

THE HOUSE THAT WANTED SKIN

by

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"THE HOUSE THAT WANTED SKIN"

FADE IN:

EXT. PITMAN'S GROVE, N.J. - DAY

Floating high over the little village of Pitman's Grove, New Jersey, we slowly make our way toward a distant VICTORIAN HOME.

Drifting down, as if drawn in, we approach

THE VAUGHN HOUSE

A two story Victorian with the look of having been long neglected. Faded paint, unkempt landscaping, the lawn mown but definitely not maintained.

An SUV pulls into the driveway. Lettering across the back windshield reads: 'Meadows Properties' 'Foreclosure Specialists' 'PITMAN'S GROVE, N.J.' '555-5237'.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

(on phone)

What's up, Charlie? I'm about to make a stop. . .The Vaughn place. . .I know. . .I know, it makes my skin crawl just thinking about it. . .She's some fashion designer from the City, Joanna Morris or Morrison or something. . . Well what city do you think, dummy?

INT/EXT. SUV(PARKED) - DAY

GLADYS MEADOWS (65) - a neatly dressed woman, but one who seems not in the least concerned with the latest trends of fashion or of hairstyle...or of anything else for that

matter - sits behind the wheel.

She talks on a cellphone and glances up at the house with a look of some trepidation.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

I have to make sure the windows are closed. It looks like rain. Plus I've gotta check nobody's in there waiting to surprise the little princess. Remember, we had to board this damned place up, what was it, almost twenty years ago. Like a magnet for hobos. I had to bring in a crew just to haul off all the junk they left behind.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - DAY

Gladys exits the vehicle, traversing a path of broken paving stones and browned grass toward the house.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

(still on phone,
slightly impatient)

OK, Charlie, I will. OK, I've gotta go. See you soon.

Hanging up the phone, she mounts a wide set of steps leading to the porch and advances to the front door.

Fumbling with her keys she drops them, bends to pick them up, then inserts one and opens the door. It swings in with a loud CREEEEEEAAK.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY

Sweeping the visible part of the sparsely furnished first floor with her eyes, all the windows appear to be closed. She climbs the stairs to the second floor while we stay in the entry way.

GLADYS (O.S.)

Hello. Anybody here? Yoo-hoo!
Crazy homeless guys.

She comes back down the stairs and rounds the bannister, stopping at a small, ornate mirror on the living room wall. She inspects herself, running a finger across the wrinkles under her eye.

GLADYS

(into mirror)

You're not getting older Gladys,
you're getting...feistier.

She chuckles to herself then moves down the hallway to a door. Turns the antique knob, it's locked. Surprised, she sifts through her keys.

A LOUD BANG startles her. She peeks around the corner into the living room. Nothing there. She grabs a FIRE POKER from a stand near the fireplace and advances toward the kitchen.

A window stands open above the sink, sheer curtains billowing in the light breeze.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Is anybody here?

Wielding the poker uncertainly, she moves through the kitchen and cautiously through the back rooms of the first floor.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

If someone's in here you better say something. I'm armed.

She retraces her steps to the kitchen, propping the fire poker against a cabinet and closing the window with both hands.

Suddenly ANOTHER LOUD BANG from the front room makes her jump. She fumbles for the poker and creeps toward the open doorframe separating the kitchen from the front room.

Moving swiftly through the doorframe with the weapon raised above her head she sees...

NOTHING, save for a *side window now open*, which was previously closed. Wind moves the curtain and a sound like breathing is heard. DEEP, INHUMAN BREATHING.

An expression of pain moves across her face. She looks down.

Below the line of her skirt, on the side of her leg, is a small gash. She is bleeding slightly and has torn her pantyhose.

GLADYS (CONT'D)

Oh, dammit. Damn.

Disconcerted, she replaces the fire poker and closes the window.

LOW ANGLE from the kitchen door frame as we see her walk a bit unsteadily across the large room toward the front door.

FOCUS SHIFTS to foreground where an antique, square-headed NAIL protrudes from the frame of the kitchen doorway, a drop of blood and a tiny strip of hose visible on its end.

Gladys has become an out-of-focus blob in the background as she fumbles for the door, glancing back uneasily and closing the door behind her.

A moments pause on the nail, and just before the gathering drop of red falls *the nail pulls itself back in flush with the wall*. A sound like a deep AAAAAAAHHH is heard. HEAVY BREATHING echoes through the empty house.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - DAY

A MOVING VAN is backing into the driveway. A small CAR pulls in beside it. Overhead, a few dark clouds are starting to gather in an otherwise clear sky.

JOANNA MORRISON (late 20's), steps out of the passenger side of the car. She's dressed comfortably for a car ride, fashionably, but all in black.

Her assistant ERICA (mid 20's, dyed red hair), also dressed in black, climbs out of the driver's side. VIOLET (early 20's, thin), a model in jeans and punk rock t-shirt, gets out of the back seat. They all stare up at the house.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey Joanna, nice house!

Joanna swings around to find BRAD (late 20's), a well-built man in a football jersey and cut-off jean shorts, climbing from the moving truck.

BRAD (CONT'D)

It come with its own Boogie Man
or did you have to bring one?

Erica shoots him a look.

ERICA

Very funny, jock boy. Why don't
you make yourself useful and get
Joanna's bag.

Brad smiles, can see his attempt at levity bombed.

BRAD

Yes ma'am.

JOANNA

That's OK, Brad. I got it.

Joanna walks around the front of the car to the opposite
passenger's side and retrieves a large black duffel.

The back of the moving van is opened by MARK (early 30's),
a large man in a Hawaiian shirt, khaki shorts and flip
flops with a CAMERA hanging around his neck.

Inside the van are vintage furniture, antique dress forms,
boxes marked 'books' and 'records' and several full
clothing racks.

INT/EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - DAY

The quiet, darkened interior of the house. The door swings
open: CREEEEEEAAK. Joanna enters, followed by Erica, who
surveys the place disapprovingly.

ERICA

(to Joanna)

Are you sure you want to do this?
It's not too late to change your
mind, you know. We can go back
to the City. You can stay with me.

Joanna stares into the living room with foreboding. Seems

like she might be considering the offer.

JOANNA

I'm sure. It might take a little
getting used to though.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

Long shadows creep across the lawn. Brad takes a box from
the moving van, sets it on the ground and closes the
sliding door. He picks the box up and carries it into

VAUGHN HOUSE

and through the living room, passing Mark, who snaps a
photo. CLICK, freeze frame of Brad carrying the box.

BRAD

Thanks Mark. I was just thinking
'Gee, I wish someone would document
me doing all the work'.

MARK

(framing
another shot)
You're welcome.

CLICK, freeze frame Mark flipping off the camera. Mark
takes the box into

THE KITCHEN

where Erica is fixing a tray of snacks. Violet is opening
a bottle of Champagne.

BRAD

(indicating the
box)

This is the last of 'em.

ERICA

Just set it on the counter there.

VIOLET

(to Brad)

Want some bubbly?

BRAD

Mmmmm. Don't mind if I do.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Hey!

They all look up to see Mark pointing the camera at them.

CLICK. Freeze frame on the three. Brad has a dumb expression. Violet purses her lips, looking every bit the model. Erica has a look of consternation.

ERICA

Alright, out. Shoo. I'll bring these in when I'm done.

The three grumble and go back into the

LIVING ROOM.

Mark points the camera at Brad and Violet. We see them in CAMERA VIEW as they reach for each other. CLICK, freeze on them hugging, tongues out, eyes closed like they're about to kiss.

IN JOANNA'S BEDROOM

she is unpacking a box. Takes out some books and puts them on a shelf. Reaches back into the box and pulls out a

FRAMED PHOTO

of herself and an attractive man in a paint-spattered smock. An abstract canvas is on an easel behind them. Similar works hang on the wall. He holds a paintbrush. They are smiling.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Knock, knock.

Joanna swiftly puts the picture back in the box. Turns to see Erica standing in the open doorway holding two Champagne flutes.

ERICA (CONT'D)

I brought you Champagne.

Joanna forces a smile, takes the glass.

JOANNA

Thanks. Come in.

Erica strolls toward the ornate, black four-poster bed that dominates the room.

ERICA

Wow. Your new bed is amazing.

JOANNA

Thanks. . .well, you found it so. . .

ERICA

Yeah, but it looks even better in person. I'm surprised those two numb nuts were able to put it together.

JOANNA

You can sleep in here tonight
if you want.

ERICA

(pressing the
mattress)

No, thanks. Too soft. I sleep
on a board at my place.

JOANNA

Thanks for indulging me. I
couldn't sleep in the old one
anymore, not after. . .

ERICA

No, obviously.

Erica glances into the box, sees the photograph.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Look, I know we haven't talked
about it much since he, since the
funeral. I just hope you're OK.

JOANNA

I'll be alright. I just keep
thinking, maybe. . .if I'd
paid more attention to him, to
his work. . .

She lowers her head, weighed down with grief. Erica puts
an arm around her.

ERICA

Trust me Joanna, there's nothing
you could have done. I went through
it with my brother. Sometimes

people start down a path and they
just. . .don't know how to turn
around.

Meanwhile, back in the. . .

LIVING ROOM

Mark snaps another picture. CLICK, Brad and Violet with
their arms crossed, trying to look tough.

CAMERA VIEW

swings into the adjacent PARLOR ROOM and there, standing
among several antique dress forms, a DISFIGURED MAN stares
directly at us!

(Note: He's dressed all in black with a peacoat and
fisherman's hat. Half his face, evenly divided down the
nose, has had the skin removed. The exposed muscle
underneath is blood red. Half of his head, visible under
the cap, is covered in closely cropped red hair. The other
half is skinless. He is wearing black gloves. But we only
see him for a split second.)

Mark gasps and drops the camera. The Disfigured Man is
gone.

Brad and Violet look at him quizzically.

VIOLET

Are you alright?

Mark composes himself.

MARK

Yeah. I'm fine. Just thought
I saw something.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

It's dark now and pouring rain. Lightning flashes, eerily illuminating the house.

Electric light shines from within its windows for the first time in decades. Lingered voyeuristically, we can see our characters moving around in the living room.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

Joanna sits next to Erica and Mark on the couch. Violet is on a blanket on the floor. Brad comes in from the kitchen carrying three cans of beer. He tosses one to Mark and hands one to Violet, then cracks his own.

BRAD

Alright! Who's ready for some old school horror movies?

He puts a blu-ray in the player and takes a spot on the floor next to Violet.

BRAD (CONT'D)

I can't believe you guys haven't seen *Burnt Offerings*. It's absolutely essential '70s horror viewing.

As Brad prattles on about the virtues of Karen Black and seventies horror, Erica turns to Joanna, speaking low.

ERICA

(to Joanna)

I tried to tell them horror probably isn't your thing right now, but they were all so into it I-

JOANNA

It's OK.

(makes a muscle arm,
points at it)

I can handle it.

OUTSIDE

the wind picks up and a branch blows against one of the
side windows.

JOANNA hears the TAP, TAP, TAPPING sound.

JOANNA

That must be the pizza.

MARK

Good, I'm starving.

Erica starts to rise.

JOANNA

I got it.

She walks to the front door and opens it. There's no one
there. But then she sees something else. . .

Across the yard, on the sidewalk stands the Disfigured Man.
Stock still, shoulders squared, he's staring right at her.
A flash of lightning shows his hideous scars, which seem
almost to redden, to pulsate.

She gasps and slams the door.

ERICA

What is it?

JOANNA

There's someone out there. He
was just staring at me.

ERICA

It's not the pizza guy?

Joanna shakes her head no.

BRAD

I got this.

He gets up and grabs the POKER from a stand near the
fireplace. Goes to the door. He holds the poker up with
one hand and flings the door open. . .

The PIZZA GUY is there, dripping wet, holding two pizza
boxes. He screams, and so does Brad.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Oh, sorry man. We thought you
were someone else.

PIZZA GUY

Well, I'm glad I'm not him.
Or her.

Joanna, shaken, hands him some money. Thinks again and
gives him more.

PIZZA GUY (CONT'D)

(surprised at the size
of the tip)

Thanks!

Brad closes the door and heaves a sigh of relief. He looks
at Violet and Mark and the three begin to laugh.

Erica shoots Joanna a look of concern. They too start

laughing.

A COUPLE HOURS LATER

The living room is dimly lit by two ornate lamps on side tables. Bathed in the glow from the TV, Joanna sits close to Erica, eating popcorn, watching another 70s horror flick.

OUTSIDE

through the rain, the windows of the house flicker in the eerie light from the television.

BACK IN THE LIVING ROOM

Surrounded by beer cans and pizza boxes, the others sit on the floor, engrossed, as the movie is working towards a scare.

LIGHTNING FLASHES in the windows. For an instant the Disfigured Man can be seen, standing at the yard's edge.

Everyone is watching the screen, tense with fear. ANOTHER FLASH. The Disfigured man is closer, standing in the middle of the yard.

The movie reaches a climax and everyone jumps! Mark sloshes his beer. Violet grabs onto Brad, screaming. The popcorn bowl flies out of Erica's lap. They all break into nervous laughter.

Just then A HUGE BOLT OF LIGHTNING strikes in the front yard, revealing the silhouette of the Disfigured Man. He's standing on the porch, his frame filling the window!

Everybody jumps as the HOUSE SHAKES and the TV and lamps go out. Pitch darkness but for the occasional lightning, by

which we can see that the window is now empty.

BRAD

Great. Does anybody know where
the breaker box is?

MARK

Does anyone have a flashlight?

Brad and Violet simultaneously turn on their cell phone
flashlights. He puts up a hand to block the blinding
light.

MARK (CONT'D)

Thanks.

ERICA

It's in the basement.

VIOLET

Wait, what's in the basement?

ERICA

The breaker box. It's in the
basement.

MARK

Great.

SECONDS LATER

Mark is shining a light on the ANTIQUE DOOR KNOB. Joanna
hands him a key. Everyone else is huddled behind him.

He inserts the key and turns. KERCHANK, the old lock
responds.

He turns the knob and the door swings in. The cell phone

light is no match for the kind of darkness that's down those stairs.

They all watch as Mark descends, disappearing out of sight.

THUMP!

MARK

Aagh!

BRAD

Mark! Are you OK?

MARK

Got my shin. I think I found it.

CLICK, he flips the breaker. The lamps in the living room come back on. Everyone's relieved.

He shines the cell phone into the darkness of the basement and finds a pull-chain. Yanks it and a bare bulb comes on, swaying in the center of the room, casting shadows.

Joanna, followed by Erica, descends the stairs into

THE BASEMENT,

a medium-sized room that's like stepping back in time. The black-trimmed walls are covered in ornate red Victorian WALLPAPER. The floor and ceiling are black wood.

There is a single small window set high on one wall which lets in occasional flashes from the storm outside.

A few items, some covered in sheets, are here and there in the corners and an antique SURGICAL TABLE with wheels rests against one wall.

Mark starts snapping pictures of the creepy old table.
Violet shouts down the stairs:

VIOLET (O.S)
I'm not going down there.

BRAD (O.S.)
Me neither. Didn't any of you
see Don't Look In The Basement?

Joanna seems mesmerized. She walks slowly to one of the
walls and runs her fingers over the ancient wallpaper.

JOANNA
I wonder why they didn't show
this room in any of the pictures
online. It's fantastic.

ERICA
It's. . .something.

Joanna spots a large object in the corner, mostly covered
by a white sheet. She pulls off the sheet to reveal an
ANTIQUÉ SEWING MACHINE, the kind with a foot pedal and
pulleys.

JOANNA
I thought so. It's like a sign.

Mark snaps pictures of the machine and close-ups of its
ornate, cast iron base.

ERICA
(not convinced)
A sign?

JOANNA
This will make a great studio.

Erica runs her finger through a thick layer of dust on the surgical table.

ERICA

Don't you think it's a little. . .
stuffy?

JOANNA

I don't know. I think it's kind
of cozy.

Suddenly THE BASEMENT DOOR SLAMS! Mark starts up the stairs. KERCHUNK, the door locks.

MARK

C'mon Brad, don't fuck around!

BRAD

I'm not! It won't open!

The knob is turning frantically, but the door doesn't open. Mark reaches it, tries the knob, then starts banging on the door.

BRAD

on the other side of the door with Violet beside him in a panic, is furiously turning the knob and pulling at the door.

ERICA

mounts the basement stairs behind Mark.

ERICA

Alright, that's enough. Brad,
open the goddamned door or I'm

going to cut off your balls and
sew 'em into a tea cozy!

A pause, then. . .KERCHUNK, the door unlocks. It swings
open and Brad is there with a Cheshire Cat grin.

BRAD

Sorry. What? I couldn't help
myself.

MARK

Asshole.

VIOLET

He made me do it.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT (LATER)

Still raining, but lighter than before. Lightning still
flashes occasionally on the house with its windows now
darkened.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/VARIOUS ROOMS - NIGHT

The living room is dark. The couch has been folded out
into a bed upon which Brad and Violet lie. Erica and Mark
have blankets and pillows on the floor.

Brad's eyes are open. Lightning illuminates the dress
forms in the parlor room.

BRAD

Hey Mark, you awake?

MARK

No, Brad. I'm asleep.

BRAD

Those mannequins are creeping
me out.

MARK

They're not mannequins. They're
dress forms.

BRAD

OK. Mark, those dress forms are
freaking me out.

MARK

So throw a sheet over them or
something.

BRAD

You think that's gonna help?

Camera lingers for a moment on the dress forms, then moves
slowly out of the living room and creeps up the stairs,
down the hallway and into

JOANNA'S BEDROOM

where she is asleep on the large four-poster bed. She
moves a little as if in some discomfort. Flashes from the
now-receding storm occasionally light the room.

She turns onto her side and her eyes gradually open. *She
sees a large form beside her in the bed, completely covered
by the blanket.*

Slowly pulling the blanket down, she uncovers A MAN'S ARM,
a hypodermic SYRINGE protruding from its badly track-marked
surface. A trickle of blood flows from the insertion
point.

She looks at the form beside her, its face turned away, and

shakes it by the shoulder. No movement.

JOANNA

Jack?

She shakes the shoulder more vigorously now. Still no movement.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Jack, wake up! Wake up!

Slowly the body turns toward her. Lightning strikes again and we see *the face of the Disfigured Man*, the horrible patchwork of his skin revealed for a moment.

DISFIGURED MAN

(his voice hoarse and low,
barely human)

You did this to me!

She starts awake, gasping and shaking in her bed. Touching the covers where the horrible vision had been, she realizes that she is awake, this time for real.

She sits up on the edge of the bed and begins to cry, sobbing into her hands, alone in the dark.

Lightning again illuminates the room. *The Disfigured Man is standing behind her*, on the opposite side of the bed. He watches her, unmoving, for a long moment and then. . .

The room goes dark. Just her sobbing and a long, low roll of THUNDER. Another flash lights the room. He's gone.

EXT. MEADOWS' HOUSE - NIGHT

A well-groomed two story Midcentury. Dim light and faint MUSIC spill out from the front windows. The garage door

stands open and inside we can glimpse the real estate agent's SUV from the opening scene.

Lightning flashes and the Disfigured man is revealed. He's standing across the street from the house. He looks angry.

INT. MEADOWS' HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

Old-fashioned MUSIC is playing on a record player, something like Billie Holiday or Ella Fitzgerald. A POOL TABLE dominates the sunken den.

Gladys Meadows is bleary-eyed as she lines up a shot. A half-empty glass of scotch sits on the rail beside her.

Her husband CHARLIE (late 60's) is at the built-in bar mixing himself a drink.

CHARLIE

You need another one honey?

GLADYS

No, thank you. I'm pretty tipsy as it is.

CHARLIE

I'm hammered.

He salutes with his fresh drink, smiling dumbly.

GLADYS

Anyway I have an early morning. The Waits' are looking for something for their son. He's back from college, so of course he's unemployed and I guess they don't want him living in their pool house.

CHARLIE

Can you blame 'em?

GLADYS

No, I've met the kid.

CHARLIE

Yeah, me too. . .I could hear him
breathing.

They both chuckle. She takes her shot, scattering the balls around on the table but sinking nothing. Charlie wobbles a little as he steps up to the table.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Oh, congratulations by the way.

GLADYS

For what?

Charlie takes his shot, sinks nothing.

CHARLIE

For finally finding a renter for the old Vaughn place. I thought that eyeshore- eyeshore? Eyesore was going to sit there boarded up forever. Like some ancient mummy in a full body cast. What'd Ms. big-shot-fashion-designer say when you told her about the history of the place?

GLADYS

I didn't.

CHARLIE

You didn't tell her?

Gladys takes her shot, again nothing goes in.

GLADYS

No.

CHARLIE

But don't you think she has a right to know?-

GLADYS

I don't know, Charlie. Maybe. Look, it's getting late and I don't really want to talk about this right now.

CHARLIE

OK, OK. Touchy subject. Sorry.

He downs his drink. Looks at the pool table with its balls distributed equally across the surface.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

How long have we been playing this game?

GLADYS

Too long. I'd better get some sleep.

CHARLIE

Yeah, me too. Did you remember to close the garage door?

GLADYS

I don't know. I think so.

CHARLIE

I'd better go check. See you
upstairs my little love muffin.

He moves to her and kisses her forehead. She hugs him and pats him on the shoulder.

GLADYS

Goodnight, Charlie.

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT

It's dark, but as the distant lightning strikes it's clear the garage door is open.

Charlie opens the door from the house and comes in. He hits the button and the garage door RATTLES SHUT.

Light from inside the house spills into the garage, shining on a WALL RACK full of gleaming deadly instruments: A hatchet, a hacksaw, an antique hand drill, a hammer, giant wrenches, etc.

Suddenly, a CLANGING SOUND like an empty paint can falling.

CHARLIE

(under his breath)

What the hell?

(aloud)

Is somebody there?

A gloved hand reaches out for the tool rack, selects the HAMMER.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Look, you don't wanna screw with me. I was in Korea.

He turns and moves back toward the light switch. But before he can turn on the light. . .WHAM! The hammer strikes the back of his head.

Blood arcs up and spatters onto the concrete floor. The hammer comes down again and *lodges in his skull*.

The Killer twists the hammer, trying to remove it. Charlie gurgles as his body goes into convulsions, held up at the scruff of his neck by the other gloved hand.

The hammer is wrenched free revealing a round hole that fountains blood into the shaft of light from inside the house.

Charlie's body slumps to the ground, convulsing, then goes still. The hammer falls into the growing pool of blood.

INT. MEADOWS' HOUSE/BEDROOM - NIGHT

Gladys, in her night gown and sheer peignoir robe has heard a sound. She gets up from the vanity mirror and moves toward the open doorway.

GLADYS

Charlie?

IN THE GARAGE

Charlie's face is still, eyes open, mouth agape. Stone cold dead in the growing pool of crimson.

The Killer's POV moves to a stack of wooden-staked REAL ESTATE SIGNS that lean against the wall by the door.

GLADYS

stands in the bedroom doorway with a look of concern.

GLADYS

Charlie? Charlie!

(under breath)

My God, the man's deaf as a post.

With a shrug, she goes back to her vanity table and begins applying face cream.

THE KILLER'S POV

moves slowly from the garage and up the stairs. Down the hall to the bedroom. Enters, unseen by Gladys until. . .

The Killer from the neck down - black peacoat and woolen pants, hands behind the back - is framed in the mirror behind her.

GLADYS

becomes aware of the figure. Looks afraid. Stands and turns around.

GLADYS

You! What are you doing here?

Get the hell out of my bedroom!

Charlie! Charlie! What have
you done to him? Charlie!

Gladys runs for the bedroom door. The Killer, seen from behind, hands now in front, blocks her way. Frightened, she backs away toward the bed.

The Killer raises the real estate sign overhead. Gladys looks terrified but defiant. She rushes wildly at the Killer, but before she can make contact. . .the sign's pointed wooden stake plunges into Gladys' chest!

The stake is withdrawn. Blood spurts in a rich stream onto the oversize buttons of the Killer's peacoat. Gladys screams and steps back closer to the bed.

The stake is plunged in again. And again. Gladys falls back onto the bed. She struggles a little, blood filling her mouth and spilling over.

The real estate sign protrudes from her now-inert body. Emblazoned at an angle across its front: the word 'FORECLOSED'.

INT. MEADOWS' HOUSE/BEDROOM - DAY

Pulling back from the sign that's sticking out of poor ol' Gladys' chest, the Meadows' bedroom is now a crime scene.

The storm having passed, sunlight spills in brazenly from several windows along one wall.

INVESTIGATORS take samples and make notes. A PHOTOGRAPHER snaps pictures.

Standing near the foot of the bed is SHERIFF CARLO DONATI (in his 60's), goes by Carl, a large man with a serious look. DEPUTY ANDY ANDERSON (mid 30's), rail thin and awkward, stands beside him.

ANDY

Poor Gladys. She was friends with my mom. She'd come over to our house all the time. Real nice lady. We've notified their next of kin. Oh, and I looked into her recent clients like you told me. She sold a condo last month to an older couple from Maine. Down in the fish streets.

Looks like her business has been pretty slow lately. Nothing much else, except she recently rented out the old Vaughn place.

At this the Sheriff takes notice of Andy for the first time. Gives him a quick, worried look.

DONATI

The Vaughn place?

ANDY

Yes sir.

DONATI

Alright, Andy. Thank you. Make sure everything gets sent to forensics and meet me back at the station.

Sheriff Donati leaves the room and his deputy follows him out and down the stairs.

ANDY

What do you think Sheriff? I would say it's a robbery gone wrong only they didn't take anything. Least not that we can see.

They go through the open door into the

GARAGE

where the unfortunate Charlie is lying face down in a pool of his own drying blood. His lifeless eyes stare blankly. They step carefully around the body.

DONATI

Make sure they got photographs
and an impression from that partial
boot print. I have to go.

ANDY

Hey Carl, are you alright? You
look like you've seen a ghost.

DONATI

Maybe I have. Look Andy, meet
me in my office in an hour, alright?

ANDY

OK Sheriff. I'll see you then.

The Deputy watches, slightly concerned, as the Sheriff goes
out through the open garage door and down the driveway to
his CRUISER, gets in and drives away.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE - DAY

Erica, Mark, Brad and Violet are sitting around the living
room. Their overnight bags are packed, they're ready to
head back to the City. Mark looks at his watch.

VIOLET

I hate to say it, Erica, but I've
got a shoot in like three hours.

ERICA

OK, I'll go wake her up.

BRAD

There she is.

Joanna is coming down the stairs. Black pajamas, hair
disheveled.

JOANNA

I'm sorry guys. Guess I overslept.
Why didn't you wake me?

ERICA

We figured you needed the rest.

JOANNA

What time is it? Does anyone
want coffee?

ERICA

We brewed a pot. It's about eleven.

JOANNA

Eleven? Jesus.

ERICA

We've got to get going. Violet
has a shoot this afternoon and
we still have to bring the truck
back. Are you sure you don't
want me to leave your car?

JOANNA

No, that's OK. You'll need it.
Anyways, I can walk anywhere I
want to go around here.

ERICA

Alright. Oh, I hope you were
serious about setting up the
studio in the basement because
we moved everything down there
for you.

JOANNA

You did? Great.

(to everyone)

Thanks so much, for everything.

I owe you all one. You're the best.

MARK

You're welcome.

BRAD

Yeah, anytime.

VIOLET

It was our pleasure darling.

Hugs and kisses all around and everyone heads for the door. Erica is the last one out. She turns back.

ERICA

You're sure you'll be alright?

I could stay you know.

JOANNA

I appreciate it, Erica. Really. But this is what I wanted. I had this feeling like if I stayed in the City another day I was going to go completely nutso. It'll just be for a couple of months. Just 'til I figure out what I'm doing with the new line.

ERICA

Well, OK. I'll keep an eye on things until you come back. You take care of yourself, girlie.

JOANNA

I will. You too.

An emotional hug and Erica goes out. Joanna closes the

door, looks around, alone now for the first time in the Vaughn House.

INT/EXT. DONATI'S CRUISER (MOVING) - DAY

Sheriff Donati is driving on a residential street. A WOMAN, mowing her lawn, waves to him. He waves back, forcing a smile.

The CAR RADIO is on, a local newscast.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

(*INSERT: Announcer who talks about some innocuous local crime, a vandalism or something and makes a cheesy joke about how nothing much ever happens here in Pitman's Cove.*)

He comes to a stop sign, his blinker light CLICKING, and turns onto another street. It's Joanna's street. He slows the car as he approaches the Vaughn House.

As his cruiser drives past, he gives the house a look, the kind of look a soldier might give a battlefield he's visiting, many years after the war.

The car accelerates and he drives on. But we stay on the

VAUGHN HOUSE.

After a moment, the door opens and Joanna comes out. She checks that the door is locked behind her, then descends the steps onto the

SIDEWALK

and continues on down the tree-lined lane. It's a bright, crisp fall day. Joanna wears cool-weather clothes, all black, an oversized bag slung over one shoulder.

(Note: The CAMERA will seem to peer at her from a distance occasionally, watching her from behind a tree or the edge of a building. We might also see in passing - but not focus on - a few LOST PET SIGNS.)

There's a light breeze and the first yellow and orange leaves are beginning to fall. They dot the sidewalk as she continues on toward the old town center.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/BASEMENT - DAY

The basement, now set up as a working fashion studio, is dark save for the light that filters in through a small WINDOW set high on one wall.

Outside the window, seen through its smudged glass, a BLUEBIRD sits on a tree branch CHIRPING its pretty song.

After a long moment the window handle begins to twist, untouched by human hand.

It spins counterclockwise several times as the window hinges open, revealing a clear image of the songbird.

EXT. FABRIC STORE - DAY

Joanna follows the cracked sidewalk until she comes to an old STOREFRONT with a large WINDOW DISPLAY full of DRESS MODELS AND MANNEQUINS draped with expensive, richly-colored fabrics.

The whole is arranged like a fashion designer's studio, complete with worktable, sewing machine, design sketches, scissors, measuring tape, etc.

A painted glass sign reads 'CHARLOTTE'S FABRICS'. Joanna's face shows that she's impressed by the display.

BACK IN THE BASEMENT

the Bluebird, seen through the open window, is still chirruping gleefully on its branch. Suddenly, it flies in through the window and lights on a dress form.

One of the ornately-papered walls begins to pulsate, as if it were breathing. In fact, we can hear its BREATHING, deep and unnatural.

The Bird is suddenly and involuntarily pulled onto the wall. Its wings spread as it is flattened against the crimson wallpaper. Its blood fans out in all directions.

MURMURS and MOANING emanate from within the wall as the blood is absorbed. The Bird's desiccated remains are finally pulled in as if the surface were a liquid.

A small ripple in the wallpaper subsides, leaving it appearing exactly as before.

JOANNA

is still gazing at the shop display. She turns to the door, opens it. A BELL RATTLES as she goes into the

FABRIC SHOP,

a long space lined with wooden cubbies full of fabrics of every description.

A YOUNG WOMAN - blonde, athletic, about Joanna's age - whom we will shortly come to know as CHARLOTTE is at the back of the store with a clipboard. She starts toward Joanna, smiling brightly.

CHARLOTTE

Hi! How can I help you?

JOANNA

Hi. I special ordered some fabrics from you online a few weeks ago and I just wanted to see if maybe they've arrived. My name is Joanna Morrison.

CHARLOTTE

Perfect timing! Part of your order came in just this morning, but the lotus silk is still on its way from Japan. I'll go and get the rest of it.

She goes behind the counter at the front of the store and into a back room. Joanna starts looking at the excellent collection of fabrics on display.

She unrolls a spool of sheer red fabric and holds it up before her, inspecting it in the light. Through the fabric

SHE SEES

a hazy image of someone approaching rapidly, silently. A man perhaps. She pulls the fabric away, but no one is there. She's puzzled. Was it a shadow?

She jumps as a hand touches her on the shoulder.

CHARLOTTE

Gosh, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.

JOANNA

No, no. I was just daydreaming, I guess.

She hands Joanna a canvas bag containing half a dozen expensive-looking rolls of fabric, all in blacks and dark grays.

CHARLOTTE

I'm Charlotte, by the way.

She extends her hand and Joanna shakes it.

JOANNA

Nice to meet you. You have a lovely shop.

CHARLOTTE

Thanks.

JOANNA

Who did your window display?
It's really beautiful.

CHARLOTTE

Why thank you! I set that up recently.
And coming from you that is such a compliment. *The Joanna Morrison!*
Sorry, I'm such a huge fan of yours.
I mean, how many people have an actual shoe named after them that they designed? You're amazing!

JOANNA

Well, I don't know about that,
but thank you.

CHARLOTTE

When I was a kid I wanted to be a designer. I mean a professional like you. I still dabble, but

the store keeps me pretty busy.
Besides, I'm not very good.

JOANNA

Seeing what you've done with your
shop, somehow I don't believe that.
You have a great eye.

CHARLOTTE

You're too nice. Oh, I almost
forgot. Your receipt. I couldn't
help but notice you're living in
the old Vaughn house.

JOANNA

The Vaughn house?

CHARLOTTE

Well, that's what everybody calls
it. I mean since. . .since what
happened.

JOANNA

What happened?

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. I just assumed you
knew. Man, I'm really just
putting my foot in it today.

JOANNA

No, it's OK. What did happen
at the Vaughn house?

CHARLOTTE

Well, I don't know much about
it. I was just a kid, but everyone
said the man who lived there went

crazy. They say he killed some people and. . .I'm really sorry. I thought you knew.

JOANNA

You started to say something else. What was it?

CHARLOTTE

They say he skinned his own son alive.

JOANNA

Jesus.

CHARLOTTE

Yeah. It was pretty messed up. God, I feel like an ass.

JOANNA

No, I'm glad you told me. It doesn't matter anyway, I don't believe in ghosts.

And saying this, she exits the store. The BELL RATTLES.

EXT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Sheriff Donati pulls up in front of the police station, a one story brick building. He gets out of his cruiser, walks to the glass-fronted entrance and goes inside.

INT. POLICE STATION/DONATI'S OFFICE - DAY

Sheriff Donati comes into his office, a troubled look on his face, and sits down at his desk.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

"Hi, Marla. How are you doing today? . . . Oh, I'm good Sheriff, thanks for asking."

Donati looks up to see his secretary, a mountain of a woman named MARLA. If you look up the word 'battleaxe' in the dictionary you'll see a picture of this lady.

DONATI

I'm sorry Marla. How are you doing today?

MARLA

I'm doing fine, Carl. But you look like hammered horse shit. What's going on?

DONATI

Somebody killed Gladys and Charlie Meadows.

MARLA

Oh jeez, really?

DONATI

Yeah. Impaled Gladys and caved Charlie's head in with a hammer.

Marla crosses herself sadly.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Will you do me a favor and go and pull the file on the Vaughn House? Everything we've got.

MARLA

The Vaughn House? What's that got to do with anything?

DONATI

Never mind that. Just go pull
it please.

MARLA

(getting up)

OK, if you say so. But if you
ask me, that's all in the past
and that's where it belongs.

DONATI

Yeah, you're probably right.
Nevertheless. . .

He watches as she goes out, mumbling to herself. A few
seconds later Deputy Anderson enters.

ANDY

Hi Sheriff. Hey, what's got
up under Marla's chassis this
morning? She didn't say a word
to me when I passed her in the
hall just now.

DONATI

Take a seat Andy. Marla'll be
back in a second with some files
I want us to take a look at.

Andy sits, confused.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Andy, what do you know about
the Vaughn place?

ANDY

Well, let's see. . .how did that

old rhyme go? "If you pass the Vaughn House, don't go in. Or Old Man Fred will cut off your skin". Something like that. I was just a teenager when that happened Sheriff. The skin I was interested in didn't have anything to do with the Vaughn House.

Marla comes in holding a large cardboard box. She sets it on the desk between the Sheriff and Andy.

MARLA

There it is. Everything we have on the Vaughn House. God, I wish somebody would have just burned that damned place down.

DONATI

You remember what happened, don't you Marla?

MARLA

Yeah, I remember.

DONATI

You wanna fill Andy in on the details?

MARLA

No. And I don't think anything in that box needs to come out again. Now if you'll excuse me, it's time for my lunch. You know how I get when I'm hungry, so I suggest neither one of you try and stop me.

She grabs her purse and goes out. Carl watches her go, then turns to Andy.

DONATI

Well, in that case I guess it falls on me to do the honors.

He leans back in his chair, rubs his eyes.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Back in the mid-'90's a retired doctor - his name was Frederick Vaughn - moved into the house. Soon after there was an itinerant worker who disappeared. Neighbors said the last place they'd seen him was doing some yard work for the doctor. I was still a deputy then. We checked the place out. Didn't find anything. But that old doctor gave me the creeps. He had a young son, a toddler. I thought it must be his grandkid at first, but he told me it was his son. When I asked about his wife he said she had abandoned him and her child soon after the kid was born.

ANDY

Did you look into his story about his wife?

DONATI

Yes I did. I was just getting to that. Now, if you're going to interrupt me a whole bunch

during this thing it's going to
take a long time to get through.

ANDY

OK, I gotcha. Go on.

DONATI

So I checked out his story about
his wife. We couldn't find a
trace of her. Nothing after
the time she disappeared. She
didn't have much family. And
the ones she did have she wasn't
close to. But none of them we
talked to had ever heard from
her again. No known address,
no nothing. It didn't sit well
with me, but there was nothing
I could do. We had to drop it.

Donati opens the box and begins pulling out binders, laying
them on the desktop.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Nothing happened for a while,
maybe two years. Then a six
year old girl disappeared. Vaughn
had been seen talking to her earlier
in the day, down near the barber
shop. We questioned him, but
there was no evidence he'd done
anything. The little girl was
never found.

He pulls out a large envelope and sets it on top of the
stack of binders.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Fast forward to early 2001. A vagrant that was pretty well known around town at the time, a man named Herschel Jackson. . .everybody called him 'Stitch'. . .went missing and the good doctor's name came up on our list of people he'd been seen with. I went with another deputy to question him. He claimed not to have seen Stitch in several weeks. We were about to leave when I heard a sound coming from the basement. Sounded like a kid crying. The old man got real shaky at this point. I had the other deputy keep an eye on him while I went to check it out.

He opens the envelope, pulls out a stack of photographs and begins shuffling through them. Tears, unbidden, are coming to his eyes.

DONATI (CONT'D)

What I saw down those basement stairs Andy. . .I've spent the past twenty years trying to forget it. What I saw was a young boy, Philip Vaughn, that toddler I'd seen five years earlier. He was naked, strapped down to a metal table, and the skin had been cut off half of his body.

He is almost unable to go on, horrified by the memory.

DONATI (CONT'D)

There was blood everywhere, candles

burning and some sort of altar
with satanic-looking symbols.
I don't know if I went into shock
or what, but I heard this godawful
whispering sound.

He puts down the stack of photos and we can see on the top
of the stack a photograph of the young boy, PHILIP VAUGHN
(whom we have known thus far as The Disfigured Man), taken
as evidence of the crime. The expression of sadness on the
boy's face is haunting.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Frederich Vaughn was arrested and
sentenced to life without parole
in the state prison for the criminally
insane. The boy, who it turns out
was developmentally challenged, was
put into a home. They tried to
help him but his behavior became
more and more unruly. He killed
a cat they used to keep around the
ward, to cheer up the kids. After
that everybody pretty much gave up
on him. He withdrew into himself,
never speaking again. One day
they went to bring him his lunch
and he was gone. Out an unlocked
window. He was never heard from
again. Frederich Vaughn committed
suicide in his prison cell. Got
hold of a razor and slit his wrists.
But not before he'd removed all
the skin from his face. And the
weird thing is, they never found
the skin. Didn't find his son's
either.

ANDY

Do you think he ate it? I bet
he ate it. Man, that guy was
one sick puppy.

Andy looks disturbed as he thumbs through the photos:

- -Philip Vaughn from behind, half the skin missing from there as well.
- -Several pictures of the basement. The same crimson wallpaper we've come to know. The same metal surgical table.
- -An ANTIQUE PODIUM that looks like something out of ancient Babylonia. Candles, now extinguished, have dripped wax down its corners. Its surface is inscribed with a menacing symbol.
- -A photograph of DR. FREDERICH VAUGHN being led by DEPUTIES into a courthouse. Gaunt face, long mustache. Eyes intent and filled with evil power. Looking straight into the camera. We might recognize one of the deputies as a young Carlo Donati.

DONATI

He was sick all right. Let's
just hope it's not catching.

ANDY

What do you mean, Sheriff?
What does all this stuff about
Vaughn House have to do with
Gladys and Charlie?

DONATI

I don't know. Not for sure.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Knock, knock.

The spell broken, they turn to see SHARON DONATI (50s), the Sheriff's wife, standing in the doorway with a big Tupperware cake dish.

SHARON

I baked a coffee cake for you boys. And for Marla. Where's Marla?

Carl takes the photos from Andy and puts them in the box, then swiftly covers them with one of the binders.

DONATI

Hey honey. Uh, Marla's at lunch.

ANDY

Hi, Sharon.

Her eyes fix on the box. 'Vaughn House' is written on its side in black marker. It sinks in what she's interrupted.

SHARON

Hi Andrew.

She sets the cake pan down on Marla's desk.

SHARON (CONT'D)

Carlo, can I speak with you in the hallway for a moment.

Uh, oh. Carl knows the gig is up. She's seen the box.

DONATI

Uh, sure.

He gets up and follows her into the

HALLWAY

where his wife is waiting with a look of concern. They whisper:

DONATI (CONT'D)

What's up, honey?

SHARON

Don't 'what's up honey' me, Carlo Donati. What in the devil are you two doing looking at. . .at what's in that box?

DONATI

Somebody killed Gladys and Charlie.

She's shocked, but recovers.

SHARON

Oh. That's terrible. But what does it have to do with that awful house?

DONATI

At this point, nothing. But somehow I've always known that what happened in that house. . .that it wasn't over. Don't ask me how I know, I just know. And if there is some connection between what happened to Gladys and Charlie and that house, I'm not gonna be caught flat-footed again.

SHARON

I'm just worried about you Carlo.
You know, there's no shame in
putting someone else in charge
of the case. What about Andrew?
Don't you think he's ready?

DONATI

I know it doesn't make sense to
you Sharon. Hell, it doesn't
even make sense to me. But I
need to be prepared and I need
to see this thing through.

SHARON

OK. OK, sweetie. But just promise
me you'll talk to me, keep me in
the loop. That's the one thing I
could never stand about what happened
back then. How quiet you got.

DONATI

I will. I promise.

He kisses her on the forehead. She rests her head against
his chest for a moment, then dries her eyes.

SHARON

I have to get going. See you
this evening sweetie. I love
you.

DONATI

I love you too.

He watches as she walks away down the hall, the heaviness
of the day's events evident on his face.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

The House looks even more sinister after all we've just heard from the Sheriff. The sun begins to move quickly and we go into a TIME LAPSE of the house. Light turns to dark and back to light as we go into a

PASSING OF TIME MONTAGE

- -The CAST IRON WHEEL of the antique treadle SEWING MACHINE spins. Joanna sits at the machine. Her feet pump the pedal. She deftly pushes fabric under the needle.

- -A NEIGHBOR rakes leaves in their front yard. The leaves pile up at the Vaughn House.

- -The sun speeds up and we go back into TIME LAPSE. Day, night, day, night.

- -The arcing sun blends into the spinning sewing machine wheel. Joanna is again hard at work. The dress forms wear parts of the garments - all blacks and dark greys - that she has created.

- -A LITTLE BOY tapes a sheet of paper to a lamp post. It's a black and white picture of a kitten. It reads: 'Missing Cat. His name is Tiger'.

- -Joanna is finishing a sketch. She tacks it to a cork board next to several others.

END MONTAGE

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/BASEMENT - DAY

Joanna, having tacked up the sketch, sits down at the sewing machine. Her feet pump the pedal and the wheels start to spin.

She pushes fabric under the shuttle. An almost-inaudible WHISPER is heard. Joanna stops, listening, then goes back to work.

The WALL above her begins to pulsate. A HUSKY BREATHING emanates from within.

Distracted by the sound, *Joanna sews over her right index finger!* Blood drips onto the sewing machine and a little spatters onto the wall.

JOANNA

Ow! Fuck, fuck, fuck!

She gets up and heads for the basement stairs, cupping her wounded hand. Blood drips onto the black wood of the stairs.

She stops, hearing the now-louder BREATHING sound mixed with low MURMURS. Brushing it off, she continues up the stairs and into

THE DOWNSTAIRS BATHROOM

where she rinses her punctured finger under the faucet. With her other hand she opens a cabinet drawer, rifles through the random contents and pulls out a small FIRST AID KIT.

ON THE BASEMENT STAIRS

the drops of Joanna's blood are absorbed into the wood. The house reverberates with a perverse MOAN of enjoyment: Mmmmmmmmm!

THE WALLPAPER

above Joanna's sewing machine ripples and pulsates as if the very walls have come to life.

IN THE BATHROOM

Joanna tries to close the drawer, but it catches on something. Tries again but it still won't close. She pulls the drawer further out and finds a folded up NEWSPAPER article.

She pulls it out and sets it on the counter, then closes the drawer.

She begins bandaging her wounded finger as we push in on the newspaper. It is an article entitled 'House Of Horrors' which features an eerie black and white photo of Vaughn House.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/VARIOUS ROOMS - DAY (A LITTLE LATER)

Joanna's finger is neatly bandaged. She puts a KETTLE on to boil then sits down at the small dining room table. Her LAPTOP sits before her, the newspaper article beside it.

With her good hand she pecks out into the SEARCH BAR: vaughn house.

Among the links about haunted houses and urban legends she spots a headline: The Crimes Of Frederich Vaughn. She clicks on the link.

A page opens showing Frederich Vaughn's arrest photo. His wild hair and coiffed mustache, his piercing eyes that seem to stare into her, through her.

She scrolls down, reading the article. Sees the name Philip Vaughn highlighted and clicks on it.

A page that features a drawing based on the police photo of the naked Philip Vaughn. Her face shows the sadness she feels for the poor, tortured child.

She types into the search bar: philip vaughn.

Clicks on a link. An article detailing the urban legend about the escaped mental patient who is said to haunt the seaside village of Pitman's Cove.

It is accompanied by a DRAWING showing a grown-up, scary looking Philip Vaughn in his peacoat and fisherman hat, black gloves and all.

Further down in the article are crime scene photographs showing the sinister symbols on the basement wall. She recognizes the wallpaper.

Suddenly the laptop screen goes black. She presses some keys, but nothing happens.

The kettle begins to whine. She gets up and removes it from the flame, then goes back to the laptop. It's plugged in and the light on the charger is green, but its screen remains black.

JOANNA

What the hell?

She goes to the kitchen counter and removes her cell phone from its charger. Types in a search. The drawing of Philip Vaughn appears and she scrolls down to the crime scene photos of the basement.

Her phone screen goes black. She presses buttons, attempting to restart the phone, but to no avail.

Puzzled, she puts the phone down on the counter. She goes

back to the laptop and presses a few keys, but it still does not respond.

Seeming to make a decision, she goes to the door, takes a jacket from a coat rack and puts it on.

The newspaper article with its creepy black and white photograph of Vaughn House still sits on the table beside her now-dead laptop. Joanna's hand reaches in and pulls it out of frame.

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

Under grey skies a cold wind has reddened Joanna's cheeks. She passes between a pair of stone LIONS and up the stairs to the columned entrance of the library. The folded newspaper article protrudes from her jacket pocket.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - DAY

The house stands, looking somehow self-assured against the cold grey sky. A GERMAN SHEPHERD DOG comes sniffing up the sidewalk and stops at the house.

An ornate side gate to one side suddenly SQUEAKS open by itself. The Dog runs through, sniffing his way into the back yard.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Joanna goes to the librarian's desk. A distinguished looking older man, the LIBRARIAN, is holding a stack of index cards, filing them in a wooden cabinet.

He sees Joanna and approaches.

LIBRARIAN

Hello young lady. How may I assist

you today?

JOANNA

I've recently moved into a house nearby and if possible I'd like to find out some information about the previous owners. Maybe something about its history.

LIBRARIAN

Sure. I can help you. I'll just need the home's address.

JOANNA

It's 1031 Gibson Lane.

The Librarian's face goes slack. The stack of index cards falls from his hand, fluttering to the floor.

BACK AT VAUGHN HOUSE

The German Shepherd sniffs around in the back yard, makes his mark on some shrubberies.

The knob turns on the back door of the house and it opens just a crack. The Dog approaches and nudges its way in.

IN THE LIBRARY

The Librarian is kneeling, picking up the index cards.

LIBRARIAN

I'm sorry Miss. Normally I'm more professional. It's just that I haven't heard that address mentioned in a long time.

He stands up and straightens himself.

LIBRARIAN (CONT'D)

I know it's not my place, but are you sure this is something you want to delve into? The history of that house is. . .quite dark.

AT VAUGHN HOUSE

The German Shepherd sniffs around the kitchen, then runs into the living room. The basement door creaks open. The Dog moves cautiously to it and goes in, down the darkened stairs.

YELP! The door SLAMS shut. MUFFLED MOANS and MUNCHING SOUNDS are heard from the other side.

IN THE LIBRARY

Joanna, holding several index cards in her wounded hand and two BOOKS in the other, is making her way through the rows of shelves. The camera seems to spy on her from a distance.

In the quiet library the only sound is the CLOP CLOP of her shoes on the marble floor.

She finds the shelf she is looking for, scans it and pulls a book entitled 'The Ghostly Lore Of Pitman County'.

A chill runs through her. She's feeling watched. She looks down the row in one direction. Sees nothing. Looks in the other direction. . .

Philip Vaughn is standing at the end of the rows of bookshelves, silhouetted by the light from a window behind him.

Taking the book, she moves swiftly in the opposite direction, wending her way through the maze of bookshelves.

Turning a corner, she drops the stack of books. She bends to pick them up.

When she rises, PHILIP VAUGHN stands directly before her, his half-skinless face inches from hers! Her mind reels and she faints, sagging to the floor.

MOMENTS LATER

Joanna's blurry vision slowly comes into focus. The Librarian leans over her as others a few other patrons crowd around.

LIBRARIAN

Are you alright, Miss?

JOANNA

Yes, I think so. Did you see him?

LIBRARIAN

See whom?

JOANNA

Philip Vaughn.

LIBRARIAN

Perhaps I should call you an ambulance.

JOANNA

No. I'm alright.

She reaches out with an arm and the Librarian helps her to her feet. She moves to retrieve the fallen books and a BYSTANDER picks them up and hands them to her.

Unsteadily, Joanna walks toward the check out desk.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I'm going to need a library ca. . .

She falls again, scattering the books across the slick marble floor. Everything goes black.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Joanna slowly wakes. She's in a hospital bed. Erica is sitting in a chair beside the bed reading a fashion magazine. She notices Joanna's stirring.

ERICA

There she is, back from the other side.

Joanna groans, shaking off sleep.

JOANNA

I'm so groggy.

ERICA

Yeah, the nurse told me they gave you a mild sedative. She said you're OK though. Probably just exhaustion. You've been working too hard.

JOANNA

I saw him again.

ERICA

Saw who?

JOANNA

The man from the night I moved in.
The one who was outside. I dreamed
about him too.

ERICA

Ooh, do I sense a love interest?

JOANNA

What? No!

She spies her coat on a chair near the bed, reaches out and
grabs the newspaper article from the pocket. She hands it
to Erica.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

His name is Philip Vaughn.

ERICA

(scanning the
article)

Christ, this is gruesome. I
swear to God Joanna, I had no
idea.

She folds the paper and sets it down on the side table.

ERICA (CONT'D)

Well, this clenches it. We've
got to get you out of there.
I'm pretty sure we can break
the lease since the agent never
told me about any of this, but
either way-

JOANNA

No. I'm not leaving. Not now
anyway.

Erica looks puzzled. She stares at Joanna in disbelief.

ERICA

Are you completely crazy? The place is a bona fide haunted house. And if this Philip Vaughn is back-

JOANNA

No, Erica. Remember how I said my parents died in a car accident when I was nine? Well there's something else I never told you.

She closes her eyes, remembering.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

After they died, after the funeral. . . I saw them. At first it was just in dreams. They were. . .horribly burned. It was like they were calling to me, wanting me to join them.

Erica's eyes moisten as she listens to Joanna's ghost story.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Pretty soon I started seeing them everywhere, even when I wasn't asleep. I was so scared. But as time went on I realized they weren't really there. I would still see them but I knew it was all in my mind. Some manifestation of hidden guilt or an image of the loss I'd suffered. I don't know. But one day they just stopped

showing up. I knew that they were gone for good, that they weren't ever coming back.

A KNOCK at the door. A NURSE comes in holding a plastic meal tray.

NURSE

Miss Morrison, you're awake. How are you feeling?

JOANNA

Pretty good. A little stiff.

NURSE

Yeah, you bruised your shoulder when you fell. If you like you can stay overnight, just for observation, but the doctor said you're clear to discharge. He also prescribed a cream for that nasty cut on your finger.

She sets the tray on the side table and rolls it into position in front of Joanna.

NURSE (CONT'D)

Just push that button there and you can let me know when you decide.

JOANNA

Thanks.

The nurse leaves.

ERICA

What happened to your finger?

JOANNA

I sewed over it.

Erica winces, then levels a paternal gaze on Joanna.

ERICA

I think you should stay here.
Just for the night. I have to
drive back to the city this evening.
I've got that big go-see for the
models tomorrow. Though I suppose
we could reschedule-

JOANNA

No, do the go-see.

(smiling)

The show must go on.

ERICA

Well, OK I guess. Can I at least
start looking for a new place for
you? Maybe something in the city?

JOANNA

I'm going to stay where I am
for now.

ERICA

But-

JOANNA

No but's. I'm finally making
progress and I don't want to
spoil it. I feel more creative
than I have in a long, long time.

Another KNOCK at the door. Sheriff Donati peeks his head
in.

DONATI

Miss Morrison, I'm sorry to disturb you. I'm Sheriff Donati.

He comes into the room. He's holding the stack of three books Joanna was attempting to borrow when she blacked out.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?

He sets the stack of books down ominously on the hospital table. We can read the titles:

- - Skinned Alive: The Crimes Of Frederich Vaughn by Dr. Corey Plumley
- - Satanic Symbolism by S.R. Ash.
- - The Ghostly Lore Of Pitman County by Clive B. Spencer

DONATI (CONT'D)

Some interesting reading. I took the liberty of checking them out for you.

ERICA

What's this all about Sheriff?

JOANNA

It's OK, Erica.

DONATI

I spoke with the librarian. He said you saw a man shortly before you collapsed. Can you describe him for me?

JOANNA

Honestly I'm not sure if I saw anything at all. I've been under a lot of stress lately and haven't been sleeping well. I think my nerves just got the better of me.

DONATI

Well, that's understandable. If I was living in a house where all those horrible things happened I doubt I'd get a good night's sleep either.

He looks at Joanna, gauging the effect of his words.

DONATI (CONT'D)

The librarian told me you were there researching Vaughn House.

ERICA

Look officer, I don't mean to be rude but my friend has been through a lot and she needs to rest.

DONATI

I hope you'll pardon my nosiness, Miss - Summerhill is it? I guess it sort of goes with the territory, me being a cop and all. You're the one who communicated with Gladys Meadows about the rental of the Vaughn house. Is that correct?

ERICA

Yes, and I'm going to have some choice words for Mrs. Meadows when I talk to her too.

DONATI

Not unless you can speak with the dead. She and her husband were murdered in their home the night you moved your boss into Vaughn House.

ERICA

Sheriff, the last thing I want to do is make you angry, but my *friend* needs her rest, so if you'll please excuse us.

DONATI

OK. I'm sorry to have bothered you ladies.

He starts to leave, then turns back toward Joanna.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Oh, and Miss Morrison, I checked those books out with my own library card so I'd appreciate it very much if you'd return them on time. Best of luck with your fashion show.

He closes the door on his way out. Joanna stares at the congealed food-like substances on the tray in front of her.

JOANNA

Let's get out of here. I'm starved and there is no way I'm eating this.

ERICA

At least let me take you back to the house. I'll make some soup and you can show me what you've been working on.

JOANNA

Look, I appreciate all that you do for me Erica. I really do. But you've got to start trusting me, alright? I'm not helpless.

EXT. SIDEWALK - AFTERNOON

Huge trees blow in the breeze and cast shadows over the quiet avenue. MISSING PET POSTERS adorn lampposts and telephone poles.

MRS. FINSTER (mid 40's), an aging trophy wife with long blonde hair to her waist walks down the sidewalk. In one hand she holds a DOG COLLAR attached to a LEASH.

MRS. FINSTER

Dutch! Where are you boy? Dutch!

Hearing a MUFFLED BARK, she stops and looks in the direction of the sound. She is staring at the forbidding edifice of

VAUGHN HOUSE.

The front door is closed. Mrs. Finster goes around the side of the house, through the open gate, to the basement window and looks in through the grimy glass, but she can see nothing.

MRS. FINSTER (CONT'D)

Dutch? Is that you?

Another BARK emanates from within the basement. She goes back around to the front porch and stops at the bottom of the stairs. *The front door is now open.*

Hesitantly, she mounts the steps. She peeks into the dark interior.

MRS. FINSTER (CONT'D)

Hellooo. Is anybody home? Dutchie,
are you in there?

Another BARK, this time louder. She pushes the door open. A shaft of light creeps down the hallway and onto the basement door, which stands slightly open.

A WHIMPERING SOUND and she's sure it's that of her beloved German Shepherd, Dutch. She pulls her cell phone from a jacket pocket and turns on its flashlight, advancing toward the open basement door.

MRS. FINSTER (CONT'D)

If there's somebody there you
better say something, 'cause
I am coming down to get my dog.

She moves down the stairs into the

BASEMENT,

finds a lamp and fumbles for the switch. A dim, reddish light - caused by sheer red fabric draped over the shade - fills the room.

She surveys Joanna's work room, taking in the creepy dress forms and work sketches, the antique wallpaper.

Suddenly, a BARK behind her. She spins back toward the stairs but sees nothing.

The basement door SLAMS shut. She moves to run up the stairs, but she is being held in place. She turns to look behind her and sees that *her long, blonde hair is pulled*

back straight and into the wall.

She tugs at it but it won't budge. Her hair is being slowly pulled into the wall! Panicked, she tries fruitlessly to pull herself free.

Her eyes search desperately for a way out. On the edge of the nearby work table she spots a pair of ANTIQUE SCISSORS.

She reaches for the scissors, just brushing them with her finger. They drop to the floor, but too far away.

She takes the dog collar, which is attached to a leash, from her other hand and tosses it toward the scissors, but only succeeds in knocking them further away.

Crying hysterically, she throws the collar again and gets it around the scissors. Starts pulling them toward her, but the makeshift lasso slips over the top of scissors.

Losing hope, she throws the collar over the scissors again and carefully inches them toward her as her hair is slowly, relentlessly being pulled into the wall.

The scissors are close to her foot now. She drops the leash and bends to pick them up. . .but they are just out of reach!

Screaming, she's pulled onto the wall. Her legs just touch the floor. Her arms flail uselessly.

Her scalp begins to rip away from the back of her skull. Blood trickles down onto the black floorboards and is quickly absorbed.

HEAVY BREATHING and SICK MOANING SOUNDS are heard as the house feeds on her blood. Her face pales, frozen in terror, then begins to collapse from the inside.

Her arms, legs and torso similarly collapse. Her blood fans out onto the wall, pulled as if by gravity. The wallpaper ripples with excitement as it soaks in.

The dry husk of her body sinks into the surface of the wall. The House reverberates with a sound of relish:
MMMMMMMMMMMMMM!

INT. DINER - AFTERNOON

Joanna and Erica sit in a booth at a glass-fronted diner that looks out onto the town square. An OLD COURTHOUSE dominates the middle of the square. TOWNSPEOPLE bustle by, going about their afternoon routines.

JOANNA

Mmmmmmmmmmm! God this is good.
I was so hungry.

The library books sit on the table beside Erica and she thumbs through one as she distractedly pokes a fork at her salad.

ERICA

So this Frederick Vaughn guy was some sort of evil sorcerer. Jesus, why would you still want to stay in that place?

JOANNA

Do we have to keep talking about this? I told you, I don't believe in ghosts. Not anymore.

ERICA

Well then why did you decide to research the house in the first

place?

JOANNA

I guess I just got curious.

ERICA

Oh, I almost forgot. Mark told me that some of the photos he took at the house came out kinda weird.

JOANNA

Weird how?

ERICA

I don't know. He didn't say. He just said it was weird.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Joanna!

They turn to find Charlotte, dressed in a flowing hippie-girl dress with red stockings, standing beside the table. She holds a to-go cup of coffee.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. I know you're probably talking about important fashion stuff.

She curtsies awkwardly, twirls a blonde braid over her ear.

JOANNA

No, you're fine. Erica, this is Charlotte. She owns the fabric store down the street. Charlotte, this is my friend Erica. She also happens to be my brain.

Charlotte looks confused.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

She's my assistant.

CHARLOTTE

Oh! Wow, it's amazing to meet you Erica! I'm so envious.

(pauses awkwardly)

Isn't this place great? So authentic. I come in here all the time whenever I need a pick-me-up.

Erica eyes Charlotte, sizing her up. Charlotte blushes, embarrassed.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Anyways, I don't want to intrude. Just thought I'd say 'hi'.

JOANNA

Don't be silly, have a seat.

CHARLOTTE

No, I really do have to go. It was nice to meet you Erica.

Erica smiles politely and shakes her hand.

JOANNA

Oh, any news on that lotus silk? I really need it for a vest I'm working on.

CHARLOTTE

I haven't gotten a shipping update

but tell you what, I'll bring it
by your house the second it comes
in.

JOANNA

That's really not necessary-

CHARLOTTE

No, it's no problem. Besides, maybe
I could get a peek at where a true
artist makes her creations.

Erica's face shows she's not too fond of Charlotte, but
she's trying to maintain a polite demeanor.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Well, it was nice to meet you.
I've got to get going. Bye!

She smiles awkwardly and leaves. Erica watches through the
glass front of the diner as Charlotte skips happily away.

ERICA

Who's the cheerleader?

JOANNA

She's just a fan I guess. You
should see her shop. It's really
quite fantastic.

ERICA

Is that so?

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE - EVENING

We're in the darkened front room of Vaughn House. The door
is opened and Joanna comes in. Flips on the lights. Erica
stands in the doorway.

JOANNA

Are you sure you won't come in
for a while?

ERICA

No, I'd better head back. It's
going to be an early morning and
I'll be useless If I don't get
some sleep.

Plus it doesn't look like she really wants to set foot in
the place.

JOANNA

Well, alright then.

They hug.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Keep me posted on the models.

ERICA

Will do. And hey. . .get some
rest, OK?

JOANNA

(nods)

OK.

Joanna watches as Erica walks out to her car and gets in.
They wave to each other as Erica backs the car down the
driveway onto the street and pulls away.

Joanna closes and locks the door. She takes off her
jacket, hangs it on the coat rack.

Sets down her keys and goes to the kitchen. Pours a glass

of red wine, then makes her way to the basement door. Opens it and flips on the light switch at the top of the stairs. She goes down the stairs into the

BASEMENT.

She straightens a jacket on one of the dress models and sits down at her work table. Something catches her eye. She looks beside her and sees the dog collar and leash coiled on the floor next to her scissors.

Curious, she rises and picks up the collar and leash. Holds them in her hands for a moment. . .then tosses them into a waste basket that's full to the rim with crumpled papers.

EXT/INT. CAR (MOVING)/FOGGY ROAD - NIGHT

A thick bank of fog has rolled across the two lane road. A large moon shines overhead.

Erica squints through the windshield, straining to see where she's driving.

Fog whirls around the car as it speeds on down the moonlit highway.

She turns on the windshield wipers but they don't do much. The headlights shine onto the roiling bank of fog that seems to engulf her.

Suddenly, a break in the fog - PHILIP VAUGHN is standing in the middle of the road!

Erica, panicked, turns the wheel sharply and the car goes off the road. It plummets down a grassy embankment and into the woods, *smashing into a tree.*

INSIDE THE CAR

The airbags have deployed and the interior is filled with smoke mixed with fog that flows in through the busted windshield.

Erica is coming to, her EARS BUZZING from the collision. She pushes the airbag aside and looks out.

A shadowy form is approaching the car. Moonlight glints off of a BOWIE KNIFE in its gloved hand.

She pushes at the car door but it won't budge. Every part of her is sore from the crash. She jams her shoulder into the door and it pops open.

Erica hauls herself from the wrecked car and runs away into THE WOODS.

She runs as fast as her bruised body will allow through the moonlit underbrush. Imposing pines loom all around.

She turns and looks back. The silhouette emerges from the fog, walking steadily, determinedly toward her, knife in hand.

Erica stumbles and falls, striking her head on a rock. The ringing in her ears becomes a crashing symphony and everything goes black.

MOMENTS LATER

Erica's eyes open and her vision comes into focus. She's alone, lying on the forest floor.

She pulls herself to her feet and brushes pine needles from the side of her face. Looks all around in the foggy woods.

Sees no one.

Leaning against the trunk of a large pine tree, she begins to sob quietly.

Regaining control of her senses, she reaches in her pocket and pulls out a CELL PHONE.

She dials 9-1-1. The line rings several times.

ERICA

Come on! Come on!

Suddenly a black clad arm reaches around the tree and grabs her by the hair!

She struggles to break free, twisting and turning her body, but the gloved hand holds her fast.

Another arm reaches around the other side of the tree wielding in its hand the Bowie knife. With a swift, smooth motion *the knife is pulled across Erica's throat.*

Her body convulses. The cell phone falls onto the forest floor just as the Operator picks up.

9-1-1 OPERATOR

(through phone)

9-1-1, what is your emergency?

The thin red line across Erica's throat begins to gush blood. Grasping at the wound with her hands, she gurgles and coughs blood onto the fallen cell phone.

9-1-1 OPERATOR (CONT'D)

Hello? Hello, is anyone there?

Erica loses consciousness and goes limp. The hand releases

her hair and she slumps to the ground, dead.

The 9-1-1 Operator is still calling out through the fallen cell phone. Suddenly the knife comes into frame, piercing the phone. Its screen goes black.

THE WRECKED CAR

rests silently against the tree, one headlight stabbing out into the fog. The MOON hangs overhead, unable or unwilling to do anything about what it has witnessed.

THE MOON CHANGES INTO THE SUN

and the scene of the wreck has become a

CRIME SCENE - DAY

Erica's body, zipped up in a body bag, is being hoisted into an AMBULANCE by EMT'S. Several POLICE CRUISERS are parked nearby. The wrecked car has been loaded onto a TOW TRUCK.

An INVESTIGATOR comes out of the woods holding a large plastic bag that contains Erica's cell phone with the knife still sticking through it.

Sheriff Donati and Deputy Anderson stand at a distance, surveying the scene. Andy looks at the Sheriff out of the corner of his eye. Donati just stares straight ahead, suddenly seeming older, more weary than before.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/BASEMENT - DAY

The wheels of the antique sewing machine spin. Joanna is hard at work in her studio. Her cell phone rings and she picks up.

JOANNA

Hey Violet. What's going on? . . .
She didn't? That's weird, she's
never missed an appointment, not
in three years. . .

A LOUD KNOCK at the front door.

JOANNA

Hey, someone's at the door. I'll
call you back, alright? . . .Don't
worry, I'm sure she's fine. Probably
just overslept or something. . .
OK, I gotta run. . .Bye bye.

Another knock. She mounts the basement stairs and goes to
the front door. Opens it, flooding the room with light.
When her eyes adjust she sees the Sheriff standing there, a
grim look on his face.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

A VINTAGE RECORD PLAYER spins, playing a SAD SONG. A near-
empty bottle of wine sits on the coffee table next to a
near-empty wine glass.

Joanna downs the rest of the glass and refills it with the
remainder of the bottle. Her eyes are puffy and red.
She's obviously been crying, but now her face has a wry,
almost angry look.

Her phone rings. She picks it up and looks at it. The
readout says 'MARK'. She silences the phone and sets it on
the side table. Puts her head in her hands and starts to
sob quietly.

A KNOCK at the door startles her.

She grabs a tissue from a box on the table and wipes her eyes. Tosses it into the small trash can beside her (the one from the basement that she threw the dog leash and collar into before, but it's obviously been emptied since then).

She goes to the door and opens it. Charlotte stands in the doorway holding a bag with fabric in one hand and a bottle of wine in the other.

CHARLOTTE

Hey, I brought you the lotus silk,
as promised. . .and a little house-
warming gift.

She notices something's not right with Joanna.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Are you alright Joanna?

Joanna runs a finger under her eye, tries to force a smile.

JOANNA

Yeah, I'm OK, it's just. . .

She can't hold back the tears and begins to cry. Charlotte sets down the bag with the fabric and embraces her.

CHARLOTTE

(all sympathy)

Aw, what's wrong? Here, let's
sit down and you tell me everything.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The record player spins, playing a less-somber but still mellow song. Charlotte sits near Joanna on the living room couch. She's pulling the cork on a bottle of wine.

Two empty bottles sit on the table. Candles burn. She fills both their glasses as Joanna talks:

JOANNA

(looser from
the wine)

She was more than just an assistant, you know? I mean, at first it was just business, but after a while we became really good friends. She practically knew me better than I know myself.

She drinks down most of the glass.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I just don't see how this could have happened.

CHARLOTTE

What did the sheriff say when he came to tell you?

JOANNA

He just said there was an accident and that the car hit a tree. It was foggy that night, but she was a good driver and always so careful.

Joanna gets up and goes to a kitchen drawer. Opens it and reaches in the back, pulls out a pack of cigarettes, a small ashtray and a matchbook.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to be putting all this on you Charlotte. You just met me. I swear, normally I'm not

this much of a mess, but it's been
a tough couple of months.

She walks back to the couch.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Do you mind if I smoke?

CHARLOTTE

No, of course not.

JOANNA

I normally don't, just sometimes
when I drink.

Joanna lights the cigarette.

CHARLOTTE

Speaking of which. . .

She fills Joanna's glass again.

JOANNA

Thank you. You're very kind.

She looks at Charlotte tenderly. Charlotte smiles back and
puts a hand on Joanna's shoulder, caressing it.

INT. DONATI'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheriff Donati, in pajamas and reading glasses, sits up in
bed reading a paperback western. His Wife is beside him.
They are bathed in the flickering glow from a T.V. set that
plays a late night talk show at the foot of the bed.

SHARON

Is everything alright, Carlo?
You haven't turned the page on

that book in about thirty minutes.

DONATI

Yeah, I'm fine. Just a bit distracted
that's all.

He continues staring at the book. She looks at him with concern. He tries to ignore her for a moment, then seems to give in. Tents the book on the bed and turns to her.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Are you sure you want to hear
about this?

SHARON

I'm sure.

He takes off the reading glasses and rubs the bridge of his nose.

DONATI

There was another murder last
night. A young woman. A motorist
spotted a wrecked car beside the
road and called us. Andy and I
found her in the woods this morning.
Her throat had been cut.

SHARON

Oh my God. Carlo, honestly I don't
know how you do that job.

DONATI

I'm beginning to wonder myself.

Donati's CELL PHONE RINGS. He picks it up from the nightstand and looks at it.

DONATI (CONT'D)

(to Sharon)

It's Andy. I better see what
he wants.

Sharon nods. Carl answers his phone.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Hi Andy, what's up?

INT. POLICE STATION/DONATI'S OFFICE - NIGHT

A uniformed Andy sits at his desk, alone in the station
house, on night duty.

ANDY

Sorry to call you so late, but
Mr. Finster called again. His
wife still hasn't come home.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

DONATI

What on God's green earth are
you talking about?

ANDY

Oh, I guess with all the hubbub
today I forgot to tell you.
Apparently Mrs. Finster went
out looking for their dog yesterday
afternoon and she never came home.

A look of worry comes over Donati's face. His wife
notices.

DONATI

Is that so? What's the Finster's

address?

Andy rifles through a stack of papers, finds the police report.

ANDY

Let's see. . .it's uh, 808 Gibson Lane.

DONATI

OK. I'll start looking into it tomorrow. Goodnight Andy.

ANDY (V.O.)

Goodnight sheriff.

Carl hangs up the phone and sets it back on the bedside table. His face betrays a growing sense of dread. His wife looks on, concerned.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT (LATER)

Joanna is visibly tipsy. She downs her glass of wine and stubs out a half-smoked cigarette in the ashtray. Lights another one with unsteady hand.

Charlotte is standing by the record player, perusing a large shelf of VINYL RECORDS.

CHARLOTTE

I love all your records. When did you start collecting?

JOANNA

Well, they belonged to my boyfriend. After he, uh, passed away I couldn't bear to get rid of them. But we pretty much shared the same taste

in music anyway, so. . .

CHARLOTTE

I'm so sorry. There I go again asking too many personal questions.

JOANNA

It's OK. It actually feels kind of good to talk about it.

Joanna refills her glass, takes a sip and a drag from the cigarette.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

He was an artist, a painter I mean. He was really good, but never motivated enough to really pursue it as a career. I was so busy, sometimes we didn't see each other for days at a time. But I loved him. I miss him.

A SLOW WALTZ - something like 'I Go To Sleep' by the Kinks - starts up on the record player. Charlotte moves toward Joanna.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, you poor thing, you've had a rough time lately. But it will get better. I promise.

She holds out her hand.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Dance with me, Joanna.

Joanna looks confused at first, then smiles and stubs out the cigarette.

JOANNA

Sure. Why not?

She gets up from the couch, stumbles a little, then takes Charlotte's hand. They move close together, Charlotte leading a slow waltz to the melancholy music.

Joanna rests her head on Charlotte's shoulder, closes her eyes, feeling the warmth of an almost maternal embrace.

Charlotte's eyes are open. She smiles to herself as the slow, spinning dance continues.

Joanna stumbles. Charlotte catches her.

CHARLOTTE

Whoopsie! Maybe we should get you to bed.

Joanna nods assent.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/JOANNA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bedroom is dimly lit by a vintage lamp. The door opens and Charlotte helps Joanna onto the bed. She sets Joanna's cell phone on the bedside table.

CHARLOTTE

Here's your phone.

She takes a blanket that is draped over a nearby chair and gently covers Joanna, tucking her in.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You get some rest and I'll come check on you tomorrow.

Joanna rolls onto her side and mumbles sleepily.

JOANNA

Thank you Charlotte. You're so
good to me.

Charlotte stands, watching the sleeping Joanna for a long moment. She smiles to herself, then turns off the lamp.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

The door opens and Charlotte emerges. She stumbles a little on the front steps, laughs to herself.

There is almost a skip in her step as she goes to the sidewalk and walks away into the darkness.

Suddenly Philip Vaughn steps into frame. He watches her go for a moment, then begins to follow.

BACK IN JOANNA'S BEDROOM

She is passed out on the bed. We move slowly toward her until we go INTO HER DREAM.

INT. MASQUERADE BALL - NIGHT (DREAM SEQUENCE)

A huge wood-paneled room is crowded with MASKED REVELERS. A masquerade ball is in full swing. COUPLES waltz in synchronized movement on a checkered dance floor.

Moving closer we find a WOMAN in black Victorian dress with a black feathery mask held in front of her face. She moves the mask away and we can see that it is Joanna. She walks bewildered among the grotesquely costumed party-goers.

Everything begins to move slowly as her attention is drawn to a SHADOWY MALE FIGURE in top hat and cloak who stands by

the open entry door. He's wearing a conical PLAGUE MASK.

A group of decadently attired ladies walks past, obscuring her view. When they have passed the man is gone.

Curious, she goes to the open door and looks out. She sees the Man standing at the corner of a building some distance away. A bank of fog rolls past and he's gone.

She moves along the gas-lit cobblestone street to the spot where the Figure had stood. Peers around the corner and sees him standing near a path that goes into the woods.

She starts in his direction, walking slowly, as if in a trance. She gets closer to the Shadowy Man. The inscrutable expression of his plague mask stares back at her.

With a sweeping move of the cape he disappears into the tree line. Joanna follows, entering the foggy woods. She moves slowly through the gnarled trees.

The path ascends and she sees an IMPOSING BUILDING that stands on the hill above. As she moves in the direction of its hulking facade she comes to a large, scary tree. She walks toward it, looking all around for the mysterious Man.

Suddenly, he jumps out from behind the tree! He removes the plague mask. The bright and malicious eyes in his *skinless face* stare directly into Joanna's.

EXT. FABRIC SHOP - NIGHT

Charlotte arrives at the door to her shop. Unlocks it and goes in. We hear the CLICK of the lock.

Philip Vaughn, seen from behind, steps into frame and walks toward the shop door.

INT. FABRIC SHOP - NIGHT

Charlotte goes behind the counter and up the stairs to her apartment above. Opens a door and flicks on a lamp, illuminating her very eclectic living space.

Stumbling, she kicks off her shoes (she's still wearing dark-colored or red socks or stockings). She goes into the adjacent bathroom, opens the opaque shower curtain and turns on the hot water.

We see her stockings fall - first one and then the other - onto the checked tile floor.

OUTSIDE THE SHOP

Philip Vaughn stands at the glass-paned door. His rage-filled face is visible as a distorted reflection in the glass.

BACK INSIDE

Charlotte is in the shower. She strokes the warm water over her hair, eyes closed, an expression of pleasure on her face. (Note: Camera will remain above her waist)

OUTSIDE

Philip Vaughn's gloved hand breaks a pane of glass on the door, reaches in and unlocks it.

CHARLOTTE,

still in the shower, smiles to herself as she lets the water run down over her face and hair.

PHILIP VAUGHN'S POV

creeps up the stairs. Enters her apartment and goes to the open bathroom door. Sees her blurred form through the shower curtain. Creeps closer.

Charlotte, oblivious, continues her shower.

Philip Vaughn stands before the shower curtain. His chest heaves angrily. Suddenly he reaches out with both arms and grabs Charlotte through the curtain, wrapping her in the plastic!

He picks her up, pulling the curtain from its rings, and *slams her body* against the toilet seat, breaking it.

CUT TO BLACK, FADE IN

Charlotte lies wrapped in the plastic shower curtain on the bathroom floor. Her face is partially exposed and blood seeps from a wound on her forehead.

Unseen hands drag her body out of frame, leaving a smear of blood on the bathroom tile.

EXT. SIDEWALK - MORNING

It's a cold, sunny day. An OLD WOMAN in a fur coat walks down a sidewalk in the town square.

She passes the window display of Charlotte's fabric store and goes to the door. Steps on the broken glass that is scattered on the sidewalk. Looks down, then back up to the broken-out pane of the door.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/JOANNA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Joanna wakes, groggy. Clutches her aching head. She checks her phone, scrolls through dozens of notifications.

Closes her eyes and falls back onto the bed with a sigh.

There is a LOUD KNOCK at the front door. Joanna's eyes open and she drags herself onto the edge of the bed.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

She makes her way down the stairs. Again there is a KNOCK at the door.

JOANNA

Alright, alright I'm coming.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE/PORCH - DAY

Donati stands on the porch. We can just spy the dog collar and leash from earlier sticking out of his back pocket.

The door opens and Joanna squints, blinded by the sunlight. She's disheveled, bags under her eyes, hair a mess.

DONATI

Miss Morrison. I'd like to speak with you if you don't mind.

JOANNA

Uh, sure. What's going on?

DONATI

Is it OK if I come in. Just for a few minutes.

JOANNA

Uh, sure.

We follow Donati into the

LIVING ROOM.

Joanna walks toward the kitchen.

JOANNA (CONT'D)

Would you like some coffee?

DONATI

No, thanks.

JOANNA

Do you mind if I heat some up?

DONATI

No, go right ahead.

She pours a leftover cup, puts it in the microwave, pushes a button. Donati notes the disarray of the living room table with its empty wine bottles and spent candles.

JOANNA

Have a seat if you like.

DONATI

OK.

He sits down at the small dining room table.

JOANNA

So now can you tell me what this is about?

DONATI

It's about Charlotte.

JOANNA

Charlotte.

DONATI

The young woman who owns the fabric shop down the way. She's gone missing.

JOANNA

Oh.

DONATI

You know her?

JOANNA

Yes. Well, not really. I mean I just met her.

DONATI

But she was here with you last night. Is that true?

JOANNA

She stopped by to bring me some fabric.

The microwave DINGS. Joanna goes to the kitchen and removes her coffee cup. Sits down at the table across from Donati.

DONATI

About what time would you say she left your house last night?

JOANNA

Well I. . .It's hard to say. I was upset about Erica and we had some wine, and. . .

DONATI

I see.

JOANNA

I'm not used to drinking, so I guess I had too much. She must have helped me to bed before she left.

DONATI

But you don't remember.

JOANNA

No.

Donati reaches into his back pocket and pulls out the dog collar and leash. Places them on the table.

DONATI

Do these look familiar to you?

JOANNA

I found them in the basement.

DONATI

Any idea why a missing woman's dog leash would be in your basement?

JOANNA

I don't know. I didn't even know Charlotte had a dog.

DONATI

Not Charlotte. Helen Finster. She's missing as well. You might not realize this Miss Morrison, being from New York City, but people around here look out for their neighbors. Mrs. Finster was seen near your house, carrying this leash, the day she disappeared. The day your assistant was murdered.

Donati watches Joanna's face as she absorbs what he's just said.

JOANNA

Wait, what? You said she crashed her car.

DONATI

Before her throat was cut. Look, Miss Morrison I'm really sorry about your friend. But something is going on around here and I don't know if you have anything to do with it or not. First the person that rented you this house and her husband get butchered. Then your assistant. Now two women are missing.

JOANNA

You think I had something to do with any of this? You're going through my trash? Sorry sheriff, but I've said all I can say to you.

She gets up from the table. Donati rises as well.

DONATI

OK, suit yourself. But it might be best if you were to stay in the area for the time being. We may need to speak with you again.

Joanna goes to the front door and opens it. Donati walks to the door. Stops.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Look, if you didn't do anything then you have nothing to worry

about.

Joanna stands holding the door, her face a mixture of shock and restrained anger. She says nothing.

DONATI (CONT'D)

OK.

Donati goes out and Joanna closes the door. She starts back toward the dining room, but *bumps the stack of library books* on the small table by the door.

The top book hits the floor and falls open, revealing a PHOTOGRAPH of the building Joanna had seen in her dream, only in the photo the building looks newer, still in use, the grounds not overgrown.

She stares at the photo. The caption reads: 'New Jersey State Hospital For The Criminally Insane'.

INT/EXT. DONATI'S CRUISER (PARKED) - NIGHT

Donati's patrol car is parked on a residential street.

Inside, he pours a cup of coffee into the lid of his Thermos and takes a sip. Through the front windshield he has a good view of Vaughn House in the distance.

His POLICE RADIO SQUAWKS. Andy's voice comes through the speaker.

ANDY

Hey Sheriff, this is Andy.

DONATI

Go ahead Andy.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Andy sits with his boots up on a desk, speaking into the police radio. Marla, pretending to shuffle some papers, listens in from the desk behind.

ANDY

It's George Finster. He keeps calling in about his wife. Going on about how we aren't doing anything to find her and how he's gonna call the F.B.I.

INTERCUT - PHONE CONVERSATION

DONATI

Well what the hell am I supposed to do about that?

ANDY

I don't know sheriff, maybe you could talk to him. Calm him down. He's really driving Marla and me crazy.

DONATI

Alright. If I go by his place and talk to him will that make you and Marla happy?

ANDY

(through radio)

Yessir.

Donati puts the car in gear and pulls away.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

Joanna pushes a curtain aside and looks out. Sees that the

police cruiser is gone.

She picks up her phone and dials. As she does we may notice her laptop (now working again) open on the table, the screen showing an article about Frederich Vaughn with accompanying photographs of the New Jersey Asylum building and of Vaughn in his cell.

JOANNA

Hi, I'd like to get a cab as soon
as possible please. It's uh, 1237
Gibson Lane.

EXT. FINSTER HOUSE - NIGHT

Sheriff Donati stands on the porch of an upscale Victorian home. He rings the doorbell.

The door opens, revealing GEORGE FINSTER (late 50s). He's well-dressed but his face shows the grief he's endured since his wife's disappearance.

INT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

Joanna goes to the window and looks out then turns off the lights and slips out the front door.

She walks briskly down the sidewalk. A car turns on to the road ahead and she ducks behind a large tree, turning herself around it to avoid the approaching headlights.

The car passes - a station wagon. Joanna comes out of hiding and continues on.

INT. FINSTER HOUSE - NIGHT

Donati and Mr. Finster are seated in leather armchairs. A fire burns in the fireplace between them. The house lights

are low. Finster pours whiskey into a glass and downs it. He looks a mess.

MR. FINSTER

You want a whiskey Carl?

Donati contemplates the offer. Distant lightning flashes in the windows.

DONATI

Sure.

Finster takes a glass from the nearby table and pours in some whiskey, hands it to Donati.

DONATI (CONT'D)

Thanks.

Donati downs the whiskey, sets the glass on a table near his chair.

DONATI (CONT'D)

My deputy tells me you've been calling. I thought I'd come by and talk to you personally.

MR. FINSTER

I'm sorry about that Sheriff. I really am. But it seems to me like you all aren't doing anything to find my wife.

DONATI

Well George, there's not a whole lot we can do in the first couple of days of a missing person case. Not without some obvious sign of foul play.

MR. FINSTER

See, that's just the kind of
bureaucratic bullshit I'm talking
about.

He pours another whiskey and downs it.

MR. FINSTER (CONT'D)

Now you know I've always supported
you Carl. Every one of your elections.
But if you can't do something to
find my wife I. . .well, I can't
promise I'll do it again.

DONATI

I understand that George, but you've
got to understand that we're doing
all we can. Now I promise you
we'll open an official investigation
tomorrow.

Finster pours and downs another shot.

MR. FINSTER

Tomorrow. Tomorrow. OK sheriff,
tomorrow. But I'll tell you what
you ought to do. You ought to
arrest that girl that moved in to
Vaughn House.

DONATI

We can't just arrest-

MR. FINSTER

You think I don't know about her
assistant? About what happened
to the Meadows? And now my Helen. . .

He puts his head and his hands and starts to cry.

DONATI

Look George, everything's going to be alright. You need to get some sleep. And maybe lay off the sauce, OK?

Finster doesn't respond, just keeps sobbing with his head in his hands.

DONATI (CONT'D)

I'll let myself out. Get some rest.

EXT. FINSTER HOUSE - NIGHT

The door opens and Donati comes out, shaking his head. He walks to his cruiser, gets in and drives away.

EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Joanna is waiting in front of a house down the street from Vaughn House. Headlights appear and she ducks behind another tree.

The TAXI pulls up and stops in front of the house. Joanna peeks out, sees that it's not a police car and comes out from behind the tree. She approaches the car.

The driver's window comes down. We see a familiar face. It is the guy who delivered pizza earlier in the movie. We can imagine he probably does every odd job in town that needs doing.

DRIVER

Oh, hey. I didn't see you there.

You're Joanna? I tried to call but-

JOANNA

Yeah, I left my phone in the house
but it's alright.

Joanna, with a glance around, climbs into the back seat of
the taxi.

DRIVER

I think they gave me the wrong
address for your destination.
It says you're going to the old
State Prison but that place has
been closed for years.

JOANNA

No, that's right.

DRIVER

But why would you want to go
there?

Joanna holds out a stack of folded 20 dollar bills. The
Driver's eyes widen.

JOANNA

And if you wait for me once we get
there and drive me back I'll give
you the same again.

DRIVER

I mean, it's not my job to ask
questions, but there's nothing
up there. The place is abandoned.
Me and my friends used to go there
in high school just to drink and
stuff. It's creepy as hell.

JOANNA

Well if you're afraid. . .

The driver takes the money from her hand.

DRIVER

I'm not afraid. Just figured you should know what you're getting into that's all.

He pockets the cash and puts the car in gear.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

I'm definitely not afraid.

The taxi pulls away but we stay on the sidewalk.

A few moments later another set of headlights turns onto the street. As they approach we can see that it's Donati's patrol car. The headlights go off as it passes. It pulls up the street and stops.

INT/EXT. DONATI'S CRUISER (PARKED) - NIGHT

Through the front windshield he can see the darkened Vaughn House in the distance. Rain begins to patter on the glass.

Donati pours coffee into the Thermos lid and takes a small box from the dash. Inside is a cannoli (an Italian pastry). He takes a bite and sips the coffee, his eyes fixed on Vaughn House all the time.

It begins to rain harder. He turns on the windshield wipers. Continues eating the cannoli and drinking coffee, squinting through the rain and wipers to keep a good view of the house.

Suddenly - and he can't be sure - the front door of Vaughn House swings open. It seems to blow back and forth in the wind.

He puts aside his coffee and desert and grabs a plastic rain poncho, begins pulling it on. He reaches for a large flashlight, pulls the hood of the poncho over his head and opens the car door.

It's raining hard now and lightning crackles in the sky as Sheriff Donati makes his way up the sidewalk toward Vaughn House.

INT/EXT. TAXI (MOVING) - RURAL ROAD - NIGHT

The little taxi ascends on a winding rural road lined with pine trees. Lightning flashes in the distance.

DRIVER

Looks like it might rain.

The Driver pauses, feeling the futility of his small talk.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Hey, are you sure you want to do this? I know it's none of my business, but-

Joanna sits with her legs crossed in the back seat. Her hands rest on her lap. Silent lightning flashes across her face as she looks out the window.

JOANNA

I'm sure.

DRIVER

Hey like I said, it's none of my business.

The taxi continues on the winding road. Lightning flashes and in the distance, on a hill, we can just make out the outline of the OLD STATE PRISON. Meanwhile. . .

SHERIFF DONATI,

fighting the wind and rain, approaches Vaughn House. The front door stands open. He approaches cautiously. Mounts the steps, shining the flashlight into the darkened interior. He calls out over the din of rain and thunder:

DONATI

Hello! Joanna! It's sheriff
Donati!

He flashes the light around the interior then goes inside, closing the door behind him. He flips the light switch but the lights don't come on.

DONATI

Joanna. Is anybody here?

It's quieter inside. He pulls the hood down on his poncho. Continues shining the light around the living room.

IN THE PARLOR ROOM

Lightning strikes and we can see Philip Vaughn standing there, looking at the sheriff. But Donati's back is turned and he does not see him. When he shines the flashlight into the parlor room no one is there.

Lightning strikes again and the basement door swings open, although Donati does not see it. Suddenly a sound, as if a CHILD were CRYING is heard coming from the basement. It strikes a chord with Donati. He's heard that sound before.

EXT. OLD STATE PRISON - NIGHT

The taxi pulls up on a section of broken roadway. Grass and small trees have grown from the cracks in the asphalt. Grey clouds move through the sky, occasionally obscuring or revealing a bone white moon.

The abandoned prison stands above the surrounding woods, a fading monolith of a place, grey walls overgrown with ivy.

INT. TAXI (PARKED) - NIGHT

Joanna pulls a flashlight from her bag. Slings the bag over her shoulder and opens the car door.

JOANNA

I'll be back in less than thirty minutes. You're gonna wait for me, right?

DRIVER

Yeah. What, you think I'd leave you out here?

JOANNA

No, of course not.

She starts to get out of the taxi. The Driver is visibly nervous.

DRIVER

Hey.

JOANNA

Yes?

DRIVER

Whatever it is you're doing. . .

be careful, OK?

JOANNA

OK, I will. Don't worry. I'll
be right back.

She closes the door and disappears into the underbrush.

DRIVER

(to himself)

Why did she have to say that?

He looks around into the darkened woods. Pushes a button
and locks all the car's doors.

JOANNA

shines the flashlight ahead and makes her way through
gnarled trees and hanging vines.

She is suddenly pulled back and stops, realizing that her
bag has caught on a thick, thorny vine. She carefully
frees the torn fabric from its prison and continues on. . .

BACK AT VAUGHN HOUSE

Sheriff Donati approaches the basement door. The sound of
the CHILD'S CRYING grows louder.

Shining his flashlight, he starts down the basement stairs,
one hand hovering over the gun he wears on his hip.

CAMERA POV follows him as he continues down the stairs. . .

INT/EXT. TAXI (PARKED) - OLD STATE PRISON - NIGHT

The Driver checks his watch and looks around at the gloomy
surroundings. It's not raining yet, but lightning fills

the sky. He's talking to himself:

DRIVER

Man, I've really got to take a
piss.

Reluctantly, he pushes the button to unlock his door.
Shuddering, he gets out of the cab, walks to a nearby bush.
Begins relieving himself.

He looks up into the trees. Looks down the abandoned road
in one direction. Looks the other.

A FLASH of heat lightning reveals the silhouette of a Man
in top hat and cape. The profile of the bird-like beak of
the plague mask completes the unsettling apparition. The
Driver blinks, unbelieving, and the Man is gone.

DRIVER

Joanna!

He zips up quickly and starts toward the car. Opens his
door. Stops.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Are you fucking shitting me?

(pause)

Joanna! Miss Morrison!

Against his better instincts, he closes the door of the
taxi and disappears into the woods along the path that
Joanna had followed, calling to her all the way:

DRIVER (CONT'D)

Joanna! Joanna!

MEANWHILE JOANNA -

out of earshot of her Driver - comes to a grey, peeling metal door which is partially ajar. She has to push hard, but manages to open it enough to squeeze in.

She shines her flashlight along the moss-stained walls of the old prison. The light reflects in pools of water on the floor. The desolate hallway echoes with the sound of her FOOTSTEPS.

BACK AT VAUGHN HOUSE

Sheriff Donati reaches the bottom of the stairs and shines his flashlight over the eerie dress models. He moves the flashlight to the wall and there, inscribed upon the wallpaper, is a complex and nefarious-looking symbol.

He moves closer and touches it with his finger. He can see now that it has been painted on in a red liquid - most likely blood.

Just then the sound of the CHILD CRYING rings out, seemingly from behind the wall. He moves his ear closer, listening. The voice falls silent.

Suddenly, an ornate DAGGER - held by a black-gloved hand - plunges into Donati's exposed ear and through his skull, pinning him to the wall. His limbs spasm and flail involuntarily, then go still.

The wall, to which he has been pinned like a prized insect, begins to ripple and MOAN.

Donati's face, frozen in a look of terror, blanches and collapses from within as the blood is drained out. His once-bulky body shrinks within the police uniform.

A gloved hand pushes against the side of his face and the other hand pulls free the dagger with its twisted blade of

black metal.

The hand still on the side of Donati's face gives a push and his entire body is absorbed into the wall.

INT. OLD STATE PRISON - NIGHT

Joanna continues down the hallway of the old asylum, passing open doorways, each with an attached metal plate to the side etched with a cell number.

She shines her flashlight to the end of the hallway and there, standing where it turns into the darkness of another passage, stands the Man in the top hat. The pale mask stares back at her blankly.

JOANNA

Hey!

The figure steps to the side and disappears around the corner. Joanna follows, hesitant, yet somehow unable to stop herself.

IN THE WOODS

the Driver makes his way through the undergrowth to the front of the old prison. It's starting to rain and lightning crackles in the sky. He yells into the darkness of the partially open door:

DRIVER

Miss Morrison! We've gotta go!
I think someone's here!

He seems to be struggling with himself, but finally makes a decision and attempts to force his way through. It's too tight. He steps back and runs at the door. The hinges crack and it opens enough for him to squeeze himself in.

JOANNA

walks cautiously down another hallway. Water from an open hole in the roof DRIP-DRIPS into a pool on the floor.

She comes to an open door with a number plate reading "19", the number she'd seen in the photograph of Frederich Vaughn in his cell.

She goes in, shines the light around the walls with their flaking grey paint. On the floor of the cell, before a heavy metal grate, she sees the white PLAGUE MASK. From the distance she hears a voice:

DRIVER (O.S.)

Joanna! C'mon, let's get out
of here!

Ignoring him, she works quickly. Reaching into her bag, she searches around for a suitable implement. Finds a large pair of scissors in a leather case.

She removes them from their sleeve and, using the edge of a blade, begins to pry the head of one of the four large screws that holds the grate in place.

THE DRIVER

can see nothing as he slowly makes his way through the dilapidated hallway. An occasional FLASH of lightning through the smudged, broken windows reveals him, arms outstretched like a sleepwalker.

DRIVER

(timidly)

Joanna. Time to go, OK?

A FLASH behind him reveals the form of Frederick Vaughn. Without the mask we can see his skinless face as he watches the young man through lidless eyes.

JOANNA

is twisting out the third screw on the metal grate. When it comes out she lets the grate hinge on the fourth screw and twists it to the side, revealing a small recessed area holding a small heating duct.

She hears the Driver call out again, closer now:

DRIVER (O.S.)

Joanna! We've gotta goooooo!

She reaches around in the darkness and pulls out a large book bound in some sort of leather.

JOANNA

(whispers)

Bingo!

On its cover is inscribed the same sinister-looking symbol that was on the basement wall (and also on the ceremonial altar from an earlier picture in the police station).

She shoves it into her shoulder bag. Grabs the birdlike plague mask and deposits it in the bag as well and slinging it over her shoulder, heads for the cell door.

THE DRIVER

is approaching an open cell door. The camera seems to stalk him from behind. Suddenly, Joanna emerges from the cell. Both she and the driver scream!

DRIVER

Oh my god, you scared the living
shit out of me.

Joanna laughs, as much at herself as at the Driver. He
laughs in relief.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

I think I'm gonna have a heart
attack. Can we get out of here?

JOANNA

Yes, let's go.

They quickly disappear around a corner, their footsteps
echoing in the dark corridor.

INT. POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Marla sits at her desk, typing data from a sheet into her
computer. Andy comes in carrying a coffee cup and a bag of
chips.

ANDY

Heard anything from the sheriff?

MARLA

Nope.

ANDY

I better check in.

He sits down at his desk and picks up the police radio
microphone.

ANDY

(into radio mic)

Hey sheriff, this is Andy,
do you copy?

No answer.

ANDY (CONT'D)

Carl, do you copy?

A strange FEEDBACK comes from the radio, then an ECHOING VOICE:

VOICE

(from radio)

Andy?

ANDY

Is that you sheriff?

(to Marla)

Did you hear that?

MARLA

(concerned)

I did.

She gets up from her desk and stands behind Andy. She reaches for the microphone and Andy hands it to her.

MARLA

(into radio)

Carl? Can you hear me?

The voice comes again, barely a whisper but echoing wildly.

VOICE

Marla? . . .It's dark. . .Can't see. . .

Andy starts pulling on his coat.

MARLA

Hang tight sheriff. Andy's
on his way. You stay with
me on the radio, OK?

A burst of STATIC from the radio, then silence.

MARLA (CONT'D)
Sheriff? Can you hear me?

Nothing. Marla looks at Andy, concerned.

ANDY
Stay with the radio, OK? I'm
sure everything's fine, but I'd
better go check on him.

Marla nods. Andy straps on his gun belt and bolts out the
door. Marla calls after him.

MARLA
Be careful Andy!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

It's no longer raining. The taxi pulls up to the curb and
stops. Joanna gets out, her bag slung over her shoulder.
Vaughn House is visible in the distance.

The Driver rolls down his window. He has a wad of cash in
his hand.

DRIVER
Hey, this is really too much
money. Let me give you some
of this back-

JOANNA
You don't like money?

DRIVER

No, I love money but-

JOANNA

Then keep it. You earned it.

DRIVER

Well, alright. Thanks.

JOANNA

Thank you.

She waves to him as he drives away. Then she starts toward Vaughn House, keeping one eye on Donati's patrol car, which is still parked down the street.

INT/EXT. PATROL CAR - NIGHT

Andy speeds his patrol car along the abandoned, rain slicked streets. Marla's voice comes over the police radio:

MARLA

Hey Andy. What's going on?

ANDY

I'm almost there Marla. Stay on the line, OK? In case I need you to call in another car.

MARLA

I already woke up Henry. He's on his way.

ANDY

OK, thanks.

Rain begins to patter on the windshield. He turns on the wipers. The car continues on as lightning crackles through the storm clouds.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

Joanna is approaching the house. THUNDER CRACKS and rain starts to pour down on her. She increases her pace and runs up the front steps. Stops, surprised to see the front door standing open. She goes

INSIDE.

Tries the light switch. Doesn't work.

JOANNA

Sheriff! Are you in here?

She pulls the flashlight from her bag. It flashes on, then goes out. She taps it, but it won't work.

JOANNA

Dammit. Sheriff Donati!

She grabs one of the candles from the table and lights it. Looks all around in the empty house. She slings her shoulder bag onto the dining room table and pulls out the BOOK. Opens it to a page featuring the sinister SYMBOL.

She flips to another page we don't see and her face changes. She seems to realize something, we know not what.

Picking up the book and the candle she starts toward the basement door. WHISPERS emanate from within. She turns the knob and the door CREAKS open.

The whispers grow louder. She goes down the stairs into

THE BASEMENT.

Bright flashes of lightning through the oval-shaped window cast slanted shadows over her studio. She sets the book down on her work table and places the candle beside it.

Moving to the wall above her work area she grabs at the corner of the wallpaper. She pulls and a large swath of the paper rips off.

In the flickering candlelight we can't quite make out what's on the open pages of the grimoire.

Joanna grabs a ragged edge and pulls off another large piece of the wallpaper. Lightning flashes in the window and we catch our first glimpse of what lies beneath.

SKIN in the shape of hands, arms, legs, faces, half-faces, breasts, ears, etc. covers the wall. Joanna works frantically, pulling off several more pieces of the crimson paper.

She stands back, horrified, surveying the SKIN WALL. We can see the open grimoire clearly now: a drawn image of the skin wall with strange symbols and foreign writing in the margins.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

I see you've discovered my father's
great work.

Joanna jumps. Spins around to find Charlotte, a bandage on her head, a smile on her face. She's dressed in black peacoat and long skirt, a fisherman's hat and gloves. In one hand she holds an ornately carved CHALICE.

CHARLOTTE

Well, I say my father, I was. . .

adopted you might say.

She undoes a button and, with a flourish, twirls off the long black skirt. She is now nude - *and skinless* - from the waist down.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

My stupid "brother" never appreciated what our father did for us. What he *made* us.

JOANNA

Philip Vaughn.

CHARLOTTE

(mockingly)

Yeah, Philip Vaughn.

Joanna instinctively backs away from Charlotte, closer to the skin wall.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You know something Joanna? I think my brother's sweet on you. It's too bad for him though, 'cause I kind of like you too. Grab her!

Skin hands and arms flesh out, becoming three-dimensional, and grab Joanna's wrists and ankles. She struggles against their supernatural grip as her mind struggles with the reality of what is happening to her.

JOANNA

(near tears)

Did you kill Erica?

CHARLOTTE

Eh. Erica. Gladys and Charlie

Meadows. Helen Finster. A few others.

JOANNA

But why?

CHARLOTTE

Oh. I thought you were smarter than that.

She sets the chalice down on the work table beside the grimoire. Stares at Joanna with a look of pity.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

To get you out of my house. My father's work is not complete.

Lightning flashes in the oval-shaped window. The pages of the grimoire flip and the book opens to two pages, each having half of a man's facial skin, mustache and all, attached to it.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

But you have helped, Joanna. More than you can ever know.

The book shudders on the table, then flies onto the wall. It slowly sinks in, leaving the two halves of Frederick Vaughn's face attached to the surface.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You've brought our father back to us. Besides, I changed my mind about you.

MURMURS of anticipation emanate from the skin wall.

JOANNA

You won't get away with this.

CHARLOTTE

Of course I will, silly. Turn
her around!

The restraining arms respond, flipping Joanna so that she is held facing the wall, her back to Charlotte.

Charlotte reaches to her skinless hip and unsheathes an elaborately carved black metal DAGGER. With her other hand she rips Joanna's shirt, exposing her shoulders and upper back.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

But the good news is you get
to come with me!

With the dagger she slashes vertically across Joanna's back. Joanna screams!

Charlotte sets down the dagger and picks up the chalice. Holding it beneath the wound, she catches Joanna's blood as it begins to flow.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You are going to love it in there
Joanna. It's so quiet. So peaceful.
You can go anywhere, and you never
have to die.

Charlotte reaches to the dagger's sheath. There is a separate compartment and she pulls from it a wooden-handled PAINT BRUSH.

She dips the brush into the chalice and begins to swiftly paint onto the skin wall the same complex symbol from the grimoire.

Having dipped the brush several times and completed the symbol she sets down the chalice and brush and picks up the dagger.

The bloody symbol is absorbed by the wall. Suddenly the leathery skins of faces, arms, legs, hands and feet begin to flesh out. Their movements are stiff at first, becoming gradually more fluid.

A LEERING HOBO's face rises up beside Joanna and licks at her ear. She pulls away, horrified.

Charlotte begins to chant in an inhuman voice, accompanied by VOICES from the faces on the skin wall. As she chants she cuts at Joanna's back, making a half-oval shape similar to that of the basement window, which still flashes with light from the increasing storm outside.

CHARLOTTE

Mesh! Vana! Dim! Kab! Dek!

Frederich Vaughn's face skin joins together, becoming three-dimensional until his fully-formed face - eyes and all - is visible. He joins the chant:

CHARLOTTE & FREDERICH VAUGHN

Gah! Batai! Mesh! Vana! Dim!

Kab! Dek! Gah! Batai!

All the while Joanna cries out in pain. Charlotte puts a hand on the back of her head. Strokes her hair.

CHARLOTTE

Trust me, you're going to feel a whole lot better when this is over.

She shoves Joanna's face *into the skin wall*. Now we're

looking

FROM THE OTHER SIDE.

Joanna's face protrudes from the writhing mass of the wall. She screams, then closes her mouth. It looks like she's holding her breath underwater, trying not to breathe in the supernatural atmosphere. Then we see from

JOANNA'S POINT OF VIEW

a room exactly like the basement but devoid of furniture. Just the black ceiling and floor, the red Victorian wallpaper and a YOUNG BOY standing there, looking at her!

The Boy is dressed in black peacoat and woolen pants, black turtleneck and fisherman's cap. A tear rolls from his eye and slides down the perfect skin of his cheek.

CHARLOTTE

pulls Joanna's head from the wall. She gulps for air. It's much noisier on this side where we can again hear the din of chanting voices, the pattering of rain, the crack of thunder.

CHARLOTTE

Don't worry, you'll get used to it.

She holds the dagger close to Joanna's blood-stained back and we can see that it has a special, super-sharp cutting tool that curves up from the handle.

With this she begins to cut underneath the skin, gradually removing the half-oval shape as one piece.

She holds the skin up and it flies from her hand and onto wall, finding its place in the writhing mosaic. Joanna's

screams are ear-piercing.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You're so dramatic.

She shoves Joanna's face back into the wall, silencing her.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

I know some girls are screamers
but this is ridiculous.

FROM JOANNA'S POINT OF VIEW

we see the empty basement room. The little boy is no longer there.

EXT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

Andy's patrol car roars down the rainy street. Stops beside Donati's patrol car. Seeing the car is empty, Andy speeds on to Vaughn House. Another PATROL CAR is just pulling in.

Both deputies spring from their cars and run to the front door.

IN THE BASEMENT

Charlotte lets go of Joanna's head, freeing it from the wall. The protruding hands continue to restrain her arms and legs.

CHARLOTTE

Let me see her face.

The hands respond and flip Joanna back around so she's facing Charlotte. Tears stream from her reddened eyes.

OFFSCREEN we begin to hear the deputies calling out and banging at the door.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Oh you poor thing. I didn't want to hurt you, you know.

She strokes Joanna's cheek.

CHARLOTTE

I just wanted to make you part of my life.

Joanna's eyes move upward. Charlotte notices this just as Philip Vaughn *brings his arm down hard on Charlotte's, knocking the dagger from her hand.* It skitters across the floor.

Rage filled, he wraps his arms around Charlotte and lifts her, squeezing with all of his strength. Her legs kick at him to no avail.

ON THE PORCH

Deputy Andy takes a step back and kicks in the front door. He and Henry, guns drawn, enter the house.

PHILIP VAUGHN

continues to squeeze Charlotte, then throws her violently to the floor. She glares at him, gasping for air.

ANDY (O.S.)

Pitman County police!

CHARLOTTE

I guess it's time to go.

She drags herself up. Looks at Joanna.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

You should come with.

The hands release Joanna and recede - along with all the other body parts - into their former mosaic pattern on the wall.

Joanna rubs her wrists and stares at Charlotte, her eyes a burning mixture of hatred, pity and fear.

CHARLOTTE (CONT'D)

Oh well, suit yourself. Anyway,
I'll see you later.

She waves goodbye and disappears into the skin wall, leaving only the splayed-out skin of the lower half of her body behind.

DEPUTY ANDY

Bangs at the basement door.

ANDY

Pitman County police, open up!

He kicks the door. The jamb cracks but it doesn't give. He steps back and tries again, this time sending the door flying open. The deputies bustle down the stairs.

PHILIP VAUGHN

has a conflicted expression. He looks at the bloody dagger on the floor. Looks to the skin wall. Looks at Joanna. Back to the wall.

ANDY (O.S.)

Freeze scumball!

Andy and Henry have their guns trained on Philip Vaughn. He looks confused, but seems to make a decision. He lunges for the dagger and picks it up.

At this point we notice that the skin wall is covered back over with paper, looking again like an ordinary wall.

Henry fires first, striking Philip Vaughn in the chest. Vaughn stands up straight and waves the dagger before him. He glances sadly at Joanna, then makes a slight move, as if he would lunge at her.

Andy fires, then Henry, then Andy again. They both unload their weapons into the disfigured man. He falls to the floor, dead. Well, dead in this world anyway.

The deputies move toward Joanna and we DISSOLVE to

INT. FASHION SHOW - NIGHT

A MODEL strides toward us down the runway. Her outfit is colorful, inspired by Victorian wallpaper designs. She reaches the end of the catwalk and stops.

She turns to walk away and we see that the dress has a cut-out opening in the back in the shape of the window from the Vaughn House basement. The shape Joanna had carved from her flesh by Charlotte.

As ANOTHER MODEL repeats this process we see Joanna from behind, seated, as she watches her show. Her dress is black with a high collar and completely covers her back.

PHOTOGRAPHERS' cameras FLASH. From the looks on the faces of the HOITY-TOITIES, the show is going well. They murmur and whisper to each other.

Joanna's gaze moves to the distance. Standing there, raising a champagne glass to her and smiling, is Charlotte.

A shock runs through Joanna's body. The YOUNG WOMAN beside her leans in and whispers something, perhaps inquiring if everything's OK. Joanna nods.

She looks back to where Charlotte had stood but there is only a FAT MAN with a big gold ring, gesticulating some point with a high ball glass in his hand. He notices Joanna's gaze and lifts the glass to her, smiling.

EXT/INT. VAUGHN HOUSE - NIGHT

The house looks scarier than ever as we slowly move toward it. Up the steps to the front door. It opens and we go inside.

Down the hallway to the basement door. It opens. We proceed down the dark steps. Turning we face the wall with its Victorian wallpaper.

We move slowly closer until it is just inches away, then we go *through the wall* to

THE OTHER SIDE,

where antique lamps cast a mellow light. A VICTROLA plays a 78rpm record of a string quartet. The place is comfortably furnished with antique furniture, but is otherwise the basement we've come to know.

We can see Charlotte - her back to us - now dressed in her habitual flowing hippie garb. She stands before an ornately carved black chair, mostly obscuring the figure who sits upon it.

She has been making some movement with her arms but now she stops and moves to the side. . .

And there sits Frederich Vaughn in all his finery. The skin is back upon his face, his mustache waxed and curled to perfection. The wild, grey hair frames his gaunt face.

Charlotte smiles proudly at the job she has just done tying his ascot. She brushes the shoulder of his jacket and kisses him on the forehead.

We slowly push in on the elegantly attired Frederich Vaughn as Charlotte reaches for something off screen. The classical music gradually fades into an industrial sound (something like Skinny Puppy).

We are now looking full-on into the face of the evil magician. Charlotte's hand enters frame and places the top hat on his head. His blue eyes gaze at us with steely indifference and we

CUT TO BLACK

THE END