNG HUGH

Eyes closed. No matter what. Eyes closed.

Steven shakes his head, rests his chin on his father's shoulder, and CLOSES HIS EYES.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Okay. Okay... okay.

CUT TO:

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY, HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

He pushes the door open and starts moving FAST down the hallway.

WE STAY ON STEVEN'S CLOSED EYES. We hear -

HUGH'S FOOTSTEPS, heavy with the weight of both of them.

But then, something else -

BANGS. CREAKING WOOD.

As though the house around him is MOVING AS WELL.

HUGH

(desperate)

Eyes closed!

The BANGS GET LOUDER, and then -

AN EAR-SHATTERING SCREECH comes from the other end of the hall.

A woman SCREAMING, growing in volume and intensity -

Just as Hugh is about to round the corner, Steven OPENS HIS EYES -

YOUNG STEVEN'S POV: The hallway, dark, but for just a split second before we turn the corner we think we see -

A WOMAN, AT THE FAR END OF THE HALLWAY -

EITHER IN A NIGHTGOWN OR A LONG DRESS -

ADVANCING QUICKLY -

Hugh turns the corner, and we can't see any more.

CUT TO:

INT. FOYER, HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

Hugh's feet THUNDER down the stairs, clutching Steven to him. Sprinting toward the door.

Behind them, a HORRIBLE VOICE SHRIEKS:

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
BRING HIIMMM BAAAACCCCKKKK!

Hugh barrels toward the front door, WHICH IS ALREADY OPEN. Panting, gasping for air, he RUNS OUTSIDE, the boy in his arms.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILL HOUSE, THEN - CONTINUOUS

Hugh SPINS Steven in his arms, putting his FEET ON THE GROUND.

YOUNG HUGH
The car!

Steven's eyes are open now, he starts RUNNING next to his father, panicked.

Behind them, the front door of Hill House SLAMS SHUT.

Steven starts to turn to look, but Hugh PUSHES him forward.

YOUNG HUGH (CONT'D)
Keep going!

As Steven nears the car, he sees -

ALL OF HIS SIBLINGS ARE ALREADY INSIDE.

Nell up front. Theo, Shirley, and Luke are all there, in their pajamas, all shouting and panicked.

They get to the car and Steven opens the back door, climbing in. Hugh races for the driver's seat.

CUT TO:

INT. HUGH'S CAR, THEN - CONTINUOUS

Young Hugh FUMBLES with the keys, trying to get the car started. Around him, the kids shriek.

YOUNG SHIRLEY
What's happening?! What's happening?!

YOUNG THEO
Daddy!! Daddy?!

Nell just SOBS LOUDLY. Hugh IGNORES THEM, TURNING OVER the engine. It ROARS as he floods it with gas.

Steven surveys the scene, breathing heavy, and REALIZES -

YOUNG STEVEN
(realizing)
Where's mom?

Steven looks back up at the house as -

Hugh FLOORS IT.

The tires DIG INTO THE GRAVEL, throwing it up behind the car as he swings it onto the drive.

The kids SHOUT and CRY, panicked and lost.

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)
Where's mom! Dad, where's mom!

Hugh ignores him. Drives as FAST AS HE CAN away from Hill House, while his children scream and cry.

Steven turns around in his seat, looking at the house, dark against the woods, as it gets smaller in the window.

In the GRAND, GOTHIC UPSTAIRS WINDOW he sees -

THE SILHOUETTE OF A WOMAN, IN A LONG NIGHTGOWN (OR IS IT A DRESS?) STARING DOWN AT THEM.

 YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)
Dad! Dad! We can't leave mom!
Where's mom!

Hugh drives, CRYING NOW.

 YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)
Dad! Dad! DAD!

CUT TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

 STEVEN
Dad...

Steven holds his phone to his ear, speaking softly while he PACES. The house is dark, all of his equipment is set up and running.

 STEVEN (CONT'D)
Dad, I can't.

INT. HUGH'S CAR - INTERCUT

Hugh DRIVES in the dark, pale.

 HUGH
You're the closest. Your sister
needs you.

INT. WALKER HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - INTERCUT

 STEVEN
She's freaked about Luke. I already
called all the shelters and the
clinics looking for him, like she
wanted -

 HUGH
That's not -

STEVEN

- and unless he shows up in a morgue, we all know what he's doing. He'll pop up in a week or two looking for money, just like every other time -

HUGH

This isn't about Luke.

STEVEN

Nell said it was.

HUGH

It's about her. Get home, stay with her. Don't let her out of your sight. I'll meet you there.

STEVEN

Dad, listen, I'm not even -

Hugh hangs up.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

- living at home right now.

He lowers the phone. Sighs.

AT THE INFRARED CAMERA: Steven takes a look at the ceiling above the bed. Just grey, nothing unusual. He scribbles a note, checking his watch.

AT THE WINDOW: Steven looks out at the street below. They're on the corner lot, the empty roads lit by street lights.

The roads SHIMMER with the faint rain.

He settles into the bed. On his back, still clothed. Looks around.

Steven's POV: the ceiling above him. No spirit, just the light fixture.

He closes his eyes, going to sleep.

CUT TO:

INT. THEO'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

The camera slowly moves in on Theo, asleep in her bed. We drift toward the ALARM clock.

We see the time, glowing red in the darkness: 3:02 am.

As we watch, it changes to 3:03...

And Theo suddenly BURSTS UP IN BED, a startled SCREAM in her throat.

She GASPS, her hand absently clutching her neck. Eyes wide. Like she woke from a nightmare.

CUT TO:

INT. HARRIS FUNERAL HOME, SHIRLEY'S ROOM - NIGHT

Ryan is STARTLED by a SHORT SCREAM. DISORIENTED, he sits up, looking around as he gets his bearings -

SHIRLEY IS SITTING UPRIGHT IN BED. Gasping, breathing heavy. Hand over her heart.

SHIRLEY
(catching her breath)
Nellie's in the Red Room...

RYAN
Shirl?

She blinks at him. Snapping out of it.

SHIRLEY
Oh... sorry...

RYAN
What'd you say?

SHIRLEY
I don't... what?

We can tell she can't remember. And we notice, though he doesn't, the clock beside her. 3:03.

CUT TO:

EXT. UNDER AN OVERPASS, LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

WAKING WITH A START, A STRUNG-OUT YOUNG MAN (20's, filthy) scrambles to his feet. Under the overpass there are tents, blankets - the tiny homeless colony common to the city.

He knocks against the trash can, startling others. Staring wildly at the BLANKET he was just asleep on, eyes wide.

CUT TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Steven's eyes BURST OPEN. He looks around, catching his breath. Something woke him up...

We realize the clock beside him reads 12:03 am.

There's nothing in the room. Steven slowly closes his eyes, going back to sleep.

From high above him, the camera SLOWLY BOOMS DOWN on his face until we land in a CLOSE UP...

A DROP OF WATER HITS HIS FOREHEAD.

He opens his eyes. Looks up at the ceiling...

NOTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY. Just the light fixture, and a whole lot of ceiling.

He WAITS. WAITS...

ANOTHER DRIP.

Intrigued, Steven ROLLS OUT OF BED. Stands up.

Looks at the ceiling, the light fixture.

Waits.

Looks down at the pillow on the bed...

WAITS...

DRIP. A drop of water hits the pillow.

Steven STEPS UP ONTO THE BED, looking up at the ceiling.

He STRETCHES ON THE TIPS OF HIS TOES, trying to identify the source of the water...

WAITS...

WAITS...

A CAR HORN BLARES!

Steven SPINS, almost FALLING off the bed. He turns, looking out the window -

And from his height, he can see the TWO CARS in the intersection that just avoided a collision.

Another SHORT HONK, and they go off in separate ways.

Steven SMILES, catching his breath.

STEVEN'S POV: The intersection, dark.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, MASTER BEDROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

- Steven's POV: The intersection, IN DAYLIGHT.

STEVEN

There was a stop sign there until recently, yes?

Steven stands at the window, with Mrs. Walker next to him.

MRS. WALKER

... I don't know, I think so.

STEVEN

There's a pole there, see? But no sign.

There is indeed a silver pole sticking up from the ground at the intersection... but nothing on it.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Kids take them for their dorm rooms. It's a moderately trafficked area; a four way stop without a sign is bound to have a few near misses.

(beat)

You slept better with your husband in bed, right?

MRS. WALKER

Of course.

STEVEN

You're probably just noticing the car horns now because you're not sleeping as well. Things you used to sleep through.

(beat)

The water...

Steven hops up onto the bed. He reaches up, slowly turning unscrewing the bolt holding the light fixture.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

It was a big storm the night he died, one of the biggest you've seen in a long time.

MRS. WALKER

Yes...

STEVEN

There's a leak in your roof. And you just didn't notice the water damage because...

He removes the bolt, and PULLS DOWN THE LIGHT FIXTURE. There, where the power cord goes into the ceiling, is a WATER STAIN.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

It was covered. It was only drizzling last night, and I even got a few drips.

He places the light fixture on the night stand, and waits patiently. Mrs. Walker looks up at the stain, and we can tell... SHE'S EMBARRASSED.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

This happens all the time, Mrs. Walker.

MRS. WALKER

And the man I saw hanging from my ceiling?

Steven sighs, sitting on the mattress.

STEVEN

The mind... it is a powerful thing, ma'am. Especially the grieving mind.

MRS. WALKER

I know what I saw -

STEVEN

The water, the car horn, you'd be picturing how he died, as much as you wouldn't want to -

MRS. WALKER

I saw him.

STEVEN

And when you push that stuff down,
it comes out at night. You couldn't
help it.

She shakes her head. She'll buy the rest, but not that.
Steven frowns. He speaks softly, gentler.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

When I said I've never seen a
ghost, that's not exactly true.
I've seen a lot of ghosts. Just not
the way you think.

He steps closer, sympathetic.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

A ghost can be a lot of things. A
memory, a daydream. A secret.
Guilt, grief, anger. But in my
experience, most times they're just
what we want to see -

MRS. WALKER

He looked so horrible. Why would I
want to see my Carl... like *that*?

STEVEN

Because it's better than never
seeing him again.

She looks at him, tears in her eyes.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Most times, a ghost is a wish.

CUT TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Steven reaches up, taking down the copy of THE HAUNTING OF
HILL HOUSE from the book shelf. He looks at it, sighs.

He sits down on the couch, pen in hand. Opens the book, to
the title page, and starts to inscribe.

"To Irene... thank you, and Carl, for your support. 'And
whatever walked there... walked alone'.

He signs his name with a flourish. Mrs. Walker watches,
smiling to herself.

MRS. WALKER

Thank you for doing that. Carl
would have loved it.

STEVEN

My pleasure.

He finishes signing, and closes the book. Looks at the cover,
and the photograph of his childhood home. As he stares at it -

CUT TO:

INT. STEVEN AND SHAYE'S APARTMENT - EVENING

A MANUSCRIPT of THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE is forcefully
DROPPED on the table in front of Steven.

He's a few years younger, and living in a modest apartment.
He looks up, startled by the loud noise. Shirley stands in
front of him... she's PREGNANT.

SHIRLEY

The fuck, Steve.

STEVEN

You didn't like it?

SHIRLEY

No. I didn't like it.

From the other room, Steven's wife SHAYE (30's) enters, a
little alarmed by the argument.

SHAYE

What's going on?

SHIRLEY

My brother just raped the family,
is what's going on.

STEVEN

Hang on.

SHIRLEY

Look, I get that things haven't
exactly been going well with your
writing, and when you said you were
doing a book about the house I
understood that. But this -

STEVEN

I sent you guys the manuscript in case you objected to anything, I didn't have to do that -

SHIRLEY

Of course I object! We object, Steven!

SHAYE

Let's calm down a bit -

SHIRLEY

You be calm, Shaye, your name's not in here. He's not exploiting your worst memories for some sensationalized coffee table book, it's not your family -

SHAYE

(hurt)

Hey! It *is* my family, I'm a Crane now too -

SHIRLEY

You weren't there.

(back to Steven)

Nell. Luke. Theo. They were just kids, the things they told you in confidence -

STEVEN

I'm clear that they were kids -

SHIRLEY

You make mom sound fucking crazy -

STEVEN

Oh, mom wasn't crazy?

SHIRLEY

And the Dudleys, and dad - this is the worst of the bullshit, worse than dad with the tabloids -

STEVEN

Dad's had every opportunity to set it straight - what am I supposed to write? He said it was haunted, those are his words -

SHIRLEY

He was a wreck! He just lost his wife -

STEVEN

- and he hasn't said shit about it since then! Does he talk to you, Shirl? Has he told you what happened that night? Because all I've got are the tabloid quotes, he refuses to tell us anything else -

SHIRLEY

He *believed* it, Steve!

This shuts him up.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

When he said those things he *believed* them, in the moment at least, but *you*... you never did -

STEVEN

Neither did you -

SHIRLEY

- and now you're digging up all that stuff, so you can make a buck and stop living on credit for a change -

STEVEN

(incredulous)

A buck.

Shaye steps into the room, toward her husband. Cautious, she knows how this goes...

SHAYE

Honey, she's upset, don't make it -

STEVEN

You know how much they offered on the advance? A buck... this is a life for us, Shirl. We can get a house. We can move to L.A. I have to start a real life. For my own family -

SHIRLEY

We're your family, Steve.

(beat)

And what you're doing to mom -

STEVEN

Mom was mentally ill. It's a fact. And damned if the apple didn't fall too far from -

He STOPS HIMSELF. Too far. Shirley GLARES, the wound obvious.

SHIRLEY

Wow.

STEVEN

(standing, regretful)

I'm sorry. That wasn't -

SHIRLEY

Wow.

He holds his hands up, and we see he truly regrets saying that. Shirley collects herself.

SHIRLEY (CONT'D)

You sent me your book, now you know what I think. You publish this, you know what it costs.

STEVEN

(quietly)

No one's buying the novels, Shirl.
I have a chance here, to make a
real life -

SHIRLEY

You know what it costs.

She turns, walking away. Shaye moves to Steven, and puts her arm around him as they watch Shirley go. Steven looks back down at the manuscript on the table, the title page -

CUT TO:

INT. WALKER HOUSE, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Steven stares at the book for a moment, and then hands it to Mrs. Walker.

STEVEN

I'll write your story.

She blinks. Surprised.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

It's a good story, Mrs. Walker. And I researched your house - did you know it was used as a hospice briefly in the sixties?

MRS. WALKER

I didn't.

STEVEN

And I'd like to talk to you more about your marriage, get some background on Carl. Who he was, who you both were. That's what matters, really. I'll need to take some liberties, I always do, but I promise to be respectful.

(beat, encouraging)

He was a fan. I'll do it in a way he would have really liked.

She nods. Steven stands, and begins packing up his equipment.

MRS. WALKER

You really didn't see *anything*?

Steven frowns. He feels for her.

YOUNG HUGH (O.S.)

They didn't see anything.

CUT TO:

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE, THEN - AFTERNOON

YOUNG HUGH paces in the attorney's office. Young Steven watches on.

ATTORNEY

That's not the point -

YOUNG HUGH

My kids don't take the stand, Ross. I've been clear about that.

YOUNG STEVEN

I had my eyes closed when we left -

YOUNG HUGH

Don't say anything, Stevie.

ATTORNEY

No one else can corroborate your story, Hugh!

YOUNG HUGH

That's right.

ATTORNEY

Look, the jury hears you talk about packing five kids into your car at three in the morning, they're gonna wonder why they aren't hearing from those kids! Not a single one -

YOUNG HUGH

Right. Not a single one.

ATTORNEY

The media's already piling on, if we don't give them someone else to write about, it's gonna be more of this -

He DROPS TWO TABLOIDS on the table in front of them. Steven sees the headlines:

"Crazy Crane Claims Hill House Haunted"

"Hugh Crane Trial: Blames Ghosts for Wife's Death!"

Steven looks up at his father. SEEING HIM DIFFERENTLY NOW...

YOUNG HUGH

We don't engage.

ATTORNEY

They got this off your statement! To the police!

YOUNG HUGH

I wasn't thinking clearly that night, we lean on that.

ATTORNEY

You can't un-ring a bell -

YOUNG HUGH

Fine, they can rip me to pieces. They don't get to take bites out of the kids.

ATTORNEY

Okay. We do it your way. It'd just go a long way if I you'd let the press near the house - hell, they'll pay you! They'd pay to walk the grounds, take some pictures, that money could help cover your defense -

YOUNG HUGH

No one goes near the house. The cops have to, but no one else.

ATTORNEY

Then sell it, you need the money -

YOUNG HUGH

No.

ATTORNEY

Hugh... *you're saying you want to keep the house your wife just died in.* Do you know how that looks?

Hugh shakes his head. This guy doesn't get it...

YOUNG HUGH

I want the gates and doors locked. I want the only keys. I want to know, every day, that it's empty. No gardeners, no staff, no grounds keeping.

(beat)

I want it to sit there and rot.

CUT TO:

INT. HUGH'S CAR, THEN - DAY

They drive. Young Steven looks up at his father from the passenger seat. Stares at him. Hugh feels the gaze.

YOUNG HUGH

I'm sorry you had to hear that.

YOUNG STEVEN

What happened, dad?

Hugh doesn't answer.

YOUNG HUGH

(long beat)

It's going to be okay. I promise you.

Steven stares at his father, realizing for the first time that he DOESN'T BELIEVE HIM...

CLOSE on Young Steven, looking at the driver. We cut around to his POV:

CUT TO:

INT. STEVEN'S CAR - DAY

STEVEN is driving. We're now in his car, many years later. The passenger seat is EMPTY.

He PASSES a sign: LOS ANGELES - 180 miles.

A VOICE from his car speakers:

VOICE

I'm sorry, there's no Luke Crane at our center. We can contact you if he shows up.

STEVEN

I appreciate that. Thanks!

He reaches out, hanging up the call. Drives, frowning. Considers... and then reaches out, hitting the SPEED DIAL button on his console. Selects the first name on the list:

SHAYE.

It rings. After several rings, a woman's voice picks up.

SHAYE

(long beat)
Hello.

STEVEN

Hey.

There's a beat between them. She's waiting for him to speak, he's not sure what to say.

SHAYE

What do you want?

STEVEN

So my sister - there's something up with Nell, she may show up at the house today.

SHAYE

(beat)
At my house?

STEVEN

At the house, yeah.

SHAYE

Why?

STEVEN

My dad told her to, and I didn't
get a chance to tell him what's...

She sighs. Steven looks down at the WEDDING RING on his
finger, gripping the steering wheel.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, you can just point her
to me.

SHAYE

Is that all?

He shakes his head. Frustrated. He's not sure what to say, he
could take this conversation in a few different directions,
and we sense him trying to pick the one least likely to
combust...

STEVEN

Maybe I can come by, and we can
talk about this some more?

Nothing.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

How long does this need to go on,
Shaye? You tell me what I have to
do, and I'll do it. I mean, I just
want to come home -

SHE HANGS UP.

He sighs. The road rolls forward in front of him... but the
traffic is SLOWING.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Great.

He slows. Ahead, down the rural highway, it's BUMPER TO
BUMPER. An accident, most likely.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Just great.

He sits there, staring at the unmoving car. And at the TREES
beside the highway... some of the Northern California forest,
between the bigger cities.

He stares. Thinks.

Remembers...

CUT TO:

INT. HILL HOUSE, THEN - DAY

The view of the woods, through a window. Another time, before that night. Before the escape...

Reveal YOUNG STEVEN looking out at the trees... and at the TREE HOUSE near the house.

Behind him, MARY PACES.

MARY

Luke? Luke! Has anybody seen your brother?

Steven smiles, eyes on the tree house.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILL HOUSE, THEN - MOMENTS LATER

Steven crosses the yard, heading toward the tree house. Hand-made, clearly with love, the structure itself sits on an ancient tree, cradled by huge branches.

Steven climbs the ladder.

INT. TREEHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Steven POPS UP through the trap door. Nearby, coloring on the floor, YOUNG LUKE (5) JUMPS.

YOUNG STEVEN

Mom's looking for you.

Steven starts to climb up. Luke goes back to coloring.

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)

Trying every closet. Every single one. It never occurs to her you'll be in your tree house.

(beat)

The one dad built. For you.

Luke giggles.

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)

Dinner's ready.

YOUNG LUKE

I don't wanna go in yet, I don't like it inside.

YOUNG STEVEN

I hear you.

Distant, we hear MARY'S VOICE calling, presumably out the front door.

MARY (O.S.)

Luke?!

Luke sighs.

YOUNG STEVEN

No rush, my man.

He looks around. Lots of toys are scattered, and little Luke has clearly been busy decorating.

Next to all the crayon drawings, Luke is hard at work on a sign. He's gotten a large N and O onto the paper.

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)

Whatcha making?

YOUNG LUKE

A new sign. How do you spell "no girls allowed?"

YOUNG STEVEN

"N." "O".

YOUNG LUKE

I got those.

YOUNG STEVEN

"G".

Luke starts the "G".

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)

I told you last time, that's a bad idea. What happened to your other sign?

YOUNG LUKE

Theo ripped it.

YOUNG STEVEN

I'll bet. "I".

He looks at the DRAWINGS, scattered around the floor. Drawings of the FAMILY. Steven smiles.

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)

Is this the family? "R".

Luke starts drawing the "R".

YOUNG LUKE

Yep.

And then, begins to notice a trend. There are OTHER PEOPLE IN THE DRAWINGS, TOO.

YOUNG STEVEN

Who's this?

YOUNG LUKE

Friend.

Steven looks closer. It's a crude drawing, but there is something striking about it. The eyes are just BLACK CRAYON MARKS. The figure has no FEET.

YOUNG STEVEN

Your imaginary friends again, huh?

YOUNG LUKE

What's next?

YOUNG STEVEN

"L."

He looks at the drawings. There are several of them... it's easy to tell who the adults are, given their height. He can see representations of the kids, too...

We notice THE CRUDELY DRAWN RED RECTANGLE in some of the pictures... THE RED DOOR...

And then these other people. Tall. Grown ups. But less color... and those black eyes...

YOUNG STEVEN (CONT'D)

You know I used to have imaginary friends too. They go away when you get bigger. "S."

YOUNG LUKE

Okay.

(looking at his sign.)

No girls. Theo can't rip this one, it's not allowed.

YOUNG STEVEN

I'll tell her.

YOUNG LUKE

Will you hang out here though? With me?

YOUNG STEVEN
You want me to?

YOUNG LUKE
Yeah. That way it's just the cool
kids. You, and me.

YOUNG STEVEN
Just us?

YOUNG LUKE
You can hang out in here all the
time. We could draw together, or
play whenever you want. No girls,
just Stevie and Luke.

YOUNG STEVEN
The cool kids.

Steven laughs. His smile fades a little. There's something
about those drawings...

One of them really catches his eye. It almost looks like a
woman, but the dress is very large. RED SHOES on her feet.
But the striking thing is HOW BIG HER MOUTH IS...

A LARGE BLACK OVAL, TWICE AS LONG AS A MOUTH SHOULD BE, even
given the kid's perspective...

OPEN IN A YAWNING SCREAM...

A CAR HORN, AS IF COMING FROM THE OPEN MOUTH -

CUT TO:

INT. STEVEN'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

THE CAR HORN startles Steven out of his reverie. Traffic is
moving again, slowly. He waves at the car behind him, pulling
forward.

He's almost on the ACCIDENT SCENE. He slowly passes the
ambulance, lights flashing. The car, MANGLED.

It's not even on his side of the highway. He's been stuck in
traffic from the rubbernecking, that's all.

He sighs heavily.

STEVEN
Everybody get a good look? Okay?
Can we go now?

He and the other cars CRAWL past the scene, and get up to speed again. THE PHONE RINGS, an incoming call.

On the console: RICHARD.

Steven accepts it.

STEVEN (CONT'D)

Hey.

RICHARD

See any ghosts?

STEVEN

I've got a title: "The Leaking of Walker Roof."

RICHARD

Anything useful?

STEVEN

It used to be a hospice, there's stuff there. Maybe we find a few more? Hospices turned residential? Two more of those and I might have something.

RICHARD

You don't sound too excited.

He looks back in the mirror at the ACCIDENT SCENE behind him.

STEVEN

She gave me a great visual of a car accident ghost - maybe we go that way? Find some gnarly car accidents, ghosts in the wrecks, most haunted highways? Something like that?

RICHARD

Haunted highways isn't bad. You know what I could really sell, though?

Steven shakes his head. He knows exactly.

STEVEN

Hanging up now.

RICHARD

People want to know where you guys are these days!

STEVEN
No way, Richard.

RICHARD
None of your sales ever topped Hill House. There's so much interest - your dad, your siblings, what the house looks like today -

STEVEN
(thinks)
Bet it looks like shit.

RICHARD
It would sell.

STEVEN
Not interested. My family's still pissed about the first one. I do another one, I won't ever be able to show my face again.

A sigh on the other end. They've done this before.

RICHARD
Think about it?

Steven HANGS UP.

CUT TO:

EXT. STEVEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

LEGEND: **LOS ANGELES**

Steven steps out of his car outside of a DINGY APARTMENT BUILDING, in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Grabs his bags from the trunk, and heads in through the front door.

INT. STEVEN'S APARTMENT, STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

The "lobby" of the building is really just a series of wall-mounted mail slots, cracked tile floors, and the foot of an old staircase.

This isn't a place where someone *lives* - it's a place where someone *squats*, until the crisis has passed.

Steven DROPS his tripod, and it CLANGS noisily at the bottom of the stairs.

STEVEN
(frustrated)
Aw, fother mucker -

He grabs it, looking up the stairs -

AND FREEZES.

Standing at the landing, CLUTCHING an armful of odds and ends is the STRUNG-OUT YOUNG MAN we met under the overpass.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
(sighs)
Hey Luke.

Luke (20's, no longer the little kid we knew) has clearly had a HARD ROAD. Pale, sweaty. Thin. He looks like he's been sleeping on the streets.

LUKE
Hey Stevie.

Steven stares at him, nodding to himself. Looks at the things Luke is CLUTCHING in his hands...

Odds and ends, some cash. An old CAMCORDER. An iPad.

STEVEN
How'd you know where to find me?

Luke just stares at him. He seems CAUGHT.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Tell you what...

Steven drops his bags, reaching for his wallet. Luke watches, a bit humiliated.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
I've got... let's see. Two hundred bucks here. You hand me that iPad, you can keep the cash and you can sell that old camera.

He points to the iPad.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
I need that iPad though. I've got manuscripts on there, and some personal things. Research, pictures - it stays here.

Luke lowers his head. Ashamed.

Silently, he moves down the stairs. He hands Steven the iPad, and sheepishly takes the cash Steven holds out.

LUKE

I'm sorry.

STEVEN

I know.

Luke lingers. Somehow, this is worse than being yelled at.

LUKE

I just gotta square up and then I'm good again, and I'm going back to the clinic.

STEVEN

Good.

Steven makes no effort to stop his brother, just looks at him sadly.

LUKE

And before you say anything about rehab - I know what you're gonna say, and I don't need -

STEVEN

I'm not saying a damn thing.

Luke blinks, a little surprised... and then heads to the door.

Steven watches his brother go, vanishing into the streets. He sighs. Looks down at the iPad in his hand, and picks up his bags.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVEN'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Steven gets to his door. It's OPEN a little, and we can see the DAMAGE to the door frame from when Luke broke in.

STEVEN

Awesome.

He pushes the door open. Heads into the darkness of his apartment.

CUT TO:

INT. STEVEN'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

It's a SMALL place, dark. COLORED LIGHT from an advertisement near the window spills in, painting some of the shadows.

Steven drops his bags, hitting the LIGHT -

REVEALING NELL, standing in the living room.

STEVEN
(startled)
Jesus!

He laughs, shaking his head.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Thanks, I needed a good scare.

She stands still... her expression SAD.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Shaye booted you too, huh? I tried to tell dad. We're having some issues, but - did you tell Luke where I lived? You bring him here?

Nell doesn't answer.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
You just stood here and watched him loot me? Christ, Nell.
(beat)
So you hit up everybody. Dragged Luke out, made Dad hop on a plane...

He puts his hands on his hips.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Fine. You got us all listening. What do you want? What's so damn important, Nell?

Nell looks up, making eye contact. She starts to MOVE HER LIPS, but she doesn't make a sound...

Steven's PHONE RINGS. He looks down, lifting it out of his pocket.

It's HUGH.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Shit. I didn't give him the address...

Behind him, he doesn't see NELL'S ARM COME UP, POINTING JUST OVER HIS SHOULDER.

He answers.

STEVEN (CONT'D)
Hey. I tried to tell you.

HUGH (O.S.)
Steve...

STATIC.

STEVEN
Dad?

HUGH (O.S.)
(static, broken up)
- bout - Nell -

STEVEN
Can't hear you.

HUGH (O.S.)
(static)
... you hear me? I said it's about Nell.

STEVEN
I know, I just walked in and she -

HUGH (O.S.)
Nell was lying.

STEVEN
Shocking.

HUGH (O.S.)
She wasn't in LA. She was... at home, Steve.

He looks up at Nell.

HUGH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She was at *the house*.

Steven stops, blinking. Smirks a little.

HUGH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
She... she killed herself. Around three (static) morning...

STEVEN
(beat, laughs)
What?

HUGH (O.S.)
Last night. At the house, Steve.
The *goddamn* house -

More STATIC.

Steven holds his breath. This doesn't compute... he turns, to look back where Nell was standing -

SHE'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIS FACE. INCHES AWAY.

He DROPS THE PHONE.

HUGH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(over the phone)
Steve? Steve, you there?

Nell STARES AT HER BROTHER. And just like Mrs. Walker said, Steven doesn't scream. He just stares back, a look of CONFUSION on his face...

As her eyes SLOWLY ROLL UP INTO HER HEAD.

SILENTLY, SLOWLY. No fanfare, just... slowly ROLLING BACK, until he can only see the WHITES OF HER EYES...

Steven doesn't move. He doesn't scream. His mind can't even PROCESS what he's seeing... he just STARES.

And the RED VEINS spread across them...

HER SKIN CHANGES. STRETCHING, losing its color. BECOMING WAXEN, GREY AND DEAD.

Her mouth SLOWLY DROPS OPEN... reaching its limit...

AND KEEPS GOING.

DROPPING LOWER AND LOWER, IMPOSSIBLY LOW...

A SOUND COMING FROM HER THROAT -

Like a SCREAM, but starting VERY FAR AWAY -

BUILDING IN INTENSITY AS HER JAW DROPS -

FINALLY BECOMING DEAFENING -

Steven's paralysis is broken. He SCREAMS, FALLING BACKWARD. HITS the ground, looking back up -

And just like that, NELL IS GONE. Like she was never there.

HUGH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Steven? Steve?

Steven GASPS, catching his breath. Eyes wide and terrified.
The room is empty, and he is alone inside.

HUGH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Steve?

FADE OUT.