

SWEEP

FADE IN:

EXT. MANSARD HOUSE, DAY

The old, tall house rises from a cliff, near the sea.

Pine trees shadow the roof's elaborate cresting.

Sea spray rises as waves hit the rocks.

Two care-worn figures, a man and a woman, trudge across the uneven rocks to a side door of the old estate.

The man, PASTOR WALKER (50), limps as he leads a small woman, COLLEEN WRECHT (20), who walks slowly but solidly, her hands in loose fists, her eyes low to the ground.

Near the house, sunlight disappears behind shadows and mist.

The Pastor shudders a dread chill, looks up at the house with foreboding.

He shakes his head, sadly, then calls, to Colleen.

PASTOR WALKER
Not much farther, girl.

A last touch of sunshine shows the girl's expressionless, chalk-white face marked with bruising.

The side door of the house opens, a sullen, scrawny woman, LOUISE MANSARD (40) stands in the opening, speaks hollowly --

LOUISE
Pray if you want, Pastor. We can
buy no more blessings.

Pastor Walker beckons for Colleen to come forward.

PASTOR WALKER
We cannot know the ways of the
Almighty, Miss Louise.

LOUISE
I'm worse than abandoned and William,
my nephew, decays before me.

Pastor Walker, ready to run in the other direction, feels obliged to inquire --

PASTOR WALKER
Dead, is he?

LOUISE
 (mumbles)
 Just his soul...

Pastor shudders with relief. He needs to be done with this.

PASTOR WALKER
 See here, now, I've brought this...
 girl to help you.

LOUISE
 Poor child!

Louise gets a good look at Colleen, sees her battered face,
 spiritless eyes.

PASTOR WALKER
 She needs a place...

LOUISE
 Could a life here be better than...
 what name does she have?

Pastor Walker backs away, tries to depart.

PASTOR WALKER
 (stammers)
 Wrecht.

Louise recoils in horror.

LOUISE
 Wretched? Who names a child... hasn't
 she got another name?

PASTOR WALKER
 Clean. Clean.

The wind rises, jumbles the sound of their voices.

PASTOR WALKER (CONT'D)
 Colleen, it is. Wrecht. Foreign,
 it must be.

LOUISE
 Colleen, then. But see here, Pastor,
 life here is no life at all --

PASTOR WALKER
 (pleading)
 She needs... she needs... let her
 work, Miss Louise, no one in this
 county or the next wanted her --

Louise looks momentarily insulted, then shamed with the realization her home is lost for a reason.

Louise tries to make the best of the situation.

LOUISE
Tell me news from the village, the
farms, anything? Anyone born?

Louise pulls at the Pastor's sleeve, suddenly pleading.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Died? Any fires? Weddings? Crimes?

Louise brings Pastor Walker and Colleen into her house.

INT. KITCHEN, DAY

A dreary room, dark wooden shelves, a table, benches. Flames in a fireplace seem to give no warmth.

The noise of the sea seems louder inside the house, mixed with strange, convoluted echoes.

Pastor Walker tries for a cheery tone.

PASTOR WALKER
I won't say no to some blackberry
preserves, Miss Louise.

Louise shrinks a little, sadly.

LOUISE
We've no fruit at all now. Whenever
there's a poor brown leaf there's
never a bee to feed on it...

Pastor Walker gently pulls Colleen into the room, eases himself back toward the exit.

Colleen glances around the dismal kitchen. No sunlight enters from the narrow windows.

Colleen and the Pastor both shiver from sudden cold.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
(to Colleen)
Here's the fire, girl, and a broom.
Clean the hearth and warm yourself.

Louise hands a rag and a broom to Colleen who takes them readily, gets to work on the grimy brick and stone.

Louise's voice fades into the drone of the background noise, only bits of conversation rise above the echoes.

PASTOR WALKER
... so your poor nephew... still
suffering, is he...

A charmless, humorless conversation, but Louise hangs onto every word, strains to keep it going.

LOUISE
... you recall, do you, you must...

PASTOR WALKER
... some things, best we forget...

Colleen sweeps, disregards all else.

A short time later...

Pastor Walker, in the doorway, nods toward Colleen, speaks almost inaudibly to Louise.

PASTOR WALKER (CONT'D)
She needs a place...

A look of pain crosses Louise's face, the Pastor's guidance has been meager and now he's leaving...

Pastor Walker closes the door behind him, Louise stands at the window, watches him walk away.

Colleen cleans, but that sound fades under the oppressive, rise and fall of swirling echoes.

INT. GREAT HALLWAY, DAY

Background noises deepen, like strained machinery.

Colleen walks from the kitchen to the wide stone hallway that leads to a long, marble staircase.

A ghostly, gritty fog swirls, nearly conceals the staircase.

Colleen glances around the unwelcoming place, quietly scrapes the bristles of two brooms against each other.

She carefully takes a long sweep of one broom against the stone floor, pauses a moment, as if testing the bristles against the stone -- continues, taking long, careful sweeps.

The rest of the house stands dark, fog infested -- harsh noises rise and fall.

Colleen concentrates on her work.

Time passes, the harsher noises fade against the graceful sounds of broom against floor.

A bedroom door opens, dim light crosses the hall, as a slight man, WILLIAM MANSARD (25) stands, timidly, in the doorway.

He strains to hear the steady sounds of the broom, it almost clears away the hollow noises of the house.

William listens hungrily, but stays in the shadows.

Colleen observes his arrival, momentarily stands motionless, then continues to work.

Her brow furrows, aware of potential threat. She hunches a bit more, as if always ready for the ground to give way beneath her feet.

Time passes.

Days pass.

Montage / Household Routine:

-- Colleen sweeps, scrubs --

-- Louise prepares food in the kitchen, brings a tray to William's room --

-- Louise and Colleen work in the kitchen, gradually spruce the place up with touches of color --

-- Hints of sunlight through the windows --

End Montage

INT. KITCHEN, DAY

William, pale but smiling, stands at the door between the kitchen and hallway, oversees his Aunt Louise and their servant, Colleen, at the homely kitchen table.

The scene seems strangely peaceful.

LOUISE

William, dear, how well you look!

Colleen rises to set another place, frowns a moment, tries to think through the proper etiquette of the Master Of The House, his Aunt and Their Servant at table, together.

WILLIAM

Do not let me disturb you.

(breathlessly)

I only want...

Colleen moves further into the shadows.

LOUISE
Rest, my dear...

WILLIAM
(to Colleen)
to thank you for sweeping so
beautifully. It's healing me...

William backs out of the room, softly, into the darkness.

Colleen, mystified, looks to Louise, who sighs.

LOUISE
Most sound is painful for him. So,
when something is pleasant he's...
almost tipsy...

Colleen's posture shows an easing of her own stress.

LOUISE (CONT'D)
Sit down, dear, I think this soup's
warm for once...

Louise serves, Colleen returns to her place, they eat.

INT. GREAT HALLWAY, DAY

Swirling fog, less than before, the stairway is visible, dim
portraits on the wall can be seen.

The surrounding noises, still audible, are less harsh.

Colleen scrubs baseboards, gradually moves toward the
staircase.

Over her head, the fog fades but is replaced by...

A ghostly, branching darkness that reaches up the stairs.

The dark, eerie form grows more dense -- a high pitched
howling rises with it.

Colleen shivers, stands up, takes the broom in hand.

She sweeps, a particularly decisive sound of brush against
stone breaks through the howling echoes.

The darkness shifts, sunshine lights Colleen's face.

From the edge of the shadows William speaks, in amazement --

WILLIAM
I did not know! You are a beautiful
woman!

Colleen lowers her head, unsmiling. Notice of any kind is not good news for her. She works, but quietly as possible.

William drifts back into the darkness.

Darkness and fog reassemble on the staircase, Colleen follows as if for shelter against exposure.

She approaches the first stair, almost falls --

She's surprised to find it difficult to stand.

WILLIAM (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Beware the ghost...

COLLEEN
What's it want? Who is it?

Colleen, unused to speaking aloud, has an unexpectedly strong, sweet voice.

William returns to the edge of the shadows.

WILLIAM
(quietly)
A woman, belonged to Mortimer, my
Great Uncle. So I've heard. That's
his portrait. He died at sea...

A framed, dark painting on a wall shows through the fog, briefly. The portrait of a brash young man, with fiery eyes.

Colleen looks carefully at the picture.

COLLEEN
Belonged to him?

WILLIAM
She was to wait, just there, at the
window on the stairs, watch for him,
watch for his ship...

William moves closer to the foot of the stairs, near Colleen.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)
One night, they say, an awful storm
came, lightning struck, killed her.

COLLEEN
Lightning!

WILLIAM
As good a death as any, I guess.
Gave her power, I guess. So, here
she stays. Filthy thing.

William's voice, increasingly loud, shocks them both.

The dark fog gathers again, swirls, fills the hallway -- it's dismal but not lethal.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

So she stays -

COLLEEN

Why shouldn't she, it's her place.

Colleen's voice is cold, steady.

COLLEEN (CONT'D)

It's her place, nobody can take it.

Colleen tries to move up the stairway, can't do it, resolutely returns to sweeping the hallway.

WILLIAM

Don't you know evil when you see it?
Or don't you believe in such things...

COLLEEN

What's evil about her doing her job?

WILLIAM

It's satanic. Satanic stubbornness!

COLLEEN

Determination.

William sits on the floor, interested in the conversation.

WILLIAM

The ghost is evil, anyone can see
it, she's got an unquenchable need
to destroy life!

COLLEEN

Rot.

WILLIAM

Rot? You're a fool if you don't
believe in evil and brutality.

He's sorry he said that.

COLLEEN

(smirks)

Most people don't care enough to be
evil. They'll cut you down just
because you're in their way.

WILLIAM

I'd call that brutality...

COLLEEN

Just clumsiness, really. This ghost
doesn't care a thing about either
one of us. Nobody does.

She's sorry she said that.

Eerie silence.

Colleen turns back toward the stairs, pushes herself to ascend
the first step, loses her balances, holds onto the wall.

William watches from the shadows, frightened.

Fog separates, there's more light on the stairs, and the
ghostly form is more distinct -- ugly, dark gray, like waves
of black sand in the air.

Colleen stumbles. Suddenly she sees something on the floor --
the faint outline of footprints.

There's a film of dew across the floor, small toe prints
appear to walk up the stairs.

Colleen marvels, calls out, softly --

COLLEEN (CONT'D)

See, she walks with such care so as
not to disturb the household!

Colleen laughs, softly, gently touches a footprint --

William quivers with unexpected sensation --

A SKELETAL FORM appears, quite clearly, in the hallway. It
moves toward Colleen, passes right through her, continues up
the stairs.

Colleen falls to the floor, now very weak.

William, in a near faint, struggles to go to Colleen's aid.

A cry of distress from the darkness at the end of the hallway,
it's Louise's voice, in terror.

Colleen and William look to the shadows for Louise, they're
powerless, pale as death.

The Ghostly Skeleton slowly moves up the stairs...

Light on the face of the Ghostly Young Woman now shows her to be radiantly beautiful, also.

Ghostly Young Woman sees only Mortimer, she calls out in a sweet voice, without reproach --

GHOSTLY YOUNG WOMAN
Only a little sleep, my darling!

Ghostly Young Woman turns from the window, searching, as a filmy ghost, MORTIMER, brashly hurries through the hallway.

A whirlwind of dark ash and fog chokes William and Colleen --

The two ghosts meet, embrace, disappear in a beam of light.

Silence!

A few rays of sunlight show William and Colleen, flustered and confused but unhurt.

Darkness lingers at the end of the hallway.

William, uncertain, takes Colleen's hand, helps her back down the stairs.

William calls out, with all the strength he can muster --

WILLIAM
We're here, Aunt Louise, wait where
you are, we'll help you!

Colleen and William, arm in arm, hurry to the end of the hallway that's now riddled with light.

A low buzzing sounds... some fat bees dart down the hallway, Colleen calls out in wonder --

COLLEEN
Bees! There'll be fruit on the vines!

Bees fly back outside through an open window, into a sun covered hedge of blackberries.

In the sunlight, at the end of the hallway, Louise stands reaching toward William and Colleen, happy, amazed, happy.

THE END

