

MINE TO KILL

by

David Wagner

based on

The Great Amherst Mystery

by

Walter Hubbell

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FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- NIGHT

Through a late-summer downpour with flashes of lightning, an uncovered horse-drawn wagon races up the road toward a small village.

SUPER: This story is based on events that took place in Amherst, Nova Scotia in 1878.

In the wagon is ESTHER COX, 18, a plain-looking girl with shoulder length hair.

Driving the wagon is BOB MCNEAL, 28, a handsome, but cruel-looking man with black hair and a mustache.

ESTHER

Please slow down! You're going to
get us killed!

Bob glances at Esther, then WHIPS the horses to pick up speed.

The wagon races up the road until it nears a small, two-story house with a fenced front yard. Bob pulls back on the reins, and the horses finally slow and stop in front of the house.

As soon as the wagon stops, Bob gives Esther a violent shove, and she half-falls, half-jumps from the wagon onto the road. She lands on her hands and knees in the mud.

Bob WHIPS the horses again, and the wagon takes off up the road at top speed.

As Esther rises and stands alone in the rain, a belated sense of fear seems to wash over her, and she begins SOBBING in the dark.

A bright flash of lightning startles Esther. She turns, opens the gate, and runs inside the house. The RUMBLE OF THUNDER accompanies her.

Beside the front door of the house sits a half-full bucket of water. Suddenly, the water in the bucket becomes agitated and begins to bubble.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The room is neat, cozy, and furnished with ordinary cottage furniture.

JENNIE COX, 22, Esther's older, prettier sister, is already in bed.

Esther, her hair still damp, cries quietly as she puts on her nightgown by the light of an oil lamp.

JENNIE

If you won't tell me what happened,
I can't give you any advice. But if
you ask me --

ESTHER

(interrupting)
I didn't ask you.

Jennie continues, ignoring her sister.

JENNIE

-- you're better off without Mister
Bob McNeal. After all those awful
things we heard about him, I'm
surprised you're not glad to be rid
of him.

ESTHER

Will you please just put out the
light and be quiet?

JENNIE

(with a SIGH)
All right.

She blows out the oil lamp. Esther climbs into the large bed she shares with her sister.

A distant flash of lightning briefly brightens the small bedroom, then the night grows very dark and very quiet.

After a moment, Esther suddenly jumps out of bed with a SCREAM.

ESTHER

There's a mouse in the bed!

Jennie also jumps out of bed and quickly lights the oil lamp. Both girls search the bed, but they cannot find a mouse.

(CONTINUED)

JENNIE

Where is it?

Suddenly there is a small movement in the bed.

ESTHER

It's in the mattress -- look how
the straw is moving!

The movement becomes smaller, then stops.

JENNIE

It must have gotten out somehow.

ESTHER

I don't know...What should we do?
We can't sleep in a bed with a
mouse.

JENNIE

Maybe the boys will trade beds with
us for the night.

ESTHER

The boys? They probably have a
dozen mice in their bed!

JENNIE

(giggles)

What else can we do?

At that moment, the girls hear a SMALL, RUSTLING MOVEMENT
that seems to come from under their bed.

ESTHER

(whispering)

Listen -- it's under the bed now!

Jennie sets the lamp on the floor and tries to see under the
bed. Esther looks under the bed from the other side.

From a cardboard box under the bed comes another SMALL
RUSTLING SOUND. Both girls jump.

JENNIE

It's in the patchwork box!

Esther reaches under the bed and carefully pulls out the
box, dragging it to the center of the room.

ESTHER

What do we do now?

(CONTINUED)

At that moment, the sisters are startled to see the box jump a foot into the air then fall to the floor on its side. Both girls SCREAM.

After a few moments, Esther carefully sets the box upright. As both girls watch, the box again leaps a foot into the air and falls to the floor. Esther and Jennie SCREAM again.

JENNIE

Daniel!

ESTHER

Daniel, come quickly!

Pulling on his pants, DANIEL TEED, the girls' 29-year-old brother-in law, bursts into the bedroom.

DANIEL

What's wrong?

ESTHER

There's a mouse in the patchwork box --

JENNIE

Or a rat!

ESTHER

-- and the box keeps jumping up in the air!

Daniel gives a SMALL LAUGH OF RELIEF and picks up the box.

DANIEL

Better take it outside.

JENNIE

Be sure to kill it!

ESTHER

Be careful! It must be big!

Daniel carries the box out of the room.

EXT. YARD -- NIGHT

Moments later, Daniel picks up a small hatchet and sets the box on the ground. He squats, takes a deep breath, raises the hatchet, and slowly lifts the lid from the box.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Moments later, Daniel carries the box back into the girls' bedroom.

ESTHER
How big was it?

JENNIE
Did you kill it?

Daniel drops the box onto the floor and kicks it back under the bed.

DANIEL
You girls are crazy. Or you were dreaming.

ESTHER
What?

DANIEL
Nothing in the box but patchwork.
(grumbling)
I can't believe you woke me for this. I have to get up early, you know.

He leaves the room.

Esther, with disbelief, pulls the box back out from under the bed, throws off the top, and carefully rummages around inside.

ESTHER
It must have gotten out somehow before he looked in.

The girls stare at each other with bewilderment.

EXT. AMHERST, NOVA SCOTIA -- DAY

Amherst is a beautiful little village on the Bay of Fundy. In 1878, the town has four churches, a school, a shoe factory, and a variety of stores.

Esther, carrying a small brown bag, exits a bookstore and walks along the street toward her home.

On the other side of the street, Esther notices a Micmac MEDICINE MAN. He stands still and stares intently at Esther. The Indian watches her as she hurries away.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- DAY

Esther's home is a well-kept, two-story cottage painted yellow. The fenced front yard extends back to a small barn.

EXT. TEED YARD -- CONTINUOUS

In the yard are Esther's nephews, WILLIE, 5, and GEORGE, 17 months. Willie chases a hen near the barn.

Willie and George's mother, OLIVE, 29, comes out the kitchen door and gives Willie a WHACK on the backside, which sends him HOWLING into the house.

Olive, sister of Esther and Jennie and wife of Daniel, is a small woman with a pale complexion and motherly traits that command respect.

Daniel arrives home for lunch just before Esther reaches the gate. Olive speaks to her husband.

OLIVE

Lunch is almost ready -- you'll never guess what I made for dessert.

DANIEL

No matter what it is, I'll eat it. I'm hungry.

OLIVE

(teasing)

Oh, that's good to know. From now on I don't have to work so hard to fix a good meal.

DANIEL

(kissing his wife on the cheek)

Now, I didn't say that.

Olive LAUGHS. Daniel picks up George and carries him in the door to the kitchen.

By this time, Esther has reached Olive, who notices that Esther looks upset.

OLIVE

What's wrong, Ess?

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

Oh, nothing. Those darn Micmacs are so rude.

OLIVE

(concerned)

What happened?

ESTHER

The medicine man was staring at me and wouldn't stop.

OLIVE

I'm not surprised. You're a pretty girl.

Esther gives Olive a look that says she knows otherwise.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Well, go in and wash up. Lunch is about ready.

Esther enters the kitchen, followed by Olive.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- DAY

The combination kitchen/dining room is not large, but it contains a long pine table, a small washstand, and a wood stove.

Esther, Jennie, Olive, Daniel, Willie, George, WILLIAM COX, and JOHN TEED are having lunch at the table. William, 20, is the brother of Esther, Jennie, and Olive. John, 24, is the younger brother of Daniel.

Little George, seated in his high chair at Olive's right, VIGOROUSLY AND RHYTHMICALLY KICKS THE BOTTOM OF THE TABLE.

OLIVE

Stop it, now, George.

George CONTINUES KICKING. Jennie speaks to Daniel.

JENNIE

Goodness, why on earth did you cover the toes of his shoes with copper?

DANIEL

To stop him from wearing them out so fast. Stop kicking the table, George.

(CONTINUED)

George continues making the terrible POUNDING NOISE on the table. Olive helps Willie cut his meat.

OLIVE

Esther, will you please get that old pink scarf and tie George's feet so he can't make such a racket?

Esther reluctantly stops eating, rises, gets the scarf, and starts tying George's feet to his chair. The room is now much more quiet.

JENNIE

Did someone milk the cow again last night?

DANIEL

Yes, I only wish I could find out who does it. This is the tenth time in two weeks. If it wasn't for this rheumatism in my hip, I'd stay up all night and catch the thief.

ESTHER

(sitting back down)

I bet it's one of those Micmac Indians from the camp. They could slip in and out without making a sound.

WILLIAM

Hand me that dish of potatoes, please.

JOHN

If I ever marry, I don't care what the woman looks like, as long as she can cook like Olive.

OLIVE

Thank you, John.

The POUNDING NOISE starts again on the table.

WILLIE

Gimme 'nother piece of meat.

DANIEL

Ask as a good boy should.

WILLIE
(much louder)
Gimme 'nother piece of meat!

William and John find this hysterically funny and LAUGH LOUDLY.

OLIVE
Oh, don't encourage him!

John gives Willie another piece of beefsteak.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
I wonder how that boy learned to be so rude.

JOHN
By playing with those boys down near the carriage factory. Unless he keeps away from them, he will be ruined.

DANIEL
I'm gonna take him in hand as soon as he gets a little older and make him toe the mark. Well, Olive, I've got to get back to the factory.

The POUNDING on the table is so hard, they have to speak loudly over it.

OLIVE
Without eating some of the walnut cookies, dear?

DANIEL
Oh, walnut cookies? All right.

ESTHER
(disappointed)
Walnut?

OLIVE
I'm sorry, Ess. I forgot you don't like walnuts.

Olive rises to get the cookies. The POUNDING continues.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
Esther, I thought I asked you to tie George's feet.

ESTHER

I did!

Under the table, little George's feet are indeed tied to his chair. He is not the one making the POUNDING NOISE.

OLIVE

Then how is he kicking the table?

ESTHER

I don't know!

Already in a bad mood, this makes Esther more angry than it should. She jumps up from the table and marches out of the kitchen.

As soon as Esther is out of the room, the POUNDING NOISE STOPS.

WILLIAM

What's wrong with her?

JENNIE

(quietly)

I think Bob broke up with her.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Esther, sitting on the doorstep between the kitchen and parlor, peels potatoes and places them into a pot of water beside her.

Olive, working in the kitchen, notices her sister's silence and the troubled expression on her face.

OLIVE

What ails you today, Esther?

Esther just shakes her head.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

I probably shouldn't say this, but -- the sooner you get over your infatuation with Bob McNeal, the better for you, and the better for us all.

Esther rolls her eyes.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Listen to me, girl, and don't make me angry while I'm giving you good advice -- never invite him to call again, because I'm telling you, trouble is coming to you through that young man, I can feel it in my bones.

ESTHER

The truth is, I wasn't thinking of him at all. I was thinking about a dream I had last night. I can't stop thinking about it, and I can't figure out what it means.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Little George manages to find a hole in the fence in the front yard.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Esther puts the potatoes on the stove to boil.

OLIVE

Wait until I get my sewing, then we'll go into the parlor and you can tell me about your dream.

ESTHER

All right. But promise not to tell anybody about it, not even Dan. It might make people nervous.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Little George crawls through the hole in the fence.

INT. PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

The room has a large bay window filled with geraniums of every color. Esther sits in a rocking chair, and Olive is on the sofa.

ESTHER

Well, don't laugh, because you know how crazy dreams can be.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE
I won't laugh.

ESTHER
Well, I dreamt that when I got up
in the morning, everything had
changed except me.

OLIVE
Changed?

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

George toddles into the street in front of the house.

ESTHER (O.S.)
This house, instead of being
yellow, was green. I heard a noise
in the street, and I went to the
door, and I saw hundreds of black
bulls with bright blue eyes coming
toward the house. Blood was
dripping from their mouths, and
their feet made fire come out of
the ground.

INT. PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

OLIVE
Oh, Esther!

ESTHER
The bulls were roaring loudly all
the time, and they came straight
for the house. I shut the front
door and locked it, then I ran to
the back door and locked it. Then
the bulls started butting the house
so hard that it almost fell over. I
woke up and I had fallen out of
bed.

She gives a small, humorless LAUGH.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
The dream is still in my mind. I
can see it still, and I've wondered
what it means until I have a
headache. What do you think about
it, Olive? Do you think there is
any truth in dreams? Did you ever
know of a dream to come true?

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE

Well, I never could make up my mind fully on that, but I do know this -- whatever Daniel dreams, comes true -- there's no doubt about it. But don't tell him anything about your dream, Esther, or he'll worry all night trying to figure out what it means.

ESTHER

If I only had a dream book, like the one Mrs. Malloy used to have. I want to know if my dream means that something terrible is about to hap--

She stops. Suddenly Esther seems to have a strong intuitive feeling about something.

OLIVE

(frowning)

What is it?

Esther shakes her head.

ESTHER

Something's wrong.

She quickly gets up from her chair and walks toward the front door.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Esther opens the front door and walks outside. Olive is close behind her. The two hear a HEAVY WAGON DRAWN BY HORSES coming close.

Esther suddenly sees little George in the middle of the street. She starts toward him.

The next second, Olive sees George.

OLIVE

(screaming)

George!

Esther bolts into the street. She grabs George just in time to prevent him from being run over by the horses and wagon. George CRIES.

Olive's piercing scream has brought out all the NEIGHBORS.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. MALLOY
What happened?

ESTHER
(comforting George)
It's all right now, everything's
all right.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

A few minutes later, Olive has taken little George inside and is washing his hands and face. Esther stands close by.

ESTHER
I've a mind to go out to the Indian
camp this afternoon and see if that
fortunetelling squaw can tell me
about my dream.

OLIVE
Esther, don't talk any more about
it. Read your Bible, say your
prayers, and ask God to take care
of you, and you need never fear
dreams or anything else. You must
always remember that God has more
power than the devil, and always
will.

ESTHER
(with a mischievous smile)
I wouldn't be surprised if the
devil sees more of me in the future
than God does.

OLIVE
(scolding)
Oh, Esther, you should be ashamed!
Grandmother would turn over in her
grave if she could hear you.

With a maternal gesture, she SLAPS Esther on the backside.
Esther LAUGHS.

EXT. MICMAC INDIAN ENCAMPMENT -- DAY

The early-evening sky is overcast. Several sad-looking
wigwams stand not far from the dirt road on the outskirts of
town.

(CONTINUED)

Esther approaches a large wigwam near the road. Fastened to the birch bark is a rough sign with the word "FORTUNES" scrawled on it. Esther hesitatingly calls out.

ESTHER

Hello?

There is no response. Esther listens at the animal hide that acts as a door, but she hears no voices inside. She musters her courage and pushes back the animal hide.

INT. WIGWAM -- CONTINUOUS

The combination of clouds, lateness of the day, and windowless walls make the wigwam very dark inside. At first Esther can see nothing, then her eyes slowly adjust to the dim light.

The first thing Esther sees is a lit candle sitting on a small table on the floor of the wigwam. Looking up from the table, Esther sees the back of the FORTUNETELLER. The woman holds something that is smoking. The smoke makes Esther COUGH.

The fortuneteller slowly turns around, and Esther can see that the middle-aged Indian woman clutches a seashell that holds a small bundle of smoking sage.

The fortuneteller makes eye contact with Esther. Through the smoke, Esther sees fear in the woman's eyes.

FORTUNETELLER

You go! Go!

Holding the smoking sage on the shell, the woman uses a large feather to sweep the smoke toward Esther. The smoke makes Esther COUGH more, but she manages to say a few words.

ESTHER

I wondered if you could interpret a dream for me --

The woman SAYS SOMETHING IN THE MICMAC LANGUAGE, then ends her rebuke in English.

FORTUNETELLER

Be gone! You are not wanted, and you are not welcome. This home has been cleansed and blessed!

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER
(coughing)
I'll pay you a nickel --

The fortuneteller is so frightened that she rushes past Esther, knocking over the small table.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Wait!

Esther follows the fortuneteller out the door, not noticing that the candle that fell from the table is quickly igniting the fir twigs and woven mat on the floor of the wigwam.

EXT. MICMAC INDIAN ENCAMPMENT -- CONTINUOUS

Within seconds, the entire wigwam is engulfed in flames.

Esther backs away, horrified. She accidentally backs into someone and quickly turns around. The person she bumped into is the medicine man she saw earlier on the street.

Frightened, Esther runs back toward the dirt road. After a few moments, she glances back.

EXT. WIGWAM -- ESTHER'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

The flames from the wigwam reach into the sky. The medicine man still stares at Esther.

EXT. ROAD -- CONTINUOUS

Esther begins crying as she continues running toward home.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Jennie is reading in bed. Esther lies staring at the wall.

Jennie finishes a chapter, closes her book, and turns to Esther.

JENNIE
Ready for me to turn out the light?

ESTHER
I can't stop thinking about the
buttermilk -- want some?

(CONTINUED)

JENNIE

At this hour? You'll have bad
dreams all night.

ESTHER

(shrugs)

I need something.

She gets up, takes the lamp, and heads downstairs.

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Moments later, Esther opens the cellar door and starts down
the stairs in her bare feet.

INT. CELLAR -- CONTINUOUS

The room is dark and quiet. Esther's oil lamp casts little
light.

Esther sets down the lamp, picks up a bottle of buttermilk,
and starts drinking.

Suddenly, there is a SCURRYING SOUND. Esther jumps and looks
down at her feet. She drops the milk bottle, which CRASHES
to the floor.

Frightened, Esther grabs the oil lamp and runs back
upstairs.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Moments later, Esther, out of breath, hurries into her
bedroom, sets down the lamp, and jumps into bed.

JENNIE

What's wrong -- what happened?

ESTHER

A big rat ran between my feet when
I was down in the cellar!

JENNIE

Oh, no! Why do we have so many rats
all of a sudden? What has the cat
been doing all day?

ESTHER

Sleeping. She's getting fat and
lazy. Like me.

(CONTINUED)

JENNIE

Oh Esther, you're not fat.

She GIGGLES. Esther hits Jennie with a pillow.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The room is dark. A clock on a nightstand says it is 10:15. Jennie and Esther are sleeping.

Suddenly, Esther jumps up and leaps into the center of the room.

ESTHER

My God! What's the matter with me?
Wake up, Jennie, wake up! I'm
dying!

JENNIE

(waking slowly)
Dying people don't talk that
loudly, Esther. Wait until I light
the lamp. Don't die in the dark.

She sits up and lights the lamp.

JENNIE (CONT'D)

Are you having another nightmare?

She turns to look at Esther, and is shocked at what she sees.

Trembling with fear, Esther stands in the center of the room, her short hair almost standing on end, her face blood red, and her eyes almost popping out of their sockets.

Jennie GASPS and calls as loudly.

JENNIE

Help! Somebody help!

Olive, pulling a shawl around her shoulders, is first to enter the room. When she sees Esther, Olive is horrified and speechless.

A moment later, Daniel, William, and John, rush into the room.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL

What in thunder ails you, Esther?

Suddenly Esther becomes pale and almost faints. Olive helps her back to the bed.

Esther sits on the edge of the bed for a moment and gazes around the room with a vacant stare. Then suddenly she leaps to her feet.

ESTHER

I'm going to burst into pieces!

OLIVE

Great heavens, what shall we do with her? She's crazy!

Jennie, who has regained her presence of mind, speaks in a soothing tone to Esther.

JENNIE

Come, Esther, let's get into bed again.

Jennie and Olive try to help Esther back into bed.

ESTHER

I'm swelling up! I'm going to burst!

DANIEL

(startled)

She is swelling! Olive -- look at her!

Olive lays her hand on one of Esther's swollen hands.

OLIVE

She's hot as fire.

The family stands looking at Esther, not knowing what to do.

Esther's entire body has now swollen frightfully. She SCREAMS in pain and grinds her teeth.

All of a sudden, from beneath Esther's bed, comes a DEAFENING, THUNDER-LIKE CLAP that shakes the room. Everyone jumps in fright.

OLIVE

My God -- the house has been struck by lightning! My babies!

She runs from the room, followed by her husband.

INT. NURSERY -- CONTINUOUS

Olive and Daniel rush into the room. Both of their boys are asleep, but little George is lying on the floor in the center of the room.

DANIEL
 (in a low voice)
 Who took George out of his bed?

Olive shakes her head, picks up George, and gently puts him back into his little bed.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Olive and Daniel go back to check on Esther. Daniel walks to the window, pushes aside the curtains, and looks out.

EXT. SKY -- DANIEL'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

Daniel sees stars shining brightly in the clear night.

DANIEL
 There's not a cloud in the sky. It
 couldn't have been thunder.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

OLIVE
 What was that noise, then?

At that moment, THREE MORE LOUD CRASHES come from under the bed.

Esther's swelling immediately goes down, she assumes her natural appearance, and she sinks into a state of calm repose.

OLIVE
 Oh my God, is she dead?

Terrified, Jennie puts her head to Esther's chest and listens. She looks instantly relieved.

JENNIE
 No, she's alive.

OLIVE
 Thank God!

(CONTINUED)

John gets down on the floor with a lamp and looks under Esther's bed.

JOHN

What were those noises? They came from under the bed, but there's nothing here.

Everyone looks at Daniel, who simply shakes his head.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The room is dark. The clock on a nightstand says it is 12:55. Jennie is sleeping. Esther suddenly sits up in bed and speaks in a voice of terror.

ESTHER

Oh dear God, it's happening again!

Jennie awakens and quickly lights the lamp. Esther is visibly swelling. Jennie remains calm.

JENNIE

Stay perfectly quiet, Ess. If you do, the attack will probably pass, and then you can go back to sleep.

Esther remains motionless as advised. Then suddenly, all the bedclothes, except the sheet on which the two girls lie, fly off the bed and settle in a heap in a far corner of the room. Both girls SCREAM.

The bed sheet is yanked out from under the girls by an invisible force. The sheet flies to the center of the room, where it stands on end.

Jennie jumps out of bed and tries to grab the sheet. When her hand makes contact with it, the sheet collapses on top of her. She SCREAMS, panics, and falls to the floor in a faint.

Olive, Daniel, William, and John rush into the room, pulling on garments as they walk. They find Jennie lying on the floor covered with the sheet. Esther is frightfully swollen, and all the bedclothes are in a pile in the corner.

Daniel reaches down and pulls the sheet off Jennie, who is pale as a ghost. He feels her wrist for a pulse.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL

She's alive. She must have fainted.

He picks up Jennie and places her on the bed beside Esther.

Olive gathers the bedclothes from the floor and covers Esther and Jennie. As soon as Olive finishes, the blankets again fly off the bed and settle in the same corner of the room.

JOHN

What the hell?

Esther's pillow flies out from under her head and strikes John in the face so hard that it knocks him down.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I've had enough of this!

Terrified, he runs from the room. Olive gathers the bedclothes again and covers her sisters.

OLIVE

Here, quickly, everyone sit on the corners!

Olive, Daniel, and William sit on the corners of the bed to keep the bedclothes in place over the girls.

ESTHER

My head is going to burst!

Olive feels Esther's forehead.

OLIVE

William, go get a bucket of cold water to bathe Esther's face.

William hurries from the room.

Just then, three LOUD BANGS come from under the bed. The noises are so great that the entire room shakes.

Immediately, Esther's swelling goes down. She assumes her natural appearance and falls into a deep sleep. Jennie recovers consciousness.

JENNIE

What happened?

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE -- DAY

Daniel is in the office of DR. CARRITTE, a good-natured man of 48. The doctor CHUCKLES. Daniel looks uncomfortable.

DR. CARRITTE
I'll call this evening. But I have to tell you, Daniel -- everything you've told me is nonsense. No such tomfoolery will occur while I am in the house.

DANIEL
I hope you're right.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Dr. Carritte walks into the bedroom, followed by Olive, Daniel, Jennie, and John. Esther is already in bed.

DR. CARRITTE
How are you this evening, Esther?

ESTHER
Fine, thank you, Doctor.

DR. CARRITTE
Any swelling, or...or...strange noises this evening?

ESTHER
No, sir.

He lays his hat on the bed beside Esther.

DR. CARRITTE
That's good, that's good.

At that moment, the doctor's hat is violently yanked from the bed and thrown to the floor. All present can see that Esther has not touched the hat or even moved.

DR. CARRITTE
Did...you do that?

ESTHER
No, sir.

DR. CARRITTE
All right. Well.

He decides to continue with the examination.

(CONTINUED)

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)
Stick out your tongue.

She does. The doctor looks at her tongue.

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)
Let's check your pulse.

He takes Esther's pulse.

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)
Well, Esther, you seem to be
suffering from nervous excitement,
and have... evidently, received a
tremendous shock of some kind.

Just then, Esther's pillow slides out from under her head, as if it is pulled out by an invisible hand. The pillow appears to inflate like a balloon to the bursting point, then it deflates and slides back into place under Esther's head.

The doctor's eyes open wide.

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)
Did you see that? It went back
again.

John moves toward Esther.

JOHN
If it moves out again, I'll hold
onto it. I don't want it to hit me
in the head again like it did last
night.

No sooner has John spoken than the pillow slides out from under Esther's head as before.

John, a strong young man, grasps the pillow with both hands and holds it with all his strength, but his efforts are unavailing. The pillow is pulled away from him by a stronger power, and it slides back under Esther's head.

DR. CARRITTE
This is astonishing!

He rises from his chair.

Suddenly three LOUD BANGS come from under Esther's bed. The doctor looks under the bed but finds nothing.

At that moment, the bedclothes fly off Esther's bed and settle in the corner.

(CONTINUED)

Then, a distinct SCRATCHING SOUND comes from the wall behind the bed. Everyone looks at the wall.

In the plaster, something is scratching letters, one by one, in characters nearly a foot tall, until a sentence is complete:

ESTHER COX YOU ARE MINE TO KILL

The writing is deeply embedded into the wall and looks as if it has been engraved with something like an iron spike.

The doctor and Esther's family, awed into silence, stand around the bed and stare at the words on the wall.

Then, fearfully loud POUNDING SOUNDS start again, louder than ever before, shaking the room and all it contains. Esther SCREAMS.

Suddenly the SOUNDS STOP. Dr. Carritte looks at Esther, who has fallen into a deep sleep.

INT. TEED PARLOR -- NIGHT

A few minutes later, Dr. Carritte, standing near the front door, speaks with Daniel and Olive.

DR. CARRITTE

She's sleeping soundly now, so I'll not wake her to give her a sedative.

OLIVE

But what about --

DR. CARRITTE

I cannot doubt my own senses, but I have no theory to offer at this point. I'll have to do some research. I'll call again in the morning and give Esther something to quiet her nerves. Good night.

Olive and Daniel are not satisfied, but the doctor seems to have said his final words.

DANIEL

Good night.

Dr. Carritte leaves. Olive walks to a table in the parlor and picks up the family Bible.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

OLIVE

I'm going to put the Bible under
Esther's bed.

DANIEL

Do you think you should?
Everything's quiet now. Why don't
you wait until morning.

Olive thinks for a moment, then nods and replaces the Bible
onto the table.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- DAY

The next morning, Esther is cleaning up the kitchen after
breakfast. As she picks up a large crock of butter and
starts to carry it down to the cellar, Dr. Carritte enters
the kitchen with Olive.

The doctor looks surprised to see Esther out of bed,
dressed, and working.

DR. CARRITTE

Esther, you're up! How are you
today?

ESTHER

I feel all right, just a little
nervous, I guess. Any little sound
makes me jump.
(nodding to the heavy crock in
her arms)
I'll be right back.

She opens the cellar door and carries the crock downstairs.

OLIVE

Can you give her something for her
nerves?

DR. CARRITTE

Of course, there are several
different sedatives we can try.
I'll --

Suddenly Esther, frightened and out of breath, runs back up
the stairs.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE
What's wrong?

ESTHER
Someone is in the cellar and he
threw a plank at me!

OLIVE
(alarmed)
What?

DR. CARRITTE
I'll go down and see.

He heads for the cellar. Olive speaks to Esther.

OLIVE
Are you hurt?

Esther shakes her head.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
Could you see who it was?

ESTHER
(shaking her head)
It was too dark.

Dr. Carritte comes back up the stairs. The sisters look at him expectantly.

DR. CARRITTE
The cellar is empty.

ESTHER
(with disbelief)
What?

DR. CARRITTE
There's no one down there to throw
a plank.

ESTHER
I don't believe you.

DR. CARRITTE
Esther, come down with me.

Esther hesitantly follows the doctor back down into the cellar.

INT. CELLAR -- CONTINUOUS

Dr. Carritte leads Esther back down into the small, dark room. After a few moments, their eyes adjust to the darkness, and Esther can see that they are alone.

DR. CARRITTE

You see? There's no one down here.

All of a sudden, several potatoes fly at their heads. Esther lets out a short SCREAM. She and the doctor run back up the cellar stairs.

INT. KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Olive is startled to see Esther and Dr. Carritte running back up into the room.

OLIVE

What happened?

ESTHER

(out of breath)

Potatoes!

OLIVE

What?

One of the potatoes is thrown all the way up the cellar stairs and rolls across the kitchen floor.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Someone is down there throwing potatoes?

DR. CARRITTE

No one is down there.

OLIVE

What? Then who is throwing potatoes?

The doctor is at an utter loss. He shakes his head.

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)

I'll be back tonight with a sedative for Esther. And one for myself.

He immediately leaves the house. Esther SLAMS the cellar door and props a chair against it.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Standing beside Esther's bed, Dr. Carritte fills a syringe with a clear fluid. Olive and Daniel stand close by.

The doctor speaks to Esther as he administers the injection. Esther looks away.

DR. CARRITTE

This is morphia. It should take effect right away. You'll relax and begin to feel very sleepy.

He finishes the injection and withdraws the needle from Esther's arm.

DR. CARRITTE

There. How do you feel?

ESTHER

I'm not sure. I still feel nervous, I guess.

DR. CARRITTE

Just relax and you'll have a good night's rest.

Esther's body suddenly becomes tense.

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

Suddenly the BANGING SOUNDS under the bed return, but much faster than before. Dr. Carritte quickly backs away from the bed.

After a moment the SOUNDS SEEM TO MOVE FROM UNDER THE BED, CLIMB THE WALL, AND TRAVEL TO THE ROOF.

OLIVE

What's happening?

DANIEL

It sounds like they're on the roof!

Dr. Carritte hurries out of the bedroom.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Dr. Carritte rushes out of the house and into the street. He can hear the LOUD NOISES in the open air.

The night has a bright moon, and the doctor can see distinctly that there is no one on the roof of the small house.

Two YOUNG MEN approach the doctor in the street.

YOUNG MAN

What's going on here? Is Teed working on his roof at 10 o'clock at night?

DR. CARRITTE

No. No, he isn't.

The doctor hurries back into the house, leaving the two men looking puzzled.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The NOISES ON THE ROOF CONTINUE. Esther looks very frightened as Olive holds her hand. Daniel looks out the window.

DANIEL

More people are out there now.

OLIVE

It's no wonder. The noise is probably waking up the whole village.

Dr. Carritte reenters the room.

DR. CARRITTE

From the street it sounds like someone is on your roof with a sledgehammer, but I could see that no one is up there.

ESTHER

What are we going to do?

The clock on the table beside Esther's bed says 10:15.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The clock on the nightstand says 11:59. The LOUD NOISES ON THE ROOF CONTINUE.

Esther is now sitting up in bed. Jennie holds Esther's hand and sits beside the bed. Dr. Carritte, Olive, Daniel, William, and John are also in the room. John looks outside through the window curtain.

EXT. STREET -- JOHN'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

John can see that a small CROWD has gathered outside the house.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

The minute hand of Esther's clock moves from 11:59 to 12:00. Suddenly, the NOISES STOP.

Jennie looks at Esther and sees that she has fallen asleep.

JENNIE
(whispering)
Dr. Carritte...

She motions for the doctor to look at Esther. Dr. Carritte sees that Esther is sleeping. He nods and speaks in a low voice to Olive and Daniel.

DR. CARRITTE
The sedatives have finally started to work. I think that's going to be all for the night. I'll come back tomorrow.

OLIVE
Thank you for staying with us, Doctor.

DR. CARRITTE
I wish there were more I could do.

OLIVE
Just being here helps us more than you know.

The doctor understands. He picks up his bag and leaves the room.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- NIGHT

Moments later, Dr. Carritte exits the house. He gets no farther than the front gate when the POUNDING SOUNDS START AGAIN on the roof.

The doctor stops in his tracks with his hand on the gate. He seems to be trying to decide if he should continue or go back inside the house. After a moment, he continues walking out the gate.

A MAN in the crowd speaks to Dr. Carritte.

MAN

Doctor, what going on in there?

Dr. Carritte keeps walking and doesn't answer. His face shows a combination of guilt and fear.

Lights are on in every house on the street.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- DAY

Daniel reads the Amherst Gazette. An article on the front page has a headline that says:

THE AMHERST MYSTERY

Daniel looks worried as he speaks to Olive, who feeds little George.

DANIEL

I guess everybody knows about it now.

OLIVE

Maybe it's for the best.

DANIEL

Don't see how.

George echoes his father.

GEORGE

Don't see how!

Suddenly the POUNDING SOUNDS BEGIN again. Olive and Daniel jump, but little George seems amused by the noise.

(CONTINUED)

GEORGE
Boom, boom!

DANIEL
(angrily)
George, that's enough!

Poor George's feelings are hurt, and he CRIES.

Olive rises to comfort him, but Daniel reaches the boy first, picks him up, and gives him a hug.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- DAY

Daniel arrives home from work to find his yard filled with PEOPLE trying to get into his house. The crowd is so large that traffic is unable to pass through the street.

Daniel looks worried as he approaches a MAN in the crowd.

DANIEL
What's wrong? What's going on here?

MAN
Don't you read the papers? This house is haunted.

DANIEL
(aggravated)
Is that right.

MAN
We're waiting to go in and hear the ghosts. You better get in line if you want to get in there today.

DANIEL
I don't have to get in line.

He pushes his way through the crowd as several POLICEMEN arrive and start dispersing the crowd in the street.

INT. TEED PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Daniel finally enters his home. The house is filled to capacity with STRANGERS. Everyone is quiet, listening to the POUNDING NOISES, now coming from the kitchen.

DANIEL
Olive!

(CONTINUED)

Everyone turns to look at Daniel. A few people SHUSH him. Daniel confronts one of them.

DANIEL

This is my house, and I'll talk as
loud as I like in my house!
Everybody get out of here now! Out!

GROANS OF DISAPPOINTMENT come from the crowd, but the people slowly start making their way out the front door.

Olive finally reaches the parlor from the kitchen.

OLIVE

I'm here, Dan.

DANIEL

Why on earth did you let all these
people into our house?

Esther, looking pale, walks in behind Olive.

ESTHER

It's my fault, Dan. Don't be mad at
Olive. We just let in a few at
first, and then there were more and
more and we hated to turn them
away. I guess there was another
article in the newspaper today.

She suddenly looks faint.

OLIVE

Are you all right, Ess?

ESTHER

I just need to sit down for a
minute...

She passes out.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Dr. Carritte and Esther's family stand around Esther's bed and listen to the LOUD KNOCKING SOUNDS.

Esther is suddenly seized with a spasm. She becomes perfectly rigid.

Olive is alarmed.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE

Oh, Esther -- what's the matter?

In this altered state, Esther begins to speak.

ESTHER

Bob...

OLIVE

(frowning)

What about Bob, dear?

ESTHER

Where are we going, Bob?

FLASHBACK:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- NIGHT

The evening is very dark with no moon. Esther rides with Bob McNeal in his wagon. Bob steers the horses down a secluded road toward a patch of woods.

ESTHER

Where are we going, Bob?

BOB

You wanted to take a ride in the country.

ESTHER

Oh, I just wanted to get out of the house for a while.

The road winds into a dark wooded area. Bob pulls back on the reins, and the horses stop.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

What's wrong? Why are we stopping?

Bob drops the reins, puts his arms around Esther, and kisses her roughly. Esther resists. Distant lightning flashes.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Stop! What are you doing?

BOB

You know what I'm doing. You love me, don't you, Esther?

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER
(shyly)
Of course I do, but --

BOB
If you love me, then you're mine to
do whatever I want.

He kisses her again and pulls at her clothes. LOW THUNDER
RUMBLES in the distance. It starts to rain.

Esther pushes Bob off her and punches him hard in the jaw.

This infuriates Bob, who leaps from the buggy. He pulls a
pistol from his coat and points it at Esther.

BOB
Get out of the buggy, or I'll kill
you where you sit.

ESTHER
I will not! It's starting to rain.
Get back in this buggy and drive me
home right this minute, Bob McNeal.
You're acting like a crazy man!

Her last remark seems to enrage Bob.

BOB
You whore!

He lifts the gun, pointing it at Esther's face.

Suddenly, Bob and Esther hear BUGGY WHEELS in the distance.
Another carriage approaches.

Bob jumps back into his wagon, grabs the reins, and drives
at a breakneck pace through the storm.

ESTHER
Please slow down! You're going to
get us killed!

Bob glances at Esther, then WHIPS the horses to pick up
speed.

The wagon races up the road until it nears the Teed house.
Bob pulls back on the reins, and the horses slow and stop in
front of the house.

Bob gives Esther a violent shove, and she half-falls,
half-jumps from the wagon onto the road, landing on her
hands and knees in the mud.

(CONTINUED)

Bob WHIPS the horses again, and the wagon takes off at top speed.

As Esther rises and stands alone in the rain, a belated sense of fear seems to wash over her, and she SOBS in the dark.

FLASHBACK ENDS.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Dr. Carritte, Jennie, Olive, and Daniel stand around Esther's bed. They look surprised and sad -- this is the first they've heard of the event with Bob.

Esther cries, but she is still unconscious.

JENNIE

She said Bob McNeal had a gun and tried to force her to go into the woods with him.

OLIVE

I told her, I felt in my bones that harm would come to her through that young man, and now you see -- he's at the bottom of all this -- it's Bob who makes all these strange sounds in the house, somehow -- I know he's the cause.

Instantly THREE DISTINCT KNOCKS are heard, shaking the room with their violence.

JENNIE

(quietly)

Do you suppose that whatever makes these noises can hear us and understand what we say?

The moment she finishes her question, THREE MORE DISTINCT KNOCKS are heard as before.

DR. CARRITTE

(looking around)

Can you, whatever you are, hear what we say?

Again, THREE KNOCKS shake the room.

(CONTINUED)

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)
(to Daniel)
I believe Jennie is right -- it can
hear us.

DANIEL
Well, let's try again.
(loudly)
If you can see and hear, tell us
how many people are in this room --
knock on the floor for each one.

FIVE DISTINCT KNOCKS ON THE FLOOR are heard.

DR. CARRITTE
Amazing!

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. AMHERST STREET -- NIGHT

Dr. Carritte, carrying a large box, is on his way to the
Teed house. On the street, the doctor runs into ARTHUR
DAVISON, 47, a farmer.

DAVISON
Evening, Doc.

DR. CARRITTE
Evening. Say, Mr. Davison, are you
in a hurry?

DAVISON
Not particular.

DR. CARRITTE
Would you go with me to the Teed
house for a few minutes? I'm afraid
Esther Cox is not going to make it
through the night. I've tried
everything to arouse her from an
unconscious state, but nothing
works, and as a last resort, I'm
going to try this battery. Will you
give me a hand setting it up?

DAVISON
Sure, Doc. I hate to hear that
about the Cox girl.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

When Davison and Dr. Carritte arrive and see Esther in her bed, she appears to be dead.

After several seconds, there is a violent heaving from her breast down to her legs. Her body seems to fill up like a balloon, lifting the bedclothes, then suddenly collapse.

This happens regularly, about every 15 seconds, as the doctor and Davison work to set up the battery.

Olive and Daniel seem to expect Esther's death at any moment.

 DAVISON
 (quietly)
 Lordy, this is the hardest scene
 I've ever witnessed.

All at once, those in the room hear FAINT TAPPINGS.

 DAVISON (CONT'D)
 What's that?

He listens, moving his head down toward the foot of the bed.

 DAVISON (CONT'D)
 It's coming from the footboard.

The NOISES GROW LOUDER AND LOUDER.

Suddenly the NOISES STOP, and Esther opens her eyes and begins breathing normally. Olive rushes to her side. Esther tries to sit up.

 ESTHER
 I've got to get those potatoes
 peeled.

Olive stops her.

 ESTHER (CONT'D)
 Is it too late? Is supper over?

 OLIVE
 (laughing with relief)
 It's all right, don't worry about
 the potatoes!

She hugs Esther.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TEED PARLOR -- NIGHT

Esther and Olive do needlework, Jennie reads a novel, and Daniel reads a newspaper. The POUNDING SOUNDS continue.

Daniel must speak loudly to be heard above the racket.

DANIEL

One good thing about this noise...

OLIVE

(looking up)

What's that, Dan?

DANIEL

It'll shake some of the snow off
the roof.

Olive and Jennie LAUGH. Esther stops her needlework to rub her eyes. Olive notices.

OLIVE

Are you all right, Ess?

ESTHER

I don't know. I may be getting a
cold.

OLIVE

Oh, I hope not, so close to
Christmas.

ESTHER

I think I'll go to bed early.

OLIVE

That's a good idea.

Esther puts down her needlework and starts to stand, but before she rises all the way, she faints. The POUNDING SOUNDS IMMEDIATELY STOP.

JENNIE

Esther!

Olive and Jennie drop their things and rush to Esther.

OLIVE

She's burning up. Dan, help me get
her up to bed. Jennie, go get Dr.
Carritte.

(CONTINUED)

JENNIE

All right.

OLIVE

And bundle up! We don't need two sick girls in the house.

JENNIE

I will.

Jennie quickly puts on her coat as Daniel carries Esther upstairs.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Dr. Carritte finishes examining Esther, who is still unconscious and seems to be having difficulty breathing.

Olive and Jennie stand nearby.

DR. CARRITTE

Diphtheria.

JENNIE

Oh, no!

DR. CARRITTE

She's young and strong, and we've caught it early. I expect a full recovery.

OLIVE

Thank God.

DR. CARRITTE

Keep her quiet, and try to get plenty of liquids in her.

Olive nods.

DR. CARRITTE (CONT'D)

How has she been otherwise?

OLIVE

Fine, fine.

DR. CARRITTE

No more strange noises?

Olive looks at Jennie with surprise.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE

The pounding -- it stopped!

JENNIE

You're right! I didn't even notice.

DR. CARRITTE

So it's been happening regularly?

OLIVE

Right up until...well...Daniel made a joke about it just before Esther fainted, remember Jennie?

JENNIE

Yes.

OLIVE

It must've stopped after that.

DR. CARRITTE

Well. Let's hope it stays quiet for a while so this child can get some rest.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Esther packs a suitcase. Olive stands close by.

OLIVE

Esther, are you sure you're up to this trip?

ESTHER

After lying in bed for two weeks, I think I'm ready for anything.

OLIVE

But traveling all the way to New Brunswick? You're still weak. Won't you change your mind?

ESTHER

I'll be fine. You know Nellie will take good care of me. She's even more of a mother hen than you are, if that's possible. And I can't wait to see our new niece.

INT./EXT. SNOWDEN HOME -- NEW BRUNSWICK -- DAY/NIGHT

Esther visits the home of one of her older sisters, NELLIE SNOWDEN.

MONTAGE:

Esther eats; plays with her nieces and nephews in the snow; feeds the baby; and plays cards with Nellie and her husband JOHN SNOWDEN.

Everything is calm and normal.

ESTHER (V.O.)

I've never eaten so much in my life! And, honestly, it looked like the baby was growing every day. I'm sure I won't even recognize her the next time I see her...

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S SECOND BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Esther and Jennie are in bed, but in a different bedroom in the Teed house. Esther continues telling her sister about the visit.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

...Everything was so quiet and peaceful those two weeks. It was like heaven.

(after a serious pause)

I've been...nervous about coming back home.

JENNIE

Everything's all right now. There hasn't been a single strange noise since you left. And we moved our bedroom to this room. Things will be different in here -- a new beginning for you in a new bedroom.

ESTHER

I was so surprised! I like this room, thank --

She stops and turns her head, listening to something.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Do you hear that?

Jennie listens, but hears nothing.

(CONTINUED)

JENNIE

What?

ESTHER

That voice!

JENNIE

You hear a voice?

ESTHER

Sh-h!

She listens, then starts to cry.

JENNIE

Esther, what's wrong??

ESTHER

(terrified)

The voice said...this house is going to be set on fire tonight.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S SECOND BEDROOM -- NIGHT

A few minutes later, Olive, Daniel, and William have been called into Esther and Jennie's room. Esther tells them what she heard.

ESTHER

It said it had once lived on the earth, but it has been dead for some years, and is now only a ghost.

OLIVE

Esther, you know that isn't possible.

WILLIAM

There's no such thing as a ghost.

DANIEL

Reverend Clay said that all the troubles we've had were caused by electricity. Ghosts cannot set a house on fire.

At that moment, to the amazement and alarm of all, a lighted match appears out of thin air and falls from the ceiling to the bed. Jennie quickly puts out the match before it can catch the bedding on fire.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Where did that come from?

OLIVE
(looking toward the ceiling)
Look, there's another!

Another lighted match appears from nowhere and drops onto the bed. Jennie puts it out as well.

DANIEL
Did you see that?

WILLIAM
It came out of thin air!

ESTHER
(crying)
This can't be happening!

Another lighted match falls from the ceiling into a corner of the room. Jennie sees it and points.

JENNIE
Over there!

Daniel runs to the corner and steps on the match. Another falls in another part of the room. And another. And another.

Soon Daniel, Olive, Jennie, William, and Esther are putting out small fires all over the bedroom.

Suddenly, a giant BOOM shakes the room, and matches stop appearing. Olive starts out of the room.

OLIVE
I have to check on the boys --
Daniel, we need to look in every
room of the house to see if there
are more fires!

DANIEL
Right!

Everyone scatters.

Esther starts to get out of her bed when she suddenly seems to have a strange sensation in her stomach. She looks down at her abdomen.

Through her nightgown, Esther sees something snakelike moving around in her stomach. She SCREAMS.

Olive is the first to respond.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE
What is it?
(wildly looking around)
Another fire?

Esther has her hands on her stomach.

ESTHER
No, it's...I thought...there was
something moving...inside me.

Olive approaches Esther.

OLIVE
Here, let me feel.

She carefully presses around Esther's abdomen, then shakes her head.

OLIVE
I don't feel anything.

Jennie, Daniel, and William return to the room.

JENNIE
What's wrong?

ESTHER
It's nothing. I'm going crazy.

There is a LOW RUMBLE in the room.

DANIEL
Maybe we can talk to it again.
(into the air)
All right, you -- whatever you are
-- knock three times for yes and
one time for no -- are you going to
set our house on fire tonight?

There are THREE DISTINCT KNOCKS.

Immediately, one of the girls' gowns is torn from a nail on the wall, wadded into a ball, set on fire, and rolled under the bed.

Daniel at once pulls the gown from under the bed, then he and William extinguish the flames.

Olive, who already looks tired, is near tears.

OLIVE

What are we supposed to do now? We can't go to sleep. The house will burn down around us. We can never sleep again.

Seeing Olive frightened makes Daniel angry. He yells at the invisible entity.

DANIEL

You big coward! Show yourself! SHOW YOURSELF!

Everyone waits, but there is no response. Olive puts her hand on Daniel's arm. He calms down and turns to her.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

We'll take turns sleeping.

JENNIE

I don't think any of us will be able to sleep tonight.

OLIVE

I'll make coffee.

Everyone heads for the kitchen.

INT. TEED BARN -- DAY

Olive milks the cow. Daniel stomps angrily into the barn.

DANIEL

They moved out! Can you believe it?

OLIVE

What?

DANIEL

My brother John and your brother William are lily-livered cowards, that's all there is to it!

Olive rises and walks over to Daniel.

OLIVE

They're just boys. Besides, I wish I had the freedom to pack up and move away from all this. Don't you?

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL

I don't know.

(after a pause)

Yes.

Olive hugs her husband.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- DAY

Olive churns. A few feet away, Esther washes dishes.

Suddenly Olive notices smoke coming from the cellar door.

OLIVE

Esther!

Esther hears the panic in Olive's voice and turns to look. Olive is so frightened that she is frozen in place. Esther follows her sister's gaze and sees the smoke.

Olive regains her composure and grabs a bucket of water sitting on the table. She opens the cellar door and rushes down the stairs.

INT. CELLAR -- CONTINUOUS

Olive runs down the stairs, spilling half the water from the bucket. Esther follows Olive and stands in shock, staring.

In a far corner of the cellar, a barrel of wood shavings blazes up almost to the ceiling.

Olive pours the water from the bucket onto the fire.

Both Esther and Olive are nearly suffocating from the dense, black smoke filling the cellar. Somehow Olive manages to speak.

OLIVE

If Dan were home, he could put it out!

ESTHER

Oh, what shall we do?

OLIVE

We've got to run outside and call for help -- hurry, or the whole house will burn down!

Esther and Olive, choked with smoke, run back upstairs.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Yelling loudly, Esther and Olive run out of the house and into the street.

ESTHER AND OLIVE
Fire! Fire!

Their cries arouse the entire neighborhood. A STRANGER who happens to be passing stops and speaks with urgency to Olive.

STRANGER
Where is it?

OLIVE
In the cellar!

The man instantly throws off his coat and rushes into the house.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

The stranger grabs a rug from the floor and runs down into the cellar.

INT. CELLAR -- CONTINUOUS

The stranger smothers the flames with the rug.

OLIVE (V.O.)
He put out the fire, and then he walked out of the house and was lost in the crowd...

INT. TEED PARLOR -- NIGHT

Olive continues telling Daniel about the stranger. Esther is also in the room.

OLIVE
...What's so strange is that nobody knows who he was or where he came from.

DANIEL
You didn't even get to thank him?

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE
(shaking her head)
He disappeared before I had a
chance.

ESTHER
I think he was an angel sent to
help us.

OLIVE
(suddenly excited)
Oh, Esther, do you really think so?

Esther nods.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
Daniel, wouldn't that be something?
(quoting the Bible)
"...some have entertained angels
unawares."

DANIEL
That's not exactly what I'd call
"entertaining."

Esther GIGGLES. Olive slaps Daniel on the arm.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TEED PARLOR -- NIGHT

Daniel's hand holds a copy of the Amherst Gazette. A
headline reads:

MYSTERIOUS FORCE SETS FIRE IN HOUSE

Olive, Esther, and Jennie are also in the room. Smokey, the
Teeds' gray-and-white cat, washes herself on the sofa beside
Esther.

Daniel reads aloud from the newspaper article.

DANIEL
"...and if the Teed house catches
fire while the wind is blowing from
the bay, nothing can possibly save
the entire village of Amherst from
being reduced to ashes."

OLIVE
What do they want us to do -- leave
town?

(CONTINUED)

Suddenly the cat springs up as if startled, the hair on her tail and back standing erect. With a frightened stare, she watches something in a distant corner of the room.

A second later, Esther jumps to her feet and seems paralyzed with fear.

JENNIE

Esther -- what is it?

After a moment, Esther recovers some of her self-control and points with a trembling hand to the corner.

ESTHER

Look there -- look there! My God,
it's the ghost!

The others look, but see nothing.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Don't you see him? He's standing
right there! He's laughing at us!

She pauses as if listening to something.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

He says I must leave this house
tonight, or he'll start a fire in
the loft under the roof and burn us
all to death!

The cat suddenly seems to relax a bit and stops staring toward the corner.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

He's gone.
(to Olive)
Oh! What shall I do? Where shall I
go? The ground is covered with
snow! But I can't stay here or
he'll do what he threatens, he
always does! Oh, I wish I were
dead!

She collapses to the floor, CRYING LOUDLY in an agony of grief and fear. Olive lifts her from the floor and gently places her on the sofa.

DANIEL

Something will have to be done, and
quickly, too, because it's a windy
night. If this house catches fire,
the whole village could burn down.

(CONTINUED)

(gently, to Esther)
You'll have to go, Esther.

JENNIE
But where can she go? None of our
neighbors will take her in --
they're all afraid of her.

After a moment, Daniel suddenly seems to think of someone.

DANIEL
What about John White? He's always
asking about Esther, and his house
sits out by itself -- if it
catches, at least the fire won't
spread to the rest of the village.

OLIVE
Oh, Daniel -- the owner of the
saloon?

DANIEL
It's a restaurant. They serve food.

OLIVE
And drink.

DANIEL
(shrugs)
If you can think of a better place,
tell me.

After a moment, Olive gives up and shakes her head. Esther
looks frightened.

INT. WHITE HOME -- DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE:

Esther sews; does housework; reads; eats; and plays games
with JOHN WHITE, 35, MRS. WHITE, 30, and their two children,
MARY, 11, and FREDERICK, 8. Esther looks healthy, relaxed,
and contented.

INT. WHITE KITCHEN -- DAY

Esther and Mrs. White work in the kitchen. Mr. White arrives
home from work. White's children run up to him.

(CONTINUED)

MARY AND FREDERICK

Hi, Daddy!

WHITE

Hello!

MARY

Daddy, may we have a penny for some candy?

WHITE

Guess how much change I have in my pocket, and I'll give you a penny.

MARY

(disappointed)

Daddy, you know we never get it right!

WHITE

Try!

MARY

25 cents.

FREDERICK

I think you have 50 cents!

MARY

Esther, how much change do you think Daddy has in his pocket?

Esther turns to look at them, but seems to see something else. She listens to something a moment before she answers.

ESTHER

87 cents.

WHITE

87 -- well, that's an unusual guess! Let's see.

He pulls the change from his pocket, counts it, and looks surprised.

WHITE

Well, how about that -- exactly 87 cents!

The children are surprised and pleased. White looks worried, but tries to hide it. He gives his kids a penny.

(CONTINUED)

WHITE (CONT'D)
Here, since Esther got it right.

MARY
Thanks, Daddy!

FREDERICK
Thank you, Daddy!

They start out of the kitchen.

MRS. WHITE
Hurry back, supper will be ready
soon. And don't eat any of the
candy before supper!

The kids GROAN WITH DISAPPOINTMENT on their way out.

When the children have gone, White turns to Esther.

WHITE
Esther, how did you know how much
change I had in my pocket?

ESTHER
The ghost told me.

WHITE
He's here -- now?

ESTHER
Yes.

White looks down at the change in his hand.

WHITE
Esther, can the ghost tell me the
year this penny was minted?

Esther seems to listen to something, then she answers.

ESTHER
1872.

White looks down at the penny.

WHITE
That's right.
(pause)
And this nickel?

ESTHER
(after listening for a moment)
1868.

WHITE
And this one?

ESTHER
(after listening)
1877.

White looks at his wife and nods. Both look frightened.

INT. WHITE PARLOR -- NIGHT

Esther and Mrs. White do needlework, Mr. White reads, and Mary and Frederick play a game on the floor.

After a moment, Mrs. White sniffs the air and looks at Esther.

MRS. WHITE
Do you smell smoke?

She jumps up and runs into the kitchen, followed closely by her husband and Esther.

INT. WHITE KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

The three hurry into the kitchen to find the wooden churn on fire.

MRS. WHITE
My churn!

White quickly opens the door to the outside and kicks the churn out into the snow. He then picks up handfuls of snow and throws them onto the churn, dowsing the flames.

MRS. WHITE (CONT'D)
How on earth did my churn catch
fire?

At that moment, the three adults hear Frederick and Mary's SCREAMS from the parlor.

MRS. WHITE (CONT'D)
The children!

INT. WHITE PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Mrs. White, her husband, and Esther rush back into the parlor to find Mary and Frederick backing away from their game on the floor, which is in flames.

White yanks a heavy rug from the floor and uses it to smother the fire.

MRS. WHITE
Mary, what happened?

MARY
I don't know, we were just playing
and then it was on fire!

WHITE
We'd better check the rest of the
house. Esther, you stay here with
the kids.

Esther nods. Mr. and Mrs. White hurry off to check the other rooms. Mary and Frederick move close to Esther for comfort. Esther holds them in a hug.

ESTHER
Are you two all right?

MARY
Yes.

FREDERICK
Why is everything getting on fire?

ESTHER
I don't know, Freddy.

She looks frightened. Mr. and Mrs. White return.

WHITE
Everything's fine.

Mrs. White forces a smile to comfort the children.

MRS. WHITE
No more fires.

INT. WHITE KITCHEN -- DAY

Early the next morning, Esther and Mr. and Mrs. White eat breakfast.

WHITE

Esther, my wife and I spoke last night, and we thought, well, it might be safer if you come with me to work of a day.

ESTHER

You...want me to come to work with you at the...saloon?

WHITE

Just for a while, until things get back to normal. We can't risk the house catching fire with the children here. You understand.

ESTHER

Of course. All right.

INT. WHITE'S OYSTER SALOON -- KITCHEN -- DAY

Esther works in the kitchen that adjoins the saloon.

The door of a large cooking stove OPENS and SLAMS SHUT incessantly by itself.

The LOUD NOISES so annoy Mr. White that he braces the stove door with an old axe handle so it cannot be opened.

A moment later, however, the axe handle is yanked from its position, the stove door is lifted off its hinges, and both are thrown across the room by the mysterious force. The heavy door lands with a tremendous CRASH.

For a moment, White stands frozen and speechless. Then he runs to the door of his saloon and looks outside.

EXT. WHITE'S OYSTER SALOON -- CONTINUOUS

MR. ROGERS happens to be passing by in the street. White calls out to him.

WHITE

Rogers! Come here a minute.

(CONTINUED)

ROGERS
What is it, Mr. White?

INT. WHITE'S OYSTER SALOON -- KITCHEN -- DAY

Moments later, in the presence of Esther, Rogers helps White put the heavy door back onto the stove.

No sooner do the two men reattach the door to the stove than it once again swings open, lifts itself off its hinges, flies across the room, and CRASHES onto the floor.

WHITE
Ah, DAMMIT!

Rogers is stunned. Esther looks worried.

EXT. THEATER -- NIGHT

A poster outside the theater announces:

ONE NIGHT ONLY -- LECTURE BY WALTER HUBBELL, RENOWNED FRAUD INVESTIGATOR

HUBBELL (O.S.)
...Having been a professional actor since my early youth, I am perfectly familiar with all the mechanical devices used upon the stage to produce the illusive effects that are so often the wonder and admiration of the public...

INT. THEATER -- CONTINUOUS

On stage is WALTER HUBBELL, a handsome 27-year-old actor. His lecture continues, enhanced by dramatic lighting and overwrought ORGAN MUSIC.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
...Possessing this knowledge gained by years of experience, and being perfectly familiar with the methods and paraphernalia used by magicians in their exhibitions of legerdemain, I am, beyond doubt, competent to judge whether there is, or is not, deception performed by so called "mediums" and

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 "spiritualists." The
 "supernatural," ladies and
 gentlemen, is in the hands of
 jugglers and charlatans. Not one of
 these "mediums" has ever seen a
 ghost or received a message from
 one. Guesswork and deception
 compose the medium's chief
 stock-in-trade. These features,
 aided by darkness, cabinets, music,
 mirrors, and smoke --

Suddenly there is a large PUFF of smoke, and in it, Hubbell vanishes from the stage. The audience GASPS.

A moment later, there is another PUFF of smoke in the rear of the theater, out of which Hubbell reappears and continues speaking as he walks back up toward the stage.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
 -- give mediums the favorable
 conditions to humbug thousands. I
 say most positively that no
 "medium" can give genuine pertinent
 communications from ghosts of the
 dead, and that all mediums resort
 to trickery and hocus-pocus.

Now back on the stage, Hubbell produces flames from his fingertips with flash paper. The audience APPLAUDS with enthusiasm.

INT. WHITE'S OYSTER SALOON -- KITCHEN -- DAY

Esther washes dishes. Frederick White sits near her, whittling with a small pocket knife. The two SING A HYMN as they work.

ESTHER AND FREDERICK
 "Yes, we'll gather at the river,
 the beautiful, the beautiful river,
 gather with the saints at the
 river, that flows by the throne of
 God --"

Suddenly Frederick's pocket knife flies out of his hand and stabs Esther in the back.

ESTHER
 Oh!

(CONTINUED)

At first she isn't sure what has happened. Then she reaches back and feels the knife.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Oh, Freddie, help me.

The frightened boy jumps up and pulls the knife from Esther's back. A large blood stain forms on her dress.

Frederick pulls a handkerchief from his pocket, uses the cloth to wipe the blood from the blade of his knife, then closes the knife and puts it in his pocket.

No sooner is this done than the knife flies out of Frederick's pocket, opens, and stabs Esther again in the same spot. She SCREAMS in pain.

ESTHER
Oh my God!

FREDERICK
Daddy, Daddy, come quick!

Frederick again pulls the knife from Esther's back and wipes the blood from its blade.

This time, he runs his knife to the cash drawer, places the knife inside, closes and locks the drawer, then puts the key into his pocket.

Mr. White hurries into the kitchen.

WHITE
What's wrong?

He sees that Esther is bleeding.

WHITE (CONT'D)
Good Lord! What happened?

He helps her to a chair.

INT. WHITE'S OYSTER SALOON -- NIGHT

Several CUSTOMERS are in the saloon, some eating, most drinking. A regular, MR. MCCABE, has already had a few drinks. He speaks with Mr. White.

MCCABE
The little lady is doing better now?

(CONTINUED)

WHITE
Yes, she's fine.

MCCABE
Where is she tonight?

WHITE
She's here, in the back washing
some pans.

MCCABE
Bring her on out, I brought
something for her.

He bends down and picks up something wrapped in a cloth.

WHITE
Esther! Can you come out here?

After a moment, Esther, drying her hands, comes into the saloon from the kitchen. As she enters, several dishes behind the bar leap off the shelves and CRASH to the floor. Esther looks embarrassed.

MCCABE
Here she is!

ESTHER
Hello, Mr. McCabe.
(to White)
I'll clean those up in a minute,
Mr. White.

MCCABE
I have something here I want to
show you, darlin'.

DRUNKEN CUSTOMER
That's what he says to all the
ladies!

This is met with a general LAUGH.

MCCABE
No, no! I have here four iron
spikes.
(unwrapping them)
I've heard that some spirits don't
like the taste of iron, so these
spikes might be just the thing for
gettin' rid of 'um.

Everyone in the bar takes notice now.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

What...what am I supposed to do
with them?

McCabe pulls out a chair.

MCCABE

Here, sit ye down.

Esther sits.

MCCABE

Now, take these one at a time...
(handing her the spikes)
...and lay them right there on your
person.

Esther takes the iron spikes and lays them across her lap. Many of the saloon patrons move in closer. Everyone waits in anticipation.

At first, nothing happens. After a few moments, Esther shifts uncomfortably in her seat.

ESTHER

I...I think they're getting warm.

She touches one of the spikes with her hand, then quickly pulls her hand away as if the metal is too hot to touch.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Oh!

At that moment, the four spikes turn red hot and are thrown by an invisible force all the way across the saloon, where they CRASH into the front door.

Esther leaps to her feet and brushes off her smoking apron. Several saloon customers GASP in shock.

MCCABE

Dear God in heaven!

Suddenly all the chairs in the saloon slide across the floor and CRASH into the front door.

This frightens the customers, who run toward the exit and throw the chairs out of their way to get to the door.

When the customers finally reach the exit, the front door is violently WRENCHED off its hinges and flung to the ground with terrific force. The terrified customers run outside.

(CONTINUED)

Esther looks at White, who shakes his head and wipes sweat from his face.

WHITE

This ain't good for business.

INT. THEATER DRESSING ROOM -- NIGHT

Walter Hubbell and another actor, LEWIS BAKER, share a small dressing room. The men put on makeup and costumes for a performance.

BAKER

Did you read the paper this morning, Hubbell?

HUBBELL

No, what's in it?

BAKER

There's an article you might be interested in.

He hands Hubbell a newspaper. Hubbell looks at it. The paper has an article titled:

THE AMHERST MYSTERY

Hubbell quickly scans the article. His mind seems to be racing.

HUBBELL

Nova Scotia is nice this time of year, isn't it, Baker?

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- DAY

The early summer morning is cloudy. A man's hand KNOCKS on the front door.

After a moment, Esther opens the door.

Walter Hubbell, actor/fraud investigator, holds an umbrella and a large satchel in one hand, and politely remove his hat with the other hand.

HUBBELL

Good day, I'm Walter Hubbell, I believe you're expecting me?

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER
(shyly)
Oh, yes, won't you come in?

HUBBELL
Thank you.

Hubbell enters the Teed house and closes the door. Beside the front door sits a half-full bucket of water. Suddenly the water in the bucket becomes agitated, bubbles, and steams.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Esther, Olive, Daniel, Jennie, Mr. White, and Walter Hubbell TALK and drink coffee at the large kitchen table.

Suddenly there is an odd SCRATCHING SOUND at the table. Everyone stops talking.

ESTHER
They've come back.

Hubbell bends down and looks under the table but finds nothing unusual.

HUBBELL
Will everyone please back away from the table?

Esther, Olive, Daniel, Jennie, and Mr. White do as asked. The SCRATCHING SOUNDS CONTINUE from the table.

Hubbell pulls out a couple of chairs and crawls under the table to try to find the source of the sound, but he finds nothing.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Hmm.

He crawls out from under the table, then he stands.

ESTHER
Bob Nickle is here.

HUBBELL
Bob Nickle?

JENNIE
That's the name of the ghost.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER
Would you like to ask him a
question?

HUBBELL
(nods)
Where is he?

ESTHER
There, by the table.

HUBBELL
I don't see anything.

ESTHER
He's there nevertheless.

HUBBELL
All right --
(glancing into the parlor)
-- ask him what time it is by the
clock in the parlor.

The others in the room start to turn to see the parlor
clock.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
No one look! Keep your eyes in this
room!

Everyone seems to understand that Hubbell is making sure no
one is trying to trick him, so they obey. Hubbell repeats
his question in a louder voice.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
What time is it by the parlor
clock?

At that moment, there are NINE KNOCKS on the kitchen table,
then a brief pause, FOUR MORE KNOCKS, another brief pause,
and EIGHT MORE KNOCKS.

During the knocking, Hubbell looks at all persons present,
watching their hands and feet to make sure no one is making
the sounds.

When the KNOCKING STOPS, Hubbell looks back at the clock in
the parlor.

INT. TEED PARLOR -- HUBBELL'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

The clock says 9:48.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

HUBBELL

Very good. Now -- what time is it
by my pocket watch?

In answer, there are 10 KNOCKS on the table, a brief pause,
and THREE MORE KNOCKS.

Hubbell pulls out his pocket watch and looks at the time.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

That's correct. I keep my watch 15
minutes fast so I'm never late for
an appointment.

Hubbell turns to Esther.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

If I whistle "Yankee Doodle," can
it keep correct time?

There are THREE KNOCKS on the table.

ESTHER

Three knocks means "yes."

Hubbell begins WHISTLING THE SONG "YANKEE DOODLE." The
KNOCKS on the table keep perfect time with the song.

When the tune is over, Hubbell immediately asks another
question.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

I have a quarter in my pocket.
What's the date on the coin?

Instantly there is ONE KNOCK, a brief pause, EIGHT MORE
KNOCKS, a brief pause, SEVEN MORE KNOCKS, a brief pause, and
FIVE MORE KNOCKS.

Hubbell takes the coin from his pocket, looks at it, and
gives a little LAUGH.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

That's right -- 1875. Amazing.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Walter Hubbell sits at a desk and composes a letter. He writes quickly, as if he is excited. The letter says in part:

"Instead of exposing the girl as a fraud, now I'll be trying to convince audiences that her powers are real."

EXT. TRAIN STATION -- DAY

Esther, Walter Hubbell, and Mr. White are at the station to catch a train. Olive is there to see Esther off.

OLIVE

I'm not sure this "lecture tour" is a good idea. What if things get worse?

ESTHER

Then we'll stop. Mr. Hubbell says I can make a little money this way.

OLIVE

I know, but...you hurry back home if anything bad happens. Or even if it doesn't. You know you're always welcome here.

ESTHER

I know.

She hugs Olive.

EXT. HOTEL -- DAY

A cloud moves over the sun, casting a shadow over the large Victorian building in Moncton, New Brunswick.

Esther, Walter Hubbell, and Mr. White carry a few pieces of luggage from the nearby train station to the hotel.

Esther notices something on the other side of the street.

ESTHER

Oh, look -- there's a Baptist church right across the street. I want to go on Sunday.

(CONTINUED)

WHITE
I'll go with you, Esther.

ESTHER
Oh, that'll be fine. Would you come
too, Mr. Hubbell?

HUBBELL
Might be interesting.

INT. HOTEL PARLOR -- DAY

Moments later, Esther, Hubbell, and White have arrived at
the hotel and begin checking in.

Esther notices something in the parlor. She speaks quietly
to Hubbell.

ESTHER
Bob has followed us here.

HUBBELL
Oh -- are you sure?

ESTHER
Yes.

HUBBELL
Can you see him?

ESTHER
Yes.

HUBBELL
(glancing around)
Where is he?

Esther nods toward a seating area about 15 feet away. In
that moment, Hubbell sees that a large rocking chair slowly
rocks on its own.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
(startled)
Oh.
(a pause)
Well, it's to our advantage that
he's here -- maybe he'll put on a
good show for the audience at our
lecture.

Esther does not look encouraged.

INT. BAPTIST CHURCH -- NIGHT

Esther, Hubbell, and Mr. White stand in front of a pew in the back of the church. The CONGREGATION stands and SINGS A HYMN, accompanied by an ORGAN.

CONGREGATION

"What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear,
what a privilege to carry,
everything to God in prayer --"

Suddenly, a terrific KNOCKING SOUND begins. It seems to be coming from the pew in front of Esther and her friends.

Everyone stops singing and turns to look. The KNOCKING CONTINUES.

ESTHER

(in a whisper)
Stop it, please!

The NOISE STOPS. After a moment, the ORGANIST begins PLAYING again, and the congregation CONTINUES SINGING.

CONGREGATION

"O what peace we often forfeit, O
what needless pain we bear, all
because we do not carry everything
to God in prayer --"

The KNOCKING STARTS again, but much FASTER AND LOUDER. The congregation STOPS SINGING. Esther WHISPERS LOUDLY.

ESTHER

Stop it!

For a moment, the NOISE STOPS, then it BREAKS OUT AGAIN LOUDER AND FASTER THAN BEFORE.

Suddenly a kneeling stool slides across the floor and CRASHES into a wall.

Then, the hymn books held by Esther, Hubbell, and White are yanked from their hands by an invisible force and thrown toward the front of the church. Many in the congregation GASP in shock.

Esther is mortified. She shakes her head and exits the pew. Hubbell and White follow. Esther quietly apologizes to a WOMAN she passes on the way out.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER
I'm so sorry!

The three leave the church. As soon as Esther is out the door, the POUNDING NOISE STOPS.

INT. HOTEL -- NIGHT

Moments later, Esther, Hubbell, and White reenter the hotel.

HUBBELL
I had a feeling something like that
might happen. Churches and evil
spirits don't mix.

ESTHER
Why didn't you tell me? I've never
been so embarrassed in my life.

INT. HOTEL PARLOR -- DAY

Esther sits alone, writing a letter near a window on the first floor of the hotel.

Unexpectedly, the fan in the open window falls off the sill and outside onto the porch.

Esther is startled, then realizes what has happened. She puts aside her letter and walks out onto the porch.

EXT. HOTEL PORCH -- CONTINUOUS

Esther walks to the fan, picks it up, sets it back into the window, and walks back to the door of the hotel.

When she starts to enter, Esther sees that a large, upside-down armchair blocks the doorway. Esther glances around inside the door, but no one is in sight.

ESTHER
Hello?

No one answers. Esther tries pushing the chair aside so she can reenter the hotel, but she is not strong enough. She calls back inside the hotel.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Porter?

There is no response. She tries moving the chair again, but she cannot. Frustrated, she calls louder.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Porter!

Immediately a PORTER answers, startling Esther.

PORTER

Yes, ma'am?

ESTHER

Porter, could you help me move this chair, please? I can't get back in.

PORTER

Uh, yes.

With some difficulty, he turns the heavy armchair right side up and moves it out of the way.

PORTER (CONT'D)

If you don't mind my asking, do you know why the chair was here?

ESTHER

I don't know, the fan fell out the window, and I came out here to put it back, and when I tried to go back the hotel, this chair was blocking the way.

PORTER

(joking)

Looks like it tried to follow you out!

Esther looks worried.

ESTHER

Thank you for your help.

She reenters the hotel.

INT. HOTEL PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Esther walks back to her seat near the window, picks up her letter, and starts writing again.

In the background, the porter slowly moves the heavy armchair back into place on the far side of the parlor.

Walter Hubbell approaches Esther and sits in a chair near her. Esther looks up at him.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL
Don't stop, go on with your letter.

ESTHER
Oh, it's nothing. Just something to keep me busy.

HUBBELL
Are you all right?

ESTHER
I'm fine. A little homesick. How are you?

HUBBELL
Fine. Not homesick. I travel all the time. The world is my home.

ESTHER
That must be nice.

HUBBELL
Sometimes it is. Sometimes it isn't.

With a puzzled expression, he glances down at Esther's hand.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
How do you do that?

ESTHER
What?

HUBBELL
Talk to me and write your letter at the same time.

ESTHER
Hmm?

She looks down to see that her hand is busily writing on the paper.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
But -- I'm not doing it -- I'm not writing.

HUBBELL
(frowning)
Your hand is. What is it writing?

(CONTINUED)

Her hand continues writing rapidly across the sheet of paper. Esther looks down and reads. As she sees the words, she looks shocked and disgusted. She pulls away the paper with her other hand and wads it up.

ESTHER

Foul language -- I didn't write it,
honest I didn't! The handwriting
isn't even mine!

HUBBELL

I believe you.

Esther's hand still moves, writing in the air.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

I have an idea -- let's ask it a
question. We'll see if it writes an
answer. Here, put another piece of
paper under your pen...

As he slides a sheet of paper under Esther's hand, he asks a question.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

This question is for the entity
that has control of Esther's hand
-- who are you? What's your name?

Esther's hand pauses a moment, then writes the words,
"Maggie Fisher."

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

"Maggie Fisher" --
(to Esther)
Do you know someone named Maggie
Fisher?

Esther shakes her head. Her hand begins writing again.
Hubbell reads the words aloud as they are written.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

"I...attended the red...schoolhouse
on the hill
in...Upper...Stewiacke."

ESTHER

That's where I went to school! But
I don't remember anyone named
Maggie Fisher.

Esther's hand continues writing. Hubbell reads the words.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL

"I went to...school there...before
Miss Cox did. By the time
she...started, I had left."

(to Esther)

Is this true?

ESTHER

I have no idea.

In that instant, there is an EXPLOSIVE POPPING SOUND, and
the fan falls out the window again.

Esther suddenly looks faint, and her hand stops writing.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I don't feel very well.

HUBBELL

Let's get you upstairs.

He helps Esther up from the chair and walks with her toward
the stairs.

INT. ESTHER'S HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Later that night, Esther lies in bed, swollen, and breathing
with difficulty.

Mr. White sits in a chair near the bed.

Hubbell KNOCKS LIGHTLY at the door and enters. He speaks
quietly to White.

HUBBELL

How is she?

WHITE

About the same.

HUBBELL

Can I speak with her?

WHITE

(shrugs)

You can try.

HUBBELL

Esther, can you hear me?

Her hand reaches out. Hubbell takes it.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL

Esther, I'm not sure if you care about this right now, but...I telegraphed the public records office in Upper Stewiacke, and a girl named Maggie Fisher did attend the school there a few years before you did.

Esther responds with difficulty.

ESTHER

Is she...still alive?

HUBBELL

(after a pause)

No. She died three years ago.

Esther starts crying.

ESTHER

Why is she torturing me? I didn't even know her!

Hubbell doesn't have an answer. At that moment, Esther convulses, and a LOUD SERIES OF KNOCKS, so fast they are almost a vibration, resonates through the room.

As soon as the SOUNDS STOP, Esther relaxes, her swelling goes down, she starts breathing normally, and she falls into a deep sleep.

WHITE

She'll be all right now. It's the same as always.

Hubbell shakes his head in disbelief.

EXT. CHATHAM, MASSACHUSETTS TRAIN STATION -- DAY

Hubbell, Mr. White, and Esther, looking rested and healthy, leave the train station.

INT. MASONIC HALL -- NIGHT

Hubbell, behind a lectern, speaks before a full house. Esther is also on the stage, sitting left of center. Hubbell turns to her.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL
Is the ghost here with us tonight,
Miss Cox?

ESTHER
(shyly)
Yes.

HUBBELL
Where is he?

ESTHER
Beside the door, in the back of the
room.

The audience turns to look but sees nothing.

HUBBELL
What's the ghost doing?

ESTHER
Laughing.

HUBBELL
Laughing? At what?

ESTHER
At...you.

A few people in the audience LAUGH. Hubbell is unperturbed.

HUBBELL
And why is he laughing at me?

ESTHER
He says...

HUBBELL
Yes? What does he say?

ESTHER
He says to tell you...there's no
such thing as a ghost.

The audience LAUGHS. A HECKLER calls out.

HECKLER
I coulda told you that!

The audience LAUGHS LOUDER.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL

(turning back to the audience)

Well...in conclusion, it is my belief that a person may be born with senses so acute, that he or she literally lives in--

Unexpectedly, he is interrupted by an OLD MAN in the audience who stands and shakes his cane for emphasis as he speaks.

OLD MAN

Beware, young man, beware! You don't know what you're dealing with! The devil has many faces!

MURMURS ripple through the audience. Hubbell ignores the disruption and continues.

HUBBELL

-- that he or she literally lives in the world of men and the world of ghosts at the same time. I believe that Miss Esther Cox...

He holds out his arm toward Esther, who rises, bows her head slightly, and gives a well-rehearsed smile.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

...is one of these special people. Thank you, and good night.

There is a SMATTERING OF APPLAUSE. Someone throws an egg, which SPLATS against the lectern. The curtain comes down.

INT. STAGE -- CONTINUOUS

On the stage, now behind the curtain, Hubbell and Esther hear LOUD VOICES in the auditorium.

Mr. White hurries behind the curtain and speaks with urgency to Hubbell and Esther.

WHITE

Some roughneck just tried to hit me!

ESTHER

Hit you? Are you all right?

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL

Did you collect our share of the receipts?

WHITE

Yes, I have the money here in my pocket.

HUBBELL

Give it to me.

Mr. White hands Hubbell the money. He puts it in his pocket.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

Stay here until I get Esther back to the boardinghouse.

Mr. White nods. Hubbell leads Esther outside.

EXT. CHATHAM STREET -- CONTINUOUS

Hubbell and Esther emerge from a back door of the building. Reaching the street, they find a disorderly CROWD waiting for them. The people in the crowd suddenly get quiet when they see Hubbell and Esther.

HUBBELL

Esther, hold onto my arm and don't let go.

Esther takes his arm. The two walk quickly. They are immediately followed by the crowd.

Members of the disorderly mob pick up stones and throw them at Esther and Hubbell. The two start running.

EXT. BOARDINGHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Hubbell and Esther quickly reach their boardinghouse and run inside. The mob stays outside.

INT. BOARDINGHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Esther is entirely unnerved by the incident and begins SOBBING. Hubbell takes her in his arms and tries to comfort her.

HUBBELL

Now, now...you're not a real performer until you've been run out of town by an angry mob.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

But I'm not a performer at all! I'm just a girl!

Hubbell seems to realize that Esther is right.

HUBBELL

Yes. Yes, I know.

Mr. White suddenly enters the parlor from the back.

WHITE

I snuck out behind the crowd. Man, this is the last straw -- I'm taking Esther home on the next train. If you're smart, Mr. Hubbell, you'll come with us. If we stay on this tour, one of these crowds is gonna tar and feather us, or worse.

HUBBELL

But Mr. White --

WHITE

No buts! Esther is under my care, and I'm taking her home to her sisters. We're leaving tonight, while we still have a chance.

He takes Esther's hand and pulls her away from Hubbell, who looks disappointed, but resigned.

INT. TEED PARLOR -- DAY

Walter Hubbell's umbrella sits in a corner near the front door.

Hubbell, alone in the parlor, sits in one of the easy chairs and writes a letter. His leather satchel leans against his chair.

SOUNDS OF MEAL PREPARATION come from the kitchen.

Drying her hands, Esther walks out of the kitchen into the parlor.

ESTHER

Has the rain stopped?

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL
(glancing out the window)
I think so. At least for now.

ESTHER
That's good. I need to cut weeds in
the garden this afternoon.

She turns and opens the pantry door. Suddenly the umbrella from the corner flies across the room, passing directly over Hubbell's head, and lands on the floor in the pantry doorway.

As Esther comes out of the pantry with a dish in both hands, a large carving knife WHIZZES out of the pantry, over her head, and lands on the floor in front of Hubbell.

Hubbell jumps up from his chair and runs to look inside the pantry.

INT. PANTRY -- HUBBELL'S P.O.V. -- CONTINUOUS

No one is inside the small storage room.

INT. TEED PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Hubbell looks at Esther.

HUBBELL
Are you all right?

Esther nods. Hubbell leans down and picks up the umbrella, then walks back to his chair, where he picks up the knife and sits down.

At that moment, Hubbell's leather satchel is thrown across the room.

In the same instant, a large chair rushes from the opposite side of the room, striking Hubbell's chair with such force that it nearly knocks him out of it.

Hubbell rises. All seven chairs in the parlor fall over.

ESTHER
I don't think they like you.

Hubbell follows Esther into the kitchen.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

As Hubbell enters the room, all the chairs at the kitchen table fall over. Hubbell starts picking up the chairs.

HUBBELL

No, I'm reasonably certain they don't like me, but I've come here to investigate, and I'll remain until they drive me from the house.

At that moment, the kitchen table is pushed over.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

Which...may be sooner than later.

Esther gives Hubbell a cup of coffee, but his hands shake so much, he can hardly hold the cup and saucer.

ESTHER

Don't worry, you'll get used to them soon.

At that moment, the rugs on the kitchen floor begin sliding around, kicking up dust as they are jerked violently over the hardwood. Hubbell back up into the parlor.

INT. TEED PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Just as Hubbell enters the room, a large flower pot, containing a geranium in full bloom, flies from a stand in front of the bay window and lands unbroken on the floor in the center of the parlor.

The next moment, a tin pail, half full of water, flies from the kitchen and lands beside the flower pot on the floor in the center of the room.

Esther walks to the doorway and looks into the parlor. Hubbell points to the flower pot and water pail sitting absurdly in the center of the room.

HUBBELL

What does this mean?

ESTHER

What does any of it mean?

INT. TEED PARLOR -- NIGHT

Later that evening, Hubbell lies on the sofa with his eyes partially open so he can keep them on Esther, who sits in a rocking chair near the center of the room.

Suddenly a large glass paperweight, which has been sitting on an ornamental shelf in a corner of the room, WHIZZES through the air straight toward Hubbell's head.

Fortunately, Hubbell sees the paperweight coming. He moves, and the heavy object strikes the arm of the sofa about three inches from his head, then bounces onto a chair near the sofa.

The paperweight spins around on the seat of the chair until Hubbell reaches out and stops it.

HUBBELL

It almost hit my head, did you see that? It could have killed me!

Olive, followed closely by little George, enters the parlor from the kitchen.

OLIVE

What happened?

Hubbell takes the paperweight to Olive.

HUBBELL

Kindly lock this up somewhere.

ESTHER

It almost hit him.

OLIVE

Oh no. I'll hide it.

She carries the paperweight upstairs. Esther speaks to George.

ESTHER

Why are you still up, little man? It's past your bedtime.

She picks up George and sits back down in the rocker with him in her lap. She begins QUIETLY SINGING A HYMN.

ESTHER

"Jesus, the name high over all, in hell or earth or sky; angels and men before it fall, and devils fear and fly..."

(CONTINUED)

Hubbell sits down at a table near the bay window and begins writing a letter.

ESTHER

"...Jesus, the name to sinners
dear, the name to sinners giv'n; it
scatters all their guilty fear, it
turns their hell to heav'n --"

Suddenly one of little George's copper-toed shoes is yanked off his foot by an invisible hand and thrown toward Hubbell. It just misses him.

Esther STOPS SINGING. Hubbell speaks to George.

HUBBELL

Did you do that?

Little George shakes his head.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

I didn't think so.

He gets up, picks up the shoe, slides it back onto George's foot, and ties the laces.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

Think it'll stay on this time?

George doesn't know. Hubbell pats George's leg, then goes back to the desk and resumes writing. Esther BEGINS SINGING again.

ESTHER

"Jesus, the prisoner's fetters
breaks, and bruises Satan's head
--"

George's shoe flies off again. This time, the copper toe strikes Hubbell just above and behind his right ear.

HUBBELL

OW!

George LAUGHS. Esther gently reprimands him.

ESTHER

George! We mustn't laugh when
someone is hurt.

Then, in spite of herself, Esther cannot help LAUGHING as Hubbell rubs his head where he was struck. After a moment, Hubbell LAUGHS as well.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- DAY

Esther, Olive, George, and Hubbell eat cake at the kitchen table.

George seems to notice something unusual. He acts as if strangers are present whom he fears.

Suddenly the piece of cake George has been eating is snatched from his hand by an unseen force and thrown into Hubbell's face. George CRIES BITTERLY.

OLIVE

Oh! There, there George. We have more cake. I'll cut you another piece. You all right, Mr. Hubbell?

Before Hubbell can answer, the unseen entity roughly unbuttons George's clothes and tears them off. Olive is now frightened for her child.

OLIVE

Oh, stop!

She moves to pick up her baby. The next second, Esther's face is SLAPPED HARD by an invisible hand.

ESTHER

Oh!

Immediately, the other side of her face is SLAPPED EVEN HARDER.

ESTHER

Stop it! Can't we have just one nice afternoon??

She begins crying. Hubbell takes Esther's hand to comfort her. Red marks appear plainly on her cheeks in the shape of a hand.

Olive holds George protectively as the child CRIES LOUDLY.

Suddenly, Hubbell wrinkles his nose and jumps up from the table.

HUBBELL

I smell smoke.

CUT TO:

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S SECOND BEDROOM -- DAY

Hubbell runs upstairs and finds a pile of old newspapers on fire in the center of the bedroom. Esther arrives moments after Hubbell.

Hubbell grabs a rug from the floor and uses it to smother the flames.

HUBBELL
Open the window!

Esther obeys. Hubbell throws the remains of the newspapers out the window onto the ground below. Esther helps him.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Why did you have a pile of
newspapers in your bedroom?

ESTHER
I don't know, they're not mine.
I've never seen them before.

HUBBELL
Are they Jennie's?

ESTHER
I don't think so. And even if they
were, she wouldn't leave them in a
pile in the middle of the room.

HUBBELL
Then where did they come from?

Esther is at a loss. She leans out the window and calls to Olive, who stands outside holding George.

ESTHER
It's all right, the fire's out!

INT. TEED PARLOR -- DAY

Moments later, Hubbell and Esther, their faces and hands smudged with soot, walk back downstairs into the parlor.

When they reach the bottom of the stairs, they find the seven chairs in the parlor have been piled on top of each other in the center of the room, making a stack that reaches the ceiling.

Just as Olive enters the room with little George, an unseen hand yanks out the bottom chair, causing the rest of the chairs to fall to the floor with a terrific CRASH.

(CONTINUED)

Olive SCREAMS and protectively pulls back George, who CRIES LOUDLY.

Hubbell shakes his head as if he cannot believe his eyes. Esther sits down on the bottom stair and begins to cry.

EXT. TEED FRONT PORCH -- NIGHT

Later that night, Hubbell and Esther sits outside in the dark on the small front porch. Esther SOFTLY SINGS A HYMN to herself.

ESTHER

"...and our spirits shall sorrow no more, not a sigh for the blessing of rest. In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore, in the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore."

(louder, to Hubbell)

This night reminds me of last summer when I used to sit here and wait for Bob McNeal to come and take me for a ride in his wagon.

HUBBELL

Do you miss him?

ESTHER

Not so much him. I do miss going out, though.

She gives a sad little LAUGH.

HUBBELL

Maybe sometime we could --

Suddenly, Esther's attention is grabbed by something nearby, something Hubbell cannot see. Esther seems to listen to something, then she responds to it.

ESTHER

Where -- tell me where!

HUBBELL

(concerned)

What is it?

Esther ignores him and runs into the house, yelling at the top of her lungs.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER
Fire! Fire! There's a fire
somewhere in the house!

INT. TEED PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Daniel has been reading a newspaper, but immediately drops it in alarm when Esther runs in.

DANIEL
Where is it?

ESTHER
I don't know, he wouldn't tell me!
Where are Olive and the boys?

DANIEL
In the kitchen.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

Esther runs into the kitchen. Five-year-old Willie rises from the table and picks up George. Olive closes the cellar door. They seem to have been through this fire drill before, and they know what to do.

OLIVE
It's not in the cellar.

ESTHER
Then it must be upstairs. Where's
Jennie?

OLIVE
Still out with her beau.

ESTHER
Good!

She calls out to Daniel and Hubbell as she grabs a bucket and starts filling it with water from the pump.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Upstairs -- look upstairs!

INT. TEED PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Daniel and Hubbell race up the stairs.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- CONTINUOUS

OLIVE

Willie, take George to Mrs.
Malloy's just as we practiced.

Willie hesitates.

OLIVE

Now, Willie!

Willie clumsily carries George outside through the kitchen door.

INT. UPSTAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

Daniel and Hubbell reach the top of the staircase to find smoke pouring from a closet in the hall.

Daniel immediately grabs a throw rug and opens the closet door. The fresh supply of oxygen from the open door causes flames to burst from the closet in a small explosion. Daniel is thrown backward.

Hubbell grabs the rug and uses it to smother the flames, which come from a basket in the closet.

Daniel scrambles to his feet as Esther and Olive arrive with buckets of water. Daniel takes the bucket from Olive and pours the water onto the remaining flames. Esther throws her bucket of water onto the basket.

The fire is out, but smoke continues pouring from the closet.

After the first impulse of relief, Esther begins crying. Tears run down Olive's cheeks, too, as she tries to comfort Esther.

OLIVE

Don't despair, sister. Someday all
will be well again -- God is
stronger than the devil.

Esther nods, but doesn't seem to find much comfort in Olive's words.

INT. TEED PARLOR -- DAY

This afternoon, Hubbell holds paper and pen and sits near the bay window. He makes notes on the paper in response to various KNOCKS on the floor.

Esther knits on the other side of the room.

Olive, drying her hands, comes to the door of the parlor from the kitchen.

OLIVE

Esther, when you write to Nellie, tell her about someone stealing the cow's milk at night. I keep forgetting to tell her.

ESTHER

All right.

HUBBELL

(to the spirits)
Have you all lived on the earth?

There are THREE LOUD KNOCKS on the floor.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

(to Olive)
Three knocks means "yes."

OLIVE

You're not talking to them, Mr. Hubbell?

HUBBELL

It's the most amazing thing. There seem to be six ghosts in all. Listen --

(reading from his notes)
Bob Nickle is the chief ghost; Jane Nickle is either Bob's wife or his sister; Maggie Fisher is another ghost, almost as bad as Bob; Mary Fisher says she is Maggie's sister; Eliza McNeal claims to be the sister of Esther's friend Bob McNeal --

ESTHER

(interrupting)
He's not my friend.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL
-- and Peter Teed --

OLIVE
(startled)
Peter Teed?

HUBBELL
-- is a quiet old fellow who tries
to stop the others from breaking
things.

OLIVE
Daniel had a great-uncle named
Peter Teed...he was burned to death
in a barn fire a long time ago.
(to Hubbell)
You mustn't listen to them, Mr.
Hubbell. Nothing they say is true
-- the devil is the father of lies.
(to her sister)
Esther, please write your letter
before the post runs.

ESTHER
I will, just let me finish this
row.

Hubbell continues asking questions of the spirits.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Have you seen God?

There is ONE LOUD KNOCK. Hubbell looks at Olive.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
One knock means "no."

In spite of herself, Olive seems compelled to stay and
listen. Esther stops knitting. Hubbell continues.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Are you in heaven?

There is ONE LOUD KNOCK.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Are you in hell?

THREE LOUD KNOCKS.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Have you seen the devil?

OLIVE
(shocked)
Mr. Hubbell!

There are THREE SLEDGEHAMMER-LIKE BLOWS, so loud that they shake the floor.

Esther's knitting needles fly out of her hands and strike Hubbell in the head.

HUBBELL
Ow!

ESTHER
I didn't do it!

OLIVE
(angrily)
We have enough troubles in this house without you getting those spirits all riled up, Mr. Hubbell, so stop this nonsense now or I'll have to ask you to find other lodging!

She turns and quickly walks back into the kitchen.

Esther's hand begins making writing motions, but she is unaware of it.

Smokey, the family cat, wanders into the room. Hubbell walks over and pets her.

HUBBELL
I guess I'll have to ask you all my questions, Smokey.

Hubbell turns to look at Esther. His eyes drop from her face to her hand.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
You're doing it again.

ESTHER
Doing what?

HUBBELL
Your hand is writing.

Esther looks down to see that her hand is making movements as if it is writing. She GASPS.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

Let's see what it wants to tell us.

He hurries over to Esther and places a pen in her hand and a piece of paper under it. Esther's hand writes quickly across the page.

Esther reads the writing to herself. The words startle her. She grabs her writing hand with her free hand and makes it stop.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

What did it write?

Esther starts to tear up the piece of paper.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

No, wait! Let me read it.

ESTHER

(crying)

It's awful!

HUBBELL

I don't mind.

Esther hesitantly hands Hubbell the page.

The handwriting looks similar to the words that were scratched into Esther's bedroom wall months before. In an ugly scrawl are the words:

GET OUT OF AMHERST YOU BITCH GOD DAMN YOUR SOUL GOD DAMN
HUBBELL'S SOUL TO HELL

Hubbell speaks angrily to the spirits in the air.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

You go back to hell and stop
tormenting Esther and her family!

At that moment, a bottle of ink is thrown at Hubbell from the writing desk. The ink splatters over Hubbell's jacket.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

Damn it!

Smokey walks to the ink bottle on the floor and sniffs it. Hubbell nods toward the cat and speaks to Esther in a low voice.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

It's odd that they never bother her.

In that instant, the cat is lifted five feet into the air and then dropped onto Esther's back. The frightened cat jumps off Esther with a HOWL and runs out of the room.

Esther is once again frightened to tears.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S SECOND BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Esther and Jennie are in their bed. Esther sews, and Jennie reads the Bible by the light of an oil lamp.

Suddenly Esther glances up at something near the open bedroom door. Frightened, she reaches out to her side and touches Jennie.

JENNIE

What's wrong?

ESTHER

(whispering)

It's Bob Nickle!

JENNIE

(sitting up and looking around)

What? Where?

ESTHER

In front of the door.

Jennie looks toward the door.

JENNIE

I don't see anything, Esther. Are you sure you're not dreaming?

ESTHER

I'm not dreaming.

JENNIE

What does he look like?

ESTHER

An old man -- a living shadow -- Oh, Jennie, he's coming toward us!

(CONTINUED)

JENNIE
(frightened)
No, Esther -- what should we do?

ESTHER
Oh Jennie!

Suddenly the Bible flies out of Jennie's hands and strikes the wall so hard that it CRACKS the plaster. Jennie SCREAMS.

Esther is violently yanked out of bed onto the floor. She SCREAMS in fear and pain.

Jennie, SCREAMING HYSTERICALLY, is also forcefully pulled from the bed, her fingernails shredding the sheet as she tries to hang on. She faints.

Esther, facing the wall, is pressed against it and held there. The back of her nightgown is RIPPED away by an invisible hand.

One at a time, gashes in the shape of the cross are scratched into the skin on Esther's back. Some of the crosses are right side up, some are upside down, some are sideways.

LOUD SLEDGEHAMMER BLOWS sound from the walls and floor. Esther continues SCREAMING.

ESTHER
Oh God, help me -- HELP ME!

INT. HALLWAY -- CONTINUOUS

Daniel, Olive, and Hubbell rush to Esther and Jennie's bedroom. Just as they arrive, the door SLAMS SHUT.

Daniel grabs the doorknob to open the door. There is an odd SIZZLING SOUND, like meat on a hot grill, then Daniel YELLS OUT IN PAIN as he yanks his hand from the doorknob, which is now red hot and glowing.

HUBBELL
Stand back.

He charges the door shoulder first, but it doesn't budge.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
It feels solid, like there's a
brick wall on the other side!

Esther's SCREAMS still come from inside the room.

(CONTINUED)

DANIEL
Here, let me try.

Daniel kicks the door with all his might, but it stays solidly shut.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
Dammit! I'll have to go get the
axe.

Suddenly Esther lets out one final, bloodcurdling SCREAM, and then the room is silent.

OLIVE
Oh, hurry, Daniel!

Just as Daniel starts toward the stairs, the bedroom doorknob quietly CLICKS open.

Daniel comes back from the stairs.

Olive's trembling hand reaches out and pushes open the bedroom door.

The door CREAKS open.

Olive SCREAMS.

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S SECOND BEDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

On the floor lies Jennie, unconscious, her nude body covered with bleeding, cross-shaped scratches.

Esther is nowhere in sight.

OLIVE
Jennie!

She rushes into the room, pulls a sheet off the bed, and uses it to cover Jennie.

Daniel and Hubbell follow Olive into the room.

DANIEL
Is she alive?

OLIVE
Yes -- yes, she's breathing. Where
is Esther?

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL
(calling)
Esther?

OLIVE
Dan, help me get Jennie into bed.

Daniel picks up Jennie and lays her on her bed. Olive looks under the bed.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
Esther?

She finds nothing.

Hubbell approaches the bedroom closet. His hand slowly reaches out, turns the doorknob, and opens the door.

The dim light from the oil lamp reveals what appears to be a body hanging in the closet.

Then the "body" -- a nightgown -- slips off its hanger and falls to the floor.

Hubbell is startled, then he breathes a SIGH of relief.

HUBBELL
She isn't in the clos--

But before he can finish his sentence, Esther falls to the floor from a shelf in the top of the closet.

Her nightgown is bloody and ripped to shreds. Every exposed area of her skin is pierced with sewing pins, even her face and ears.

ESTHER
Please help me.

She loses consciousness.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S SECOND BEDROOM -- NIGHT

The family is assembled around Esther's bed. Daniel's burned hand is now covered with a bandage.

Between GASPS FOR BREATH, Esther SOBS IN AGONY.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

Oh, God! I wish I were dead! I wish
I were dead!

OLIVE

Oh, don't say that, Esther -- don't
say that.

Upon the bed lies Esther, fearfully swollen, her exposed
skin covered with scratches and scabs.

She involuntarily thrashes around the bed as if the devil
himself is inside her.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Now, Mr. Hubbell, you see how much
she suffers.

HUBBELL

I never imagined it could be as bad
as this.

(to Daniel)

Could you and I hold her still?
Maybe she won't be in as much pain
if she's still.

DANIEL

(shrugs)

We can try.

The two men do try, but the effort is useless. Esther seems
to have the strength of several men.

Hubbell, out of breath, speaks quietly to Olive.

HUBBELL

Are you sure nothing can be done to
relieve her?

OLIVE

Dr. Carritte has tried everything
without giving her the slightest
relief. Medicine has no more effect
on her than water.

At that moment, a strange, unnatural VOICE calls Hubbell's
name.

VOICE

Walter Hubbell!

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL

Yes?

He turns around to look for the source of the voice, but no one is there. He turns back to Olive.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

Did...you hear someone call my name?

OLIVE

(cautiously)

Yes.

The odd, genderless VOICE CALLS AGAIN.

VOICE

Olive Teed!

Olive, frightened, does not answer the voice, but speaks in a whisper to Daniel and Hubbell.

OLIVE

They know us by name.

DANIEL

Of course they do, they've been living with us for months.

VOICE

Daniel Teed!

DANIEL

But that doesn't make it any less creepy.

At that moment, Esther's blankets are violently yanked from her bed, and a wooden chair is hurled into a wall. When the shattered pieces of the chair fall to the floor, they burst into flame.

Hubbell and Daniel hurry to put out the fire.

Esther stops thrashing and now seems to be in a trance. She is on her back, perfectly rigid, with eyes set like a dying person.

She smiles blissfully and seems to be talking and listening to someone.

ESTHER

And you saw me there?

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE
Esther, who are you talking to?

ESTHER
Mother.

OLIVE
Mother is in heaven, Esther.

ESTHER
Yes, with angels. So beautiful.

OLIVE
Can you see her?

ESTHER
Yes.

OLIVE
But she died when you were only
three weeks old, dear.

ESTHER
Yes, but I know her.

HUBBELL
Can you see anyone else?

ESTHER
Yes.

OLIVE
Who else do you see, Esther?

ESTHER
Mrs. Bird and Mrs. Dunlap. And
there's Mr. Wagner and his son
David. And Grandmother.

Daniel whispers to Hubbell.

DANIEL
All those people are dead!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TEED PARLOR -- NIGHT

As Hubbell sits in the room, he hears FOOTSTEPS WALKING DOWN
THE STAIRS. He turns to look.

Esther reaches the bottom of the stairs. A wooden chair
comes down the stairs after her, as if it is following her.

(CONTINUED)

Hubbell stands.

HUBBELL
Are you feeling better?

ESTHER
Much better, thank you.

HUBBELL
Are you up to trying a little
experiment with me?

ESTHER
(a little hesitant)
All right.

HUBBELL
You sit here...

He helps Esther to the sofa, then he pulls a chair near her.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Are you comfortable?

ESTHER
Yes.

HUBBELL
All right then, I want you to
concentrate on...
(glancing around)
...that ceramic dove on the mantel.
Fix your mind on it, and will it to
move.

ESTHER
Okay, I'll try.

Esther stares at the dove for several seconds. Nothing happens.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Are you concentrating?

ESTHER
Yes.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Are you trying to make the dove
move?

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

Yes.

Still, nothing happens. Finally, a flower pot near the window slides a few inches on its stand. Esther and Hubbell are startled by it.

HUBBELL

Were you thinking of the flower pot?

ESTHER

Not at all!

HUBBELL

Okay, then think of the flower pot. Try to make it move again.

Esther turns and stares at the flower pot. Nothing happens.

After a few moments, an egg rolls from the kitchen into the parlor.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)

Were you thinking of an egg?

ESTHER

No.

HUBBELL

Not even in the most abstract sense, such as, perhaps you were thinking of breakfast, or you were thinking you're hungry?

ESTHER

No, I was thinking of the flower pot!

HUBBELL

Okay, let's try one more.
(glancing around the room)
The rocking chair -- see if you can make it rock.

Esther turns and stares at the rocker. At first, nothing happens.

After a moment, something CLATTERS DOWN THE STEPS from upstairs. Hubbell rises and picks up the object.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Shaving brush. Were you thinking of
a shaving brush?

Esther shakes her head.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
All right. Let's try something new.

He lays down the shaving brush and moves his chair so that
he sits facing Esther.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Okay -- place both of your hands in
mine.

Esther looks a little embarrassed, but she puts her hands in
Hubbell's.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Now, Esther -- look me squarely in
the eyes.

She does, shyly at first, then she begins to focus.

After a moment, Hubbell seems to feel something in his
hands.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Can you feel that?

ESTHER
Yes.

HUBBELL
It's like...a vibration.
(after a pause)
Now it's like a current of
electricity passing through my
arms!

Suddenly Hubbell grows so weak that he has to release
Esther's hands.

HUBBELL
I don't know what's the matter with
me, I'm so weak! How do you feel?

ESTHER
Fine. Good, in fact.

HUBBELL
Full of energy?

ESTHER
(thinks for a moment)
I guess you could say that.

HUBBELL
Could it be that you pulled the
electrical energy from my body?

ESTHER
I don't know. I don't know much
about electricity. But I didn't do
it on purpose.

HUBBELL
Of course not. But if your body
attracts forms of energy, that
could explain why you attract these
supernatural entities, if they are
composed of some form of energy.

The egg rolls up to Esther's foot, then stops.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Or maybe you just like eggs.

ESTHER
(giggling)
I do like eggs.

HUBBELL
Ah ha -- I knew it!

Esther LAUGHS.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TEED PARLOR -- DAY

Olive glues small slips of white paper to the windows and
door. All the slips are printed with a Bible verse.

ESTHER (O.S.)
I copied the Bible verse onto
pieces of paper just as you said,
Reverend Temple...

INT. WESLEYAN CHURCH -- DAY

Esther has called on the REV. TEMPLE. Their conversation continues.

ESTHER

...While I'm out, my sister Olive is pasting them over all the doors and windows.

REV. TEMPLE

Good, that should prevent demons from entering the house again. Esther, I will keep praying for you, and I advise you to keep praying for yourself. And sleep with a Bible under your head.

ESTHER

I will. Thank you, Reverend Temple.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- DAY

A short while later, as Esther returns to the house, an old bone flies up from the yard and cuts a triangular gash into her forehead.

ESTHER

Oh!

INT. TEED PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

A moment later, Esther enters the house. As soon as she walks in the door, a fork flies from the kitchen and stabs her in the face.

All the slips of paper are RIPPED from the door and windows, gathered into a pile in the center of the parlor, and set on fire.

Esther CRIES.

INT. TEED KITCHEN -- DAY

Hubbell and the family eat dinner at the table. Esther is not with them. Jennie walks into the room.

JENNIE

Esther said she isn't hungry. I'll take something up to her later.

(CONTINUED)

At that moment, a knife and a fork are hurled at Jennie with such strength that they stick into the wooden doorway beside her, vibrating with the force of their projection.

Jennie is shaken. Daniel tries to comfort her.

DANIEL

Don't be scared, Jennie -- if they wanted to hit you, they would have. They just want to scare us, for some reason.

At that moment, a large lump of soft butter is thrown into Daniel's face.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Oh, that's nice.

In spite of themselves, Jennie, Olive, and Hubbell LAUGH. Daniel wipes the butter from his face.

Jennie approaches her chair to sit down, but something on the table catches her eye. Suddenly frightened again, she points to the large crock of butter that sits on the table near Daniel.

JENNIE

The butter...

In the butter is the impression of something like a hand, but not a human hand. The hand that was in the butter had long, sharp claws.

All of a sudden, there is a LOUD KNOCK on the front door. Everyone at the table jumps. Hubbell is the first to regain his composure.

HUBBELL

I think it's the door.

Everyone is a little embarrassed. Olive nods, rises, and walks to the parlor.

INT. PARLOR -- CONTINUOUS

Olive answers the front door. MR. BLISS, the owner of the house, looks nervous as he waits. Olive looks surprised.

OLIVE

Mr. Bliss -- you're a week early! I haven't collected all the rent yet.

(CONTINUED)

MR. BLISS
I'm not here for the rent, Mrs.
Teed. I need to talk to you and
your husband. May I come in?

OLIVE
Of course.

She stands back and lets the man enter. Daniel comes out of
the kitchen.

DANIEL
Mr. Bliss.

He shakes hands with his landlord.

OLIVE
We were just having supper -- will
you join us?

MR. BLISS
No, thank you, Mrs. Teed, I'm sorry
to bother you at supper time, but
there've been some complaints,
and...

INT. STAIRCASE -- CONTINUOUS

Esther, with a blanket around her shoulders, creeps down the
stairs, sits on a step halfway down the staircase, and
eavesdrops on the conversation. The others do not see her.

MR. BLISS (O.S., CONT'D)
...you've had several fires here in
the past few months, and...well,
I'm just gonna say it -- unless
Esther leaves at once, and takes
that strange power with her, your
family will have to move. I can no
longer run the risk of having my
house, and possibly the entire
village, set on fire and burned to
the ground.

Esther listens to the landlord's stern decision in silence.
She seems to know that he is right.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TEED PARLOR -- DAY

The next morning, Esther has packed her possessions into a large satchel.

She struggles not to cry as she kisses her two little nephews and Jennie and Olive, hugs Daniel, and shakes hands with Hubbell.

Esther leaves the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ESTHER AND JENNIE'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Hubbell walks into the room and stares closely at the terrifying words that are still scratched into the wall, and have since been unsuccessfully painted over:

ESTHER COX YOU ARE MINE TO KILL

Hubbell thinks for a moment, then glances around the room and speaks.

HUBBELL
Bob...are you here?

There is no answer.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Bob Nickle?

No reply.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Maggie, come and knock on the wall
as you did yesterday.

He listens, but no knocks are heard.

HUBBELL (CONT'D)
Peter, give me some matches like
you did the other day.

He waits, but no matches appear from the air.

Olive walks into the room.

OLIVE
The house seems lonely without
Esther.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL

Yes.

(after a pause)

Mrs. Teed, have you heard any knocking today?

OLIVE

No.

After a moment, Hubbell looks at her again. Tears flow down Olive's cheeks.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

The ghosts have followed her, haven't they?

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD -- DAY

Hubbell has hitched a ride on the back of a wagon. The wagon slows, and Hubbell jumps off, carrying his satchel and umbrella.

HUBBELL

Thank you!

He walks into a small wooded area.

EXT. DAVISON FARM -- CONTINUOUS

Hubbell approaches the farm and spots Esther before she sees him.

Esther is now living with the Davison family in their old farmhouse in the woods. She is trying to make a patchwork quilt and play with the TWO DAVISON CHILDREN at the same time.

Esther looks contented and happy. As she runs after one of the children, she glances up and sees Hubbell. She stops, then runs to him.

There is a brief awkward moment when Esther reaches Hubbell. The two seem unsure whether to shake hands or hug. Finally, they hug.

HUBBELL

How are you doing? You look wonderful.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

I feel wonderful! Fresh air and sunshine.

HUBBELL

Everyone misses you.

ESTHER

I miss everyone! But I'll see them again next week. I'm supposed to spend the night with Olive and Daniel when Jennie goes out of town.

(glancing at his satchel)
You're leaving?

HUBBELL

Yes. Julius Caesar in Boston.

ESTHER

Ah. Are you Caesar?

HUBBELL

No -- Calpurnia.

Esther LAUGHS.

ESTHER

You always made me laugh. Thank you for that.

HUBBELL

It's been my pleasure, believe me.
(after a pause)
Have you had any...troubles here?

ESTHER

(shakes her head)
I read my Bible every day, and I've seen nothing of the ghosts. That's why I'm so happy.

HUBBELL

Good.
(seriously)
Pray that you'll never again be tormented by demons.

ESTHER

I promise.

(CONTINUED)

HUBBELL

Goodbye, Esther. Be a good girl.

He turns and starts walking back toward the road.

EXT. CARLTON COUNTY INSANE ASYLUM -- DAY

The massive structure with barred windows sits in a secluded area flanked by trees in autumn colors.

The voice of the asylum superintendent answers a question.

MCVEY (O.S.)

Well, several persons confined here claim to be followed by ghosts...

INT. ASYLUM OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Walter Hubbell continues the conversation as he sits opposite the superintendent, ANDREW MCVEY.

HUBBELL

Do the ghosts ever knock on the walls, or...throw objects at them?

MCVEY

They do not. On the contrary, our patients are continually throwing objects at the "ghosts." Why do you ask?

INT. TEED YARD -- DAY

Esther is outside with George, now nearly 2 1/2 years old. She tosses him a ball.

ESTHER

Catch the ball, George!

Suddenly Esther seems to see something a few feet away. She whispers its name.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Bob!

She listens to something and reacts to the message she hears.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

What? No, not George!

She goes to George, picks him up, holds him close, and begins crying.

INT. ASYLUM OFFICE -- DAY

Hubbell finishes telling Superintendent McVey about Esther. McVey listens with great attention.

HUBBELL

...so I thought I'd come here and ask if this sort of thing is more common than I realize.

MCVEY

Mr. Hubbell, years before I became superintendent here, a woman, claiming to be a clairvoyant, informed me that at some future day I would have charge of a number of diseased persons confined in a large building with iron bars at all the windows.

(he nods toward the iron bars in the windows)

You see, she foretold the truth. I hope I live long enough to see science investigate the supernatural.

HUBBELL

I hope so too.

EXT. DAVISON FARM -- DAY

The autumn day is overcast and dark.

Arthur Davison, wearing a black suit, sits in the seat of his wagon and holds the horses' reins. MRS. DAVISON, in a black dress, sits beside him. Davison looks toward his house and calls out.

DAVISON

Esther! We'll be late for the service!

Esther, also in a black dress, runs out of the barn.

Davison looks surprised to see her come out of the barn instead of the house.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

Sorry.

DAVISON

We thought you were in the house --
what were you doing in the barn?

ESTHER

Oh, I was brushing Daisy. It makes
me feel calm.

DAVISON

Well, hop in.

Esther jumps into the back of the wagon, and they take off.

Inside the dark barn, firelight flickers on the walls, dimly
at first, then growing larger and brighter.

EXT. TEED HOUSE -- DAY

A black wreath hangs on the front door.

Olive, in mourning, stands alone on the small porch. Esther
slowly walks out the front door.

ESTHER

The Davisons will be leaving soon.
I need to catch a ride with them
back to the farm.

OLIVE

Oh Ess, do you have to go?

ESTHER

I'd better.

OLIVE

Before you leave, tell me -- did
the ghosts have anything to do
with...George?

ESTHER

(shaking her head)

No, it was just the scarlet fever.

Olive looks relieved.

At that moment, a MAN rides a horse up to the house and
speaks with urgency.

(CONTINUED)

MAN
Are the Davisons here?

ESTHER
(frowning)
Yes.

MAN
Go get them -- their barn's on
fire.

Esther and Olive look frightened. Esther immediately turns and runs into the house to get the Davisons.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE -- DAY

Esther sits in the courtroom. Olive, Daniel, and Jennie sit close behind her.

JUDGE (O.S.)
Will the defendant please stand?

Esther rises, her attorney beside her.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
Miss Cox, the jury has found you
guilty of arson, in the burning of
Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Davison's barn
and outbuildings. Therefore...
(reading)
...Therefore, it is the judgment of
this court that the defendant, Miss
Esther Cox, shall be, and hereby
is, sentenced to a term of
imprisonment of four months in the
Cumberland Correctional Facility.
(looking up from the paper)
We are adjourned.

He STRIKES THE BLOCK WITH HIS GAVEL.

Esther begins to cry. As a POLICEMAN takes Esther away, she looks back at Olive and Jennie, who also cry.

INT. CUMBERLAND CORRECTIONAL FACILITY -- DAY

Olive visits Esther in the dark jailhouse.

OLIVE

Mrs. Malloy sent you some muffins.

Olive uncovers a plate of muffins.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Here, I'll butter one for you.

She butters a muffin with a small butter knife, then hands the muffin to Esther.

Esther takes a bite, chews for a few seconds, then puts the muffin back onto the plate.

Deeply depressed, Esther moves slowly and speaks in a monotone.

ESTHER

They have walnuts.

OLIVE

Oh, I'm sure Mrs. Malloy didn't know you dislike walnuts.

(covering the plate)

I'll take these home to Daniel and Willie.

She sets down the plate and takes Esther's hands.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Now, Esther, listen to me -- you mustn't despair. That's just what the devil wants. We can't let the devil win.

Esther slowly shakes her head.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Four months isn't such a long time, and when you're out, we'll go to Nellie's for a month, and we'll have the best time. So we have a lot to look forward to. We'll get through this together -- all right?

Esther slowly nods.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE (CONT'D)
All right. Now I'll be back
tomorrow. You have a good night,
and pray just as hard as you can.
We all will.

She hugs Esther, then speaks to the GUARD a few feet away.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
I'm ready.

The guard unlocks the cell door.

Olive picks up the plate of muffins, but accidentally leaves
the butter and butter knife behind.

Now crying, Olive turns back to Esther.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
Oh, I hate to leave you here.

ESTHER
I'll be all right.

OLIVE
Good night, dear.

ESTHER
Don't worry.

Olive gives a little nod and walks out.

Esther looks down at the butter knife. She slowly sits down
on a stool and picks up the knife. It isn't sharp, but it
can cut.

Esther lowers her head and quietly begins to cry.

A moment later, a man's voice breaks the silence.

ADAM
Excuse me, are you Miss Esther Cox?

Esther looks up. Standing outside her cell with the guard is
ADAM PORTER, 33, a handsome man with a friendly smile.

Esther hides the butter knife in her sleeve, then she
stands, pushes back her hair, and wipes her eyes.

ESTHER
Yes, I'm Esther.

ADAM

I read about you in the newspaper.
Is it all right if I speak with you
for a minute?

Esther nods. The guard walks away.

Adam reaches through the bars and shakes Esther's hand.

ADAM

I'm Adam Porter, pleased to meet
you. I'm sure you get lots of
strangers visiting you all the
time.

ESTHER

No, not really.

ADAM

No? Then I'm glad I came. I don't
know how to explain it, but ever
since I heard your story, I've felt
a strange sort of kinship with you.

ESTHER

Oh?

ADAM

Yes. Have you ever felt like you
know someone even though you've
never met the person?

ESTHER

Yes. Little Nell.

ADAM

(with enthusiasm)

Yes, Little Nell! The Old Curiosity
Shop is one of my very favorite
books!

ESTHER

Mine, too.

ADAM

You see? I knew we were two peas in
a pod!

Esther gives a small smile, then becomes unsteady on her
feet and has to grab hold of the bars to keep from falling.

(CONTINUED)

ADAM (CONT'D)

Oh, are you all right, Miss Cox?

Esther nods.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Goodness, you look tuckered. I'm so
thoughtless. I'll be on my way.

He signals to the guard.

ESTHER

No, I'm fine, truly.

She looks sad that Adam is leaving.

ADAM

You get some rest. And stay warm.
There's a chill in these walls.
Here --
(removing his jacket)
-- take my coat.

He starts to put his jacket through the cell bars, but the guard grabs it from him and searches through the pockets.

Adam tries to make a joke.

ADAM

Glad I left that stick of dynamite
in my other coat!

Esther smiles. The guard is not amused, but he finds nothing in the pockets and gives the jacket back to Adam, who hands it to Esther.

ESTHER

Thank you.

ADAM

You know, my next-door neighbor
lady baked me a batch of the best
walnut cookies, but there are far
too many for me to eat by myself.
May I bring you some of them
tomorrow?

ESTHER

Oh...I...love walnuts.

ADAM

(smiles)
It's settled, then. I'll see you
tomorrow. Good night.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER

'Night.

Adam leaves.

Esther sits back down. She pulls the butter knife from her sleeve and lays it down beside the butter dish. She wraps Adam's jacket around her shoulders.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CUMBERLAND CORRECTIONAL FACILITY -- DAY

Adam, Olive, Daniel, and Jennie look unusually happy as they enter the jailhouse. Adam carries a dozen long-stemmed red roses.

Esther is surprised to see them all, and even more surprised to see them looking so happy.

The guard unlocks Esther's cell door and opens it, but Esther's visitors remain several feet outside the cell.

ESTHER

(shaking her head)

What's going on?

ADAM

Do you like roses, Esther?

ESTHER

(puzzled)

Of course I do. Where on earth did you get roses in December?

ADAM

From a hothouse in Moncton. Do you want them?

ESTHER

(still puzzled)

Um...yes...

ADAM

Then come and get them.

ESTHER

But...I'll have to leave the cell.

Olive can stand it no longer. She holds out her arms.

(CONTINUED)

OLIVE
You're free, Esther!

ESTHER
What?

ADAM
So many of your friends and
neighbors, who knew the true nature
of your troubles, raised such a
fuss, that the judge gave in and
commuted your sentence. You can go
home.

Esther breaks down in tears of joy and rushes out of the
cell to hug Olive.

ESTHER
Oh, Olive -- this is the happiest
day of my life!

OLIVE
Me too!

Esther lets go of Olive and hugs Jennie and Daniel.

There is an awkward moment as Esther reaches Adam, but he
solves the problem by giving her the roses and a kiss on the
cheek.

INT./EXT. CHURCH -- DAY

In a series of black-and-white still photographs, Esther and
Adam Porter get married. They look happy and very much in
love.

Hubert Lavington, a young reporter, narrates.

LAVINGTON (V.O.)
Esther married Adam Porter. They
had a son.

A photo of Adam slowly fades to black.

LAVINGTON (V.O., CONT'D)
Then Adam died.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHANNAHAN HOUSE -- DAY

HUBERT LAVINGTON, 27, approaches a small, poor-looking cottage.

LAVINGTON (V.O.)

Years later, Esther married again,
moved to Massachusetts, and had two
more sons.

Lavington sees a black wreath hanging on the front door of the cottage. The young man seems to have reservations about disturbing the inhabitants, but after a moment, he takes off his hat and KNOCKS on the door.

Soon the door is answered by BRIDGET, 67, a woman with an Irish accent. She is dressed in black.

BRIDGET

Yes?

LAVINGTON

I'm sorry to disturb you, but, is
this the home of Esther Shannahan?

BRIDGET

Yes, it is.

LAVINGTON

The former Miss Esther Cox?

BRIDGET

Yes, her maiden name was Cox.

LAVINGTON

Would it be possible for me to
speak with her?

BRIDGET

(hesitant)

Well, I'm not sure...You see, her
little son has passed away, and --

At that moment, Esther appears at the door behind Bridget.

Esther, now almost 47 years old, is nearly unrecognizable. Her hair is gray, and she looks much older than her age. It is clear she has had a difficult life.

ESTHER

Who is it, Bridget?

(CONTINUED)

LAVINGTON

How do you do, I'm Hubert
Lavington. Are you Mrs. Esther
Shannahan?

Esther frowns and nods.

LAVINGTON (CONT'D)

I wish to offer my deepest
condolences for your loss.

ESTHER

Thank you.

LAVINGTON

I'm sorry to bother you at this
difficult time. I didn't know of
these... circumstances, or of
course I wouldn't have come. But
I've traveled such a long way, I
wonder if I might ask you a few
questions before I go?

ESTHER

(with suspicion)

What about?

She steps back to let the young man enter, then she has a
thought.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Wait -- have you had the scarlet
fever?

LAVINGTON

(thinks for a moment)

No...no, I don't believe I have.

ESTHER

We'd better stay outside, then.

LAVINGTON

All right. Mrs. Shannahan, I'm a
writer for the Psychic Phenomena
Investigation Association, and I've
been sent here on assignment to ask
you if you've had any further
contact with the mysterious
entities that tortured you and your
family so many years ago.

(CONTINUED)

ESTHER
(curtly)
How did you find me?

LAVINGTON
Your sister, Mrs. Teed, gave me
your address.

ESTHER
(angrily, under her breath)
Olive!

LAVINGTON
Are you still visited by the
supernatural beings as chronicled
in the bestselling book by Mr.
Walter Hubbell?

ESTHER
(shakes her head)
Mr. Walter Hubbell made a small
fortune off my troubles, and do you
know how much of that fortune he
shared with me and my family?

Lavington shakes his head.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
Look around -- that should tell
you. Nothing. He gave us absolutely
nothing.

She finally addresses the issue.

ESTHER (CONT'D)
The...power...has not visited me
since my marriage.

She turns and starts to go back inside.

LAVINGTON
Do you still believe in the
phenomena?

ESTHER
Of course, but I dare not talk
about it.

LAVINGTON
Why, ma'am?

ESTHER
(frightened, almost
whispering)
I'm afraid they'll come back.

At that moment, Esther's husband, PETER SHANNAHAN, comes out the door and steps in front of his wife. Esther appears to be intimidated by Peter, who speaks with an Irish accent.

PETER
For a hundred dollars, I'll consent
to her telling you all the details,
but not unless!

LAVINGTON
In that case, I'd have no guarantee
that I'd not been sold a hundred
dollars' worth of lies -- since
bought testimony -- particularly in
a case like this -- is absolutely
worthless.
(to Esther)
Good day.

He puts on his hat and leaves, none too pleased with the interview.

Peter turns away and shoves Esther back into the cottage.

LAVINGTON (V.O.)
Five years later, after a brief
illness, Esther died. She was 52.

Beside the front door of the cottage sits a half-full bucket of water.

LAVINGTON (V.O., CONT'D)
No one knows if Esther was ever
free of the demons that tortured
her body and soul, or if she
carefully concealed the signs to
the end.

Suddenly the water in the bucket becomes agitated, bubbles, and reaches a full boil, with clouds of steam rising into the air.

FADE TO BLACK

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