

SILENCE
AKA SHHH

Written

by

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This script is meant to be read late at night.

FADE IN:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

A candle. Its flame pulses, throwing a halo of light onto a bone white wall.

In the jaundice glow, the silhouette of a woman sits on the edge of a bed. Lying in the bed is another figure, also veiled in shadow.

The woman tucks the figure in. Their faces remain hidden in darkness as the scene plays out.

WOMAN

Time to go to sleep.

BOY

Tell me another story.

WOMAN

It's getting late. Tomorrow night.

BOY

Go on. I promise I'll be good for the rest of the year if you do.

The woman laughs.

WOMAN

What kind of story?

BOY

A scary one.

WOMAN

I don't know if I should. You'll have nightmares and wake up screaming.

BOY

I won't! I swear it, I swear it!

The woman sighs.

WOMAN

Well, I hope you're right about not screaming.

(beat)

That's the last thing you'd ever want to do.

BOY

Why?

The woman leans forward and whispers.

WOMAN

Because Mary Shaw might hear you.

BOY

Who's Mary Shaw?

WOMAN

What? You mean you don't know the tale of Mary Shaw?

BOY

No. Tell me!

We MOVE AWAY from the bed, searching through the inky darkness. A spotlight illuminates a young girl of about five. She sits at a children's size table, pouring tea for a doll.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Once in the town of Raven's Fair,
a little girl named Mary,
sat alone in despair.
No one loved this little girl,
neither hugged her nor kissed her,
so she talked to her dolls,
like they were brothers and
sisters.

We move past the little girl, searching through the dark and finding Mary at age 17. She is pregnant.

WOMAN (V.O.)

When Mary left home,
she went straight out and married,
and soon in her belly,
a child she carried.

A MOUSTACHED man, who is clearly drunk, steps up behind Mary, SLAPPING her viciously and ATTACKING HER.

WOMAN (V.O.)

That is 'til the night,
her husband attacked her,
she lost the baby,
and sadness did wrack her.

Everything goes dark, then another spotlight swords through the space, giving light to a haggard and desperate looking Mary, nursing one of her childhood dolls. She whispers to it.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Some say she went mad,
a little round the bend,
because she started talking,
to her dolls again.

A red velvet curtain behind Mary parts, revealing MARY, now an OLD WOMAN, sitting on a stage with a classic VENTRILOQUIST'S DUMMY on her lap.

WOMAN (V.O.)

To Mary it wasn't a toy,
made of nuts, bolts and wood,
to her she held a living being,
the child she never could.
Over the years she made a living,
talking to those dolls,
a ventriloquist she became,
the most talented of all.

As an unseen audience roars with applause, the red velvet curtain closes, and we ascend into the blackness - finding the weary figure of Mary trudging up a set of stairs.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Then late one night,
when she returned to her room,
hidden high above the stage,
dark and cramped like a tomb...

Mary steps into her living quarters. BEHIND HER, a man KICKS open the door. It is the husband who attacked her earlier.

WOMAN (V.O.)

...her husband the brute,
As usual, horribly drunk,
heard Mary talk back to him,
and demanded her tongue!

The man hurls Mary onto a table, pinning her down and holding a razor aloft.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Mary resisted,
wouldn't open her mouth,
so he made her scream,
and then cut it out!

Mary SCREAMS - and the man severs her tongue with the razor.

Darkness descends on Mary, as she CRIES and cowers in a corner, next to an empty babies crib. Her back is to us, her face buried in her hands.

She turns and steps up onto a stool, slipping her head into a noose.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Mary couldn't go on,
without her tongue,
She put her head in a noose,
and from it she swung.

Mary steps off the stool, swinging in the noose. Her ventriloquist dummy is slumped in a chair opposite her.

WOMAN (V.O.)

But after that night,
it was said,
that Mary Shaw,
wasn't really dead.
Something had gone,
from her into the doll,
her spirit found a way,
to exact a terrible toll.

We move away, another spotlight showing us Mary's husband lying in bed. A noise stirs him awake and he sits up.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Her ghost would leave,
the doll at night,
and appear to people,
to cause them fright.
And if those people,
who saw her did scream,
their tongues would be gone -
ripped out clean.

A shadow falls over Mary's husband and he SCREAMS!

A cluster of gas lanterns swarm into view; the figures holding them are all clutching Mary's ventriloquist dummy. They wrap the doll in rosary beads, stuffing it into a heavy trunk.

WOMAN (V.O.)

Eventually, the town of Ravens
Fair,
couldn't take it anymore,
not one more scare.
They locked away,
the cursed puppet,
stowed it in a trunk,
bolted and shut it.

The trunk is slammed shut and BOLTED with a padlock.

We explore the darkness beyond the trunk, finding ourselves once again in the dark, candle-lit bedroom we opened in.

The woman leans forward, lowering her voice for the finale of this Grimm poem.

WOMAN

But should you ever see her,
and your knees go weak,
and you forget,
to hold in your shriek,
remember these words,
that I have sung -
it won't be the cat,
that's got your tongue.

The woman lets the words ring in the boys ears.

BOY

So what do I do if Mary Shaw comes
to visit me?

The woman laughs. She's enjoying this.

WOMAN

There's only one thing that can
stop her.

BOY

What's that, mother?

She picks up the candle next to the bed, holding it under her face.

WOMAN

Silence...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VARIOUS ROOMS, APARTMENT - NIGHT

Home, sweet, home.

That's what the sign hanging on the wall says.

We explore the room further, finding framed photos of a happy young couple, tastefully placed flower arrangements and a pretty good, eleventh floor view of the city - all crammed into a shoebox apartment.

Ah yes, modern domestic bliss.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Ouch!

The voice came from the

KITCHEN.

where a young man is wedged under the sink, wrenching at pipes. This is JAMIE ASHEN (29). We cannot see his face yet.

An earthy, beautiful young woman enters, LISA (28).

LISA

Don't hurt yourself there, big guy.

JAMIE

I'm fine, it's...stuck, that's all.

LISA

Maybe we should just call someone,
Jamie.

Jamie emerges from under the sink. His young looks match his Batman T-shirt - this is one man who isn't done being a boy.

JAMIE

Like who? A real man?

Lisa grins.

LISA

I didn't say that.

JAMIE

Why don't you just castrate me and
give me a membership to Oprah's
book club while you're at it?

LISA

Yeah, that would be fun. Then we
could call up a real man and let
him fix the sink while we read.

Jamie breaks into a run. Lisa SCREAMS and he chases her into
the

LIVING ROOM

Jamie catches her, pinning her down on the couch as she
giggles hysterically.

LISA

Don't! Please!

Jamie sits on top of her.

JAMIE

Do you want me to prove to you what a real man I am right now?

LISA

Yeah - fix the sink, that oughta do it.

She bursts out laughing. He tightens his grip on her arms.

JAMIE

I'm going to, if you stop interrupting me.

LISA

Okay, I will.

(beat)

The only thing is, I'm probably going to need to use it sometime this year, so...

She laughs again. He lowers his face, hovering inches above hers. They pause, staring into each others eyes.

LISA

Never mind. There are other ways you can prove your manhood to me.

JAMIE

Oh really?

LISA

Yeah.

They kiss passionately. Jamie releases her arms and they curl around him. They roll over, limbs entwined. This is so on.

KNOCK! KNOCK!

Jamie stops kissing her reluctantly.

JAMIE

Timing.

He gets up and goes to the door.

JAMIE

If this is a plumber, you're in trouble.

He opens the door. A delivery man is standing there, holding a large box.

DELIVERY MAN

Lisa Tuck?

JAMIE

She's inside, I'll sign for it.

He signs and takes the package, closing the door.

LISA

What is it?

JAMIE

It's a big god damned box is what it is.

Lisa takes it and places it on the living room table. She checks the label on the package. It is addressed to her. There is no sender address.

Jamie appears, handing her a pair of scissors.

JAMIE

Come on, open it up.

Lisa cuts through the tape, opening the box.

She claws through a layer of shredded newspaper, revealing a cracked and peeling wooden surface beneath.

Curious, she reaches inside and lifts out --

-- a VENTRILOQUIST'S DUMMY.

The dummy is wearing a tattered tuxedo - a red handkerchief hanging out of the top pocket.

It is the doll we saw MARY SHAW performing with in the opening scenes.

JAMIE

What the hell is that?

LISA

I have no idea.

She scratches around through the shredded newspaper, finding nothing else inside the box.

JAMIE

That's the creepiest thing I've ever seen in my life.

LISA

Who would send it to me?

JAMIE

Somebody creepy.

LISA

It's some kind of doll.

JAMIE

No. A doll is something a child plays with. That is something a man in a raincoat who hears voices in his head plays with.

LISA

I want to know where it came from.

JAMIE

Can you find out?

LISA

I don't know.

They sit the dummy on the table. It stares at them with lifeless, black pupils.

LISA

Maybe it's a gift from your dad.

JAMIE

He's definitely creepy enough.

LISA

He called again today.

JAMIE

Are you serious?

LISA

He's been trying to reach you for weeks.

JAMIE

Yeah, well...he can keep trying.

A long beat. They return the dummies gaze.

Lisa finally turns to face Jamie.

LISA

Are you going to stare at this thing all night or go back to being a handyman so we can make dinner?

Jamie looks down at the wrench in his hand.

CUT TO:

INT. CHINESE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Jamie hands over cash in exchange for a bag of greasy Chinese takeout.

EXT. CITY STREET, OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Rain cascades down in sheets.

Jamie steps out into the downpour, shielding himself with a newspaper.

The concrete arches of the city loom overhead, trapping a cacophony of NOISE. Car horns blare, sirens shriek, people shout to be heard above it all.

Jamie makes a break for his car. A fire-truck roars past, throwing water up onto him. He opens the driver's door, setting off the alarm.

INT. JAMIE'S CAR, PARKED - CONTINUOUS

He jumps inside, shutting off the alarm and closing the door, lowering the volume of the city outside. Thank God.

He takes a deep breath. Looks up and sees a woman selling roses in a doorway.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Mid-scale. New York style.

INT. CORRIDOR, APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Jamie skips up the stairs, seems giddy. In one hand - the takeout. In the other - a long stemmed rose.

He reaches his door, fishes for his keys.

INT. VARIOUS ROOMS, APARTMENT - SAME

Jamie moves through the darkened apartment to the kitchen. Dumps the takeout on the counter.

He takes plates out of a drawer.

JAMIE

You're gonna love this. You're gonna be glad we didn't make dinner ourselves.

He listens. A beat of silence passes.

JAMIE

You're not talking to me anymore, is that it?

He arranges the rice on the plates like he made it himself.

JAMIE

Hello?

Lisa's voice answers from upstairs. Sounds strangely detached.

LISA (O.S.)

No. I'm never talking to you again.

Jamie grins.

JAMIE

What if I was planning on coming upstairs and making you beg for mercy?

LISA (O.S.)

You'd be too late.

Jamie takes the plates, walks out of the kitchen.

JAMIE

Well, I guess I -- JESUS!

HE STOPS DEAD.

Beneath him, on the living room carpet, is a splotch of BLOOD....in the shape of a foot.

He stares at it, then steps forward slowly... seeing a crimson trail of footprints weave through the entire apartment.

Fresh. Wet. Red.

Instinctively, he puts down the plates and snatches up a kitchen knife. Begins to stalk through the house in their wake.

LISA (O.S.)
What's wrong?

Jamie listens. The apartment is eerily silent.

LISA (O.S.)
Jamie?

He continues following the trail, the footprints becoming messy ponds of blood. Trembling, he reaches a door, the blood disappearing under it.

He grips the handle.

LISA (O.S.)
Jamie?

His chest expands as he heaves in a deep breath.

He flings the door open -- revealing a darkened laundry. In the shadows, he can clearly make out the SILHOUETTE of a figure, slumped on the floor.

LISA (O.S.)
What's going on?

That time, Lisa's voice is RIGHT BEHIND HIM. He whips around to warn her.

JAMIE
Lisa, stay back!

But Lisa is not there. He turns to face the intruder.

JAMIE
Who are you?

No answer. Trembling with fear, Jamie flicks on the light, illuminating the figure.

IT IS LISA.

DEAD.

Blood seeps from within her mouth, where her tongue should be...but ISN'T. Her face is a death mask, molded mid-scream. Contorted, horrified - a frozen image of terror.

Jamie cannot comprehend what he is seeing; confusion and shock colliding together on his face.

From somewhere in the abyss, he lets out a primal, tortured SCREAM.

JAMIE
 NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!!!!

The scream changes pitch, becoming --

EXT. JAMIE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

-- a siren.

Uniformed police swarm around the entrance to Jamie's building, clearing a path for a gurney which is loaded into a coroner's van.

We know the two cops talking to Jamie are important because they're not in uniform. Trench-coats and stern looks.

Jamie, however, is a million miles away.

INT. INTERVIEW ROOM, POLICE STATION - DAY

Jamie is slumped at a table. He is a SHATTERED man. Numb from the shock. Zombie-like.

Detective JIM LIPTON(47) sits opposite; a picture of hard-edged skepticism. A lit fuse.

LIPTON
 Was the victim taking any prescription drugs of any kind that you know of? For depression or any form of mental illness?

JAMIE
 No.

LIPTON
 Does anyone in her family suffer from any form of mental illness or depression that you know of?

JAMIE
 Why are you asking me this? What does it have to do with anything?

Lipton drills him with a hard stare. Decides to let it go.

LIPTON
 Did you notice anything different that night? In her behavior? Anything at all unusual?

Jamie stares at the floor, thinking back.

JAMIE

The doll.

LIPTON

What's that?

JAMIE

Lisa received some sort of...doll...in the mail that night. She didn't know who had sent it to her.

LIPTON

Okay. What about after you arrived home? Any signs of forced entry, evidence of a struggle, weapons?

Jamie is clearly mystified by the nights events. Finally:

JAMIE

I spoke to her.

LIPTON

What do you mean?

JAMIE

I spoke to her when I first got home.

(beat)

I called out to her and she answered me.

Lipton scans a file in front of him.

LIPTON

You said that you were gone about forty minutes, and that you got back home right at seven PM?

Jamie nods.

LIPTON (CONT'D)

Our forensic records show that the victim had been dead at least twenty minutes before that.

Jamie looks up at Lipton, terror on his face.

JAMIE

That can't be...

He meets Lipton's suspicious gaze. Their eyes stay locked.

A long beat passes.

LIPTON

I hear you're leaving town for a few days, Jamie.

JAMIE

Yeah. For the funeral.

LIPTON

A place called...Ravens Fair, is it? That's a long way from here.

JAMIE

She was from there. We both were. Her family's still there.

(beat)

It's the only place she would've wanted to be buried.

INT. LIVING ROOM, APARTMENT - DAY

Raining.

The apartment is bare, almost empty.

Jamie is collapsed on the floor by the window, his gaze reflected in the rain-soaked glass. Tears streak down his face.

The phone rings. Jamie doesn't react. Let's the call go to the answering machine.

JAMIE AND LISA (V.O.)

(in attempted unison)

Hello?

(beat)

This might sound like us but you're actually talking to an answering machine right now. Leave a message. We love you!

A beep.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Hello, Jamie.

Jamie turns towards the answering machine. The voice is gravelly and slurred, as if it were an effort to talk.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

I only want to say two things. Please allow me to do so.

Jamie stares at the machine.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

The first is that you have my
deepest sympathies in regards to
Lisa. The second is...

Jamie moves towards the machine, about to pick up.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

...I know that you are coming back
here for the funeral, so I would
very much like you to come and see
me while you're here. I want to
talk to you.

(beat)

I've tried to reach you so many
times in the past weeks, but I
haven't heard anything from you...I
don't know what else to do. Please
let me be there for you this time.

Jamie turns away.

MAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

Goodbye, son.

CLICK.

Jamie reaches over and pushes the ERASE button.

As he does, he glances over and sees the package the
VENTRILOQUIST'S DUMMY came in, sitting under the dining table.

He crawls over to it, hauls it out and opens it up. He lifts
out the dummy, stares at its smiling face.

The dummies jaw falls open - a red, cloth tongue falling out
of it. Disturbed, Jamie checks the box. He leafs through the
thin strips of paper that cushioned the doll.

Holds one up to the light, seeing a faded typeface on it.

It's a shred of newspaper.

The letters on it read "ns Fair".

JAMIE

Ravens Fair...

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A lonely road snakes through the fall-kissed countryside, beneath a grey sky. Jamie's car appears over a hill.

EXT. RAVENS FAIR - DAY

Jamie's car speeds past a weathered wooden sign - WELCOME TO RAVENS FAIR - A QUIET LITTLE TOWN.

The town of Ravens Fair yawns out in the valley beyond the sign; old buildings jutting out of the landscape like rotting teeth.

The perfect place for a funeral.

EXT. WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DUSK

The sun sets over the modest headquarters of the towns deceased.

Jamie's car pulls up outside and he climbs out, surveying the deserted main street.

A church clock tower at the end of the street casts its twilight shadow across vacant windows and faceless store fronts.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Never shut up, do ya?

Jamie spins around, startled to see an elderly woman sitting on a rocking chair outside the funeral home. She is cradling a dead raven in her hands.

JAMIE

Excuse me?

She holds the raven up and we realize she is talking to it.

ELDERLY WOMAN

Always hungry, always want something. It's okay. Best pet I ever had, you are.

The door to the funeral home opens and HENRY WALKER(73) steps out.

HENRY

Mister Ashen?

JAMIE

Yes.

HENRY

I've been expecting you. Please,
come inside.

Jamie follows him in, watching the woman whisper to herself
in the chair, oblivious to Jamie's presence.

INT. OFFICE, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DUSK

Cluttered. Must be a busy time.

Henry sorts through papers at his desk. He is a good man in a
bad job, with a nervous smile. A worrier.

Jamie sits opposite. Henry speaks to him in a hushed tone
that Jamie will experience with everyone he meets in Ravens
Fair.

HENRY

You, you must excuse Marion, my
sister. She's not well, but she
didn't mean any harm.

JAMIE

That's okay, I wasn't harmed.

HENRY

These days she barely talks to me.
(beat)
No such thing as a perfect family,
I suppose.

JAMIE

Yeah.

Henry hands him a clipboard.

HENRY

I'll just need you to sign where
it's marked.

Jamie signs.

HENRY

Thank you, friend.

Henry takes the form.

JAMIE

Has she arrived yet?

Henry looks up.

HENRY

She arrives tonight. The police
have a few more things to...

He trails off. Jamie nods.

JAMIE

Listen, I'm sorry to ask this...
would it be possible for me to pay
in installments. I'm in a bit of a
tight spot at the moment.

HENRY

Oh no, your father is taking care of
it all.

Jamie furrows his brow, confused.

JAMIE

I don't...what is my father taking
care of?

HENRY

All of it. He called here and
insisted. Said to bill him whatever
it cost.

(beat)

He's paying for the whole thing.

Henry watches Jamie's shocked reaction.

HENRY (CONT'D)

He didn't inform you?

JAMIE

No. He didn't.

HENRY

You can check it with him. Are you
staying with him while you're here?

Jamie looks down at his shoes.

HENRY

I'm sorry, that's none of my
business.

Jamie looks up.

JAMIE

It's okay. Actually...

(beat)

(MORE)

JAMIE (cont'd)
...do you know of a motel around
here?

CUT TO:

EXT. 'COME IN INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

The motel sign sways in the wind, the word 'VACANCY' spelled out in big, black letters.

INT. FRONT OFFICE, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

The office is empty.

Jamie waits. A sign on the desk says 'Ring Bell For Attendance'. He does - but the bell doesn't make a sound.

He taps it a few more times. Nothing. Perplexed, he picks it up, inspecting it. A figure appears from a back room, carrying something.

JAMIE
Excuse me, sir.

The man emerges from behind the counter, walking straight past Jamie towards the door. He looks like an elementary school librarian. Jamie stops him.

JAMIE
Do you work here?

The man nods.

JAMIE
Okay, so, can I get a room for the night?

The man shakes his head.

JAMIE
Are you joking?

The man shakes his head again. Jamie is agitated, city-slicker style.

JAMIE
Well, the sign out the front says vacancy.

The man just stares at Jamie.

JAMIE
What the hell's wrong with you, man?
Aren't you gonna say anything?

The man holds up what he is carrying. It is a square of white tin. Stenciled on it, in big black letters, is the word **NO**.

With that, the man exits. Jamie is dumbstruck. He goes to the window, watching the wiry man scale a ladder and begin slotting the NO sign in front of the word VACANCY.

Jamie sees another figure emerge from one of the motel rooms, unloading cases from a car. Jamie squints at him.

It is DETECTIVE LIPTON.

Time for plan B.

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Pale headlights arc across a wrought-iron gate.

Jamie's car pulls up. He climbs out.

An ageing mansion looms beyond the gate, the grounds around it carpeted by a lazy fog. Its moss-soaked spires and arched windows suggest an atmosphere one could coin 'House Of Usher-esque'.

Jamie STARTS as a figure emerges from the shadows; a hulking man, all shoulders, Cro-Magnon brow. This is the maintenance man, BOZ (30's). He is holding an oil can. He begins to oil the hinges on the gate. His arms are covered in grease.

JAMIE

Hey Boz, it's been a while.

BOZ

Yeah.

JAMIE

Good to see you're still working here at night.

BOZ

Yeah.

JAMIE

Patrolling the grounds, keeping them safe from large, dangerous men.

Boz doesn't quite get it. He pulls on the gate, which opens without making a noise.

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Jamie ambles up the garden path towards the front door, shivering in the cold.

He reaches the front door, hesitating. He knocks on it with the big, brass DOOR KNOCKER at its center. Bad decision? Too late.

The door opens, revealing ELLA ASHEN (late 30's). She is the ultimate trophy wife; sexy, yet not so young and dumb that the pool man thinks he has a shot. She smiles warmly.

ELLA

Well, this is a surprise.

Jamie clearly has no idea who this person is.

ELLA

I'm so sorry about what happened. I can't imagine how you must be feeling right now.

Jamie looks a little awkward.

ELLA

Oh my Lord, you must think I'm so rude.

She curtsies and offers her hand, all charm-school manners and southern traditions.

ELLA

I'm Ella. I'm your...well, I guess I'm your step-mother.

Jamie shakes her hand.

JAMIE

Nice to meet you. I'm Jamie.

ELLA

I know, I've seen your pictures. Though you look much more handsome in the flesh.

JAMIE

Thanks.

(beat)

Is he in?

ELLA

Is who...? Oh, of course. Yes, he is. Silly me.

An awkward moment.

JAMIE

May I come in?

Ella cocks her head in mock disbelief, then steps outside, standing next to Jamie.

ELLA

On the contrary, my dear, it is I who should be asking you if I can enter your home.

JAMIE

Sure.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL, ASHEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jamie shuffles through the door, Ella behind him. He surveys the cavernous surroundings.

Oil paintings of stern figures glare down at him, between wall mounted lamps that cast dim pools of light.

Ella shuts the door.

ELLA

It's freezing out there.

A VOICE booms from upstairs. We recognize it as the voice from the phone call with Jamie.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Who was that at the door?

Ella looks to Jamie.

ELLA

Would you like to see him?

JAMIE

Well, I've heard him now, and I can smell him. Why not ruin one more of my senses?

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY, ASHEN HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Ella leads Jamie down a narrow corridor.

ELLA

I have to warn you, he's been very sick. He would have looked a lot better the last time you saw him.

JAMIE

I probably looked a lot better
twelve years ago too.

ELLA

That's how long it's been since you
two saw each other?

JAMIE

Yeah. I didn't even know he'd
remarried, to be honest.

Ella can't tell if Jamie is sad about this or not.

They reach a door and stop.

ELLA

Well, again I have to warn you. You
might be more shocked than you
think at his...appearance.

(beat)

I'll tell him you're here.

She takes out a key, unlocking the door.

She enters and closes the door behind her. We hear her
talking to someone, then:

ELLA (O.S.)

Come on in, Jamie.

Jamie opens the door.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The theme of the house continues - it's dark in here.

Jamie takes in the room - and finds what he's looking for.

Ella was right.

A gaunt, male figure is propped up in a WHEELCHAIR in the
corner. A plastic respirator covers his mouth, from which he
draws staggered, rasping breaths. His hands are clawed, as if
his whole body was drying up.

This is CHARLES ASHEN(late 50's), Jamie's father.

Ella is seated next to him.

Jamie stands like he's in the principals office. He doesn't
ever look his father in the eye, a habit he will continue
throughout this entire story.

JAMIE
Hello, Charles.

Charles speaks in a militarily stern manner, struggling to get the words out.

CHARLES
It's a shame that it takes a tragedy to put us under the same roof again.

ELLA
Charlie, that's not the issue. Your son is here.

CHARLES
I know he is, and don't call me Charlie in front of him.

ELLA
Quiet, Charlie. Don't make me wheel you into the closet and leave you there again.

Charles grumbles.

CHARLES
(to Jamie)
I assume you've met my wife.

ELLA
Why don't you sit, Jamie?

Jamie shakes his head.

JAMIE
I always had to stand in front of father.

CHARLES
Nothing wrong with standing. That's something you only appreciate after a stroke forces you to stay seated.

Jamie looks around. Takes a seat, across the room from Charles.

JAMIE
Thanks for the charity with the funeral.

CHARLES
Don't mention it.

JAMIE

I only mention it because I'm not accepting it.

CHARLES

And why is that?

JAMIE

Because Lisa was my wife, and I lived with her and loved her and I'm going to be the one who pays for her funeral. So thanks, but no thanks.

CHARLES

I don't see why I can't help.

JAMIE

It's got nothing to do with you.

Ella, SMILING as always, tries to break the heated moment.

ELLA

Charlie, I was just telling Jamie how the photo's you have of him don't do him enough justice.

Neither Jamie nor Charles seem to hear this.

CHARLES

I've been trying to reach you. Leaving messages at your house.

JAMIE

Yes. I know.

CHARLES

I'm glad that, in light of what's happened, you haven't let our past stop you from seeing reason this time.

JAMIE

Well, the only motel in town was all booked up, so...

Ella lights up.

ELLA

Then you're staying the weekend?

Jamie doesn't answer.

CHARLES

Actually, Ella and I would like you to stay longer than one weekend. We'd like you to stay for as long as you can.

JAMIE

I can't.

CHARLES

And why not?

JAMIE

I have to go back home and help the police.

CHARLES

Surely you can at least stay the week? To clear your head.

JAMIE

Why the sudden need for me to stay here?

CHARLES

We just feel that, in light of what's happened, now would be a good time to...resolve some things.

Jamie's voice goes up an octave, frustrated.

JAMIE

Now would probably be the worst time to do that.

He sighs, calming down.

JAMIE

Look, I'm thinking it was a mistake coming here. I'm thinking I should just stay somewhere else.

Jamie gets up and walks towards the door.

CHARLES

I bet there's a whole lot of things your wife wanted to do with her life. A whole list of things she thought she had years to mark off.

Jamie spins around, angry.

CHARLES (CONT'D)

Me, I've got the luxury of foresight. I've got time to examine my list before I go.

JAMIE

Well, take me off it! You don't get a 'get-out-of-jail-free' card just because you had a stroke.

(beat)

Goodbye, Ella. It was nice meeting you.

He storms out.

INT. UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR, ASHEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jamie peels out into the corridor. Ella comes after him.

ELLA

Jamie, he didn't mean to upset you. Please, would you stay one night?

JAMIE

I've been here ten minutes and I'm already up to my knees in bad memories. Why would I stay the night and get in up to my chin?

ELLA

It hasn't been all bad. You've also made a new friend in the last ten minutes.

She approaches him, takes his hand.

ELLA (CONT'D)

And I've had the chance to meet someone I've been hearing so many great things about.

Jamie pulls his hand away.

JAMIE

Now I know you're bull-shitting. The father I grew up with would never say great things about me.

ELLA

Yes, but an old man whose brain is shutting down from mini-strokes would.

Jamie looks away, ashamed.

ELLA

You have all the power here. You can walk out, but he can't come after you. Why don't you choose to stay and show him that the young boy who left here is now a strong-willed young man?

She's got him.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Ella flicks on the light, revealing a musty bedroom filled with furniture draped in WHITE SHEETS.

Jamie flings his suitcase onto the bed, along with the box the ventriloquist doll came in. Looks around. More bad memories.

ELLA

Try to get some sleep, Jamie.

She suddenly steps towards him and EMBRACES him. He half accepts the hug, half doesn't.

They separate.

ELLA

I'm so glad to finally meet you. I'm just sorry it had to happen this way.

She leaves, shutting the door behind her.

Jamie explores the room, noticing something odd.

There are bars on the windows. Beyond the glass, he sees Boz padlocking the gate.

Boz looks up, as if he knew someone were watching him. Finds Jamie and stares straight at him.

Jamie pulls the drapes closed.

EXT. MAIN STREET, RAVEN'S FAIR - NIGHT

All is quiet in Raven's Fair.

The CLOCK FACE on the CHURCH TOWER in the town square hits midnight.

There are no bells or chimes to accompany it.

INT. BASEMENT WORKROOM, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT

A body bag is laying out on a workbench.

Henry hobbles up to it, uncoiling tubes of embalming fluid. Just another day at the office.

He unzips the bag --

-- and FREEZES. The sight is like a slug to the gut.

Inside the bag, we SEE LISA'S FACE. It looks exactly as it did when Jamie found her - eyes wrenched skyward, face twisted into a permanent scream, tongueless mouth gaping open. Eerie.

A flash of RECOGNITION flares across Henry's face. A long beat passes.

MARION (O.S.)

She's arrived.

Henry STARTS - looking up to see Marion, standing in the darkness under the stairs, staring at Lisa's body.

HENRY

I need to work now, Marion.

Marion leaves, walking up the stairs.

Finally, Henry moves. He goes to a drawer, taking out a Polaroid camera.

He aims it at Lisa's face, depressing the trigger.

The white flash transposes into--

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

-- a bloated moon. It hangs over the house, back-lighting its gothic peaks.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Blades of moonlight slice through the open window. The lace curtains swell and settle in the breeze.

The ventriloquist dummy is propped up in a chair in the corner, its head facing the window.

Jamie is wide awake, staring at a photo of Lisa. The look in his eyes is one of PURE FEAR.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMIE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Lisa's face FLASHES in Jamie's mind: blood dribbling down her chin, eyes wrenched skyward...

...dead.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT

He lowers the photo, taking a deep breath and pinching the bridge of his nose. Is he going crazy?

He pries his eyes open and sees a cockroach skitter across the ceiling above him.

A whisper slithers from out of the darkness...so soft it could almost be the breeze playing tricks.

VOICE (O.S.)
Jamie...you're home.

It sounded like Lisa. Jamie looks up.

And GASPS!

The dummy has moved to the other side of the room.

Jamie flicks on the bedside lamp.

In the light, he sees that it was just a mirror, its reflection showing the dummy - which is still sitting in its original position by the window...except for one detail.

The dummy is now facing him.

Jamie gets up, slowly. Picks up the doll. Its head slumps forward onto its chest.

He sits it back in the chair, throwing a portion of one of the white sheets over it. Covering it up, like a ghost.

Breathing hard and shaking, he shuts the window. Keeps his eyes on the doll.

Behind him, beneath the bedroom door, the shadow of someone's FEET moves away down the hall.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

Grey headstones merge with the grey sky. The last leaves of fall scatter in fear of the oncoming winter.

A dozen or so mourners hunch together around Lisa's plot, including Ella. Charles is not here.

A shovel load of dirt is heaped onto the casket. Jamie sits in a chair, watching the black lid disappear under the wormy soil. Everyone stands opposite him except Ella, who stands directly behind him, her face veiled in black lace.

A priest stands over the grave, muttering something so low that we CANNOT HEAR IT.

Jamie scans the faces of the other attendees.

None of them cry or make a sound...but they are all staring at him.

Jamie looks away and spots DETECTIVE LIPTON in the distance, standing by a tree.

Watching.

The priest raises his voice ever so slightly; enough that we can finally hear something he is saying.

PRIEST

...and we look to our families and loved ones for solace.

Ella puts her hands on Jamie's shoulders.

EXT. CEMETERY - LATER - DAY

Jamie drifts away from the crowd.

Sees Lipton walking away and hurries to catch him.

JAMIE

Detective Lipton.

Lipton stops and turns.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

How are you?

LIPTON

Fine. I'm sorry I didn't come over and say anything, I thought I'd leave you alone.

JAMIE

That's okay.

(beat; overly hostile)

Detective, if you don't mind me asking, why are you here?

Lipton studies Jamie, gauging his suspicion.

LIPTON

For most people, a funeral is closure. For a homicide detective, it's a starting point.

JAMIE

Okay. Seen anything interesting?

LIPTON

Not yet, but I'm still looking.

(beat)

She deserves that, don't you think?

Jamie nods. He's right.

JAMIE

I just didn't expect you to show up all the way down here.

LIPTON

I didn't come for fun, kiddo. I'm here for the same reason plumber's hang around broken toilets a lot.

He walks away, then stops and turns around.

LIPTON

I'll be seeing you.

Jamie watches the detective stroll away.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

She lost her voice...

Jamie turns, seeing MARION - Henry's sister from the funeral home. She steps closer to him, FEAR in her eyes.

MARION (CONT'D)

Mary Shaw...she lost her voice.

Then she came back to claim ours.

She points at an old headstone, which is partly obscured by trees, away from the other headstones. Her voice grows in volume.

MARION

Mary Shaw did it. She's the one who steals tongues.

Jamie's BLOOD FREEZES when he hears this.

JAMIE

What did you say?

Marion points at the headstone, her voice growing louder and more fearful.

MARION

And if those people,
who saw her did scream,
their tongues would be gone -
ripped out clean.

Henry appears, taking Marion by the arms roughly.

HENRY

Marion, what are you doing? Leave
him alone. You know better than
this.

(beat)

I'm sorry, Mister Ashen, she
doesn't know what she's saying. I
apologize, sir.

Henry leads her away, berating her under his breath.

Jamie, still in shock, looks to the headstone she had been pointing at.

It has decayed with age, vines strangling it.

Etched into the rock, the words: HERE LIES MARY SHAW.

INT. DINING ROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Clink. Gulp. Clink.

This family dinner is very workman-like: chew, swallow, repeat. No talking.

Candlelight dances across the walls as Ella spoon-feeds a very gruel-like substance to Charles, at the head of a long oak dining table. Jamie sits opposite, eyes down. Finally:

ELLA

Isn't this wonderful? All of us
eating here together?

Jamie pokes at his meal -- a soppy and badly cooked roast dinner. He looks up. Ella and Charles are staring at him.

JAMIE

It's great.

Ella smiles. She spoons more goop into Charles' mouth, then dabs his lips with a napkin.

CHARLES

So how much time are you taking off work?

JAMIE

What's that?

CHARLES

Surely they're giving you a break after what's happened.

JAMIE

(distracted)

Uh, yeah...they are. I can pretty much go back whenever I want.

A long beat of silence follows, until:

JAMIE

Who is Mary Shaw?

Ella and Charles stop what they are doing.

ELLA

I'm sorry honey, speak up a little bit.

JAMIE

Marion, from the funeral home, she said something to me today...about a woman named Mary Shaw. She said, "Mary Shaw did it."

CHARLES

That woman also believes Jesus communicates to her through the fillings in her teeth.

Ella goes back to spoon-feeding Charles.

JAMIE

I remember the name, though...Mary Shaw. From when I was a kid around here.

(MORE)

JAMIE (cont'd)
 They had a poem about her, I think.
 (beat)
 Mom used to read it to me.

Ella looks up, reacting to the words - if only slightly.

CHARLES
 You spent most of your childhood
 far away from here, in boarding
 school.

JAMIE
 I'm aware of that.

ELLA
 Jamie, would you like something to
 drink?

JAMIE
 I'm fine.

Clink. Gulp. Clink.

JAMIE
 So you've never heard of her?

CHARLES
 No. I told you - that woman from
 the funeral home is crazier than a
 shit-house rat.

ELLA
 Poor old thing.
 (beat)
 Jamie, would you like dessert? I
 made a pear pie.

JAMIE
 No, thank you.

Clink. Gulp. Clink.

JAMIE
 I know I've heard her name.

CHARLES
 So have you considered staying
 here? For a few more nights?

JAMIE
 I can't.
 (back to Marion)
 It was just the way she said
 it...she seemed so...scared.

ELLA

I would love you to stay for lunch,
Jamie. You simply must try my
walnut cake.

CHARLES

It's settled then. Lunch it is.

Jamie slams his fork down. Blank looks from Ella and Charles.

JAMIE

I can't stay!

He gets up and leaves.

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Jamie charges out of the front door, breathing hard.

A figure catches in his peripheral vision and he stops in his tracks.

It is Boz, in the distance. He is talking to someone at the front gate. Jamie squints at the second figure through the fog.

Detective Lipton.

Jamie hides himself behind a branch. Watches the exchange between the two men, too far away to hear anything.

Boz nods and Lipton takes a note.

Jamie backs up slowly...back into the house.

INT. BATHROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Jamie splashes water on his face, shaken. He has the look of a first-day prison inmate - a man with no escape.

He looks up into the mirror, and is STARTLED to see CHARLES, sitting in his wheelchair at the opposite end of the corridor.

CHARLES

I'm sorry. I have to learn that
you're a man now. You don't need me
telling you how to run your life.

A long beat passes between them.

CHARLES

You know, I did used to make enquiries about you after you left. I had my sources. People would always tell me that you were happy, that you were doing well. I never wanted to interrupt that.

Jamie nods, growing more disturbed by his father's 'truce'.

CHARLES

Good-night, son.

The wheelchair retreats and is swallowed up by the darkness, the screech of its wheels receding in volume as it moves away.

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

The witching hour.

Storm clouds roll in, low growls of thunder announcing their arrival.

Beneath the brooding sky, only one arched window in the house remains lit. It switches off.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

The curtains lull gently, the only thing moving in the darkness.

INT. KITCHEN, ASHEN HOUSE - SAME

A faucet drips.

Drip...drip...drip.

INT. CORRIDOR, ASHEN HOUSE - SAME

A grandfather clock ticks.

Tick...tick...tick.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - SAME

Jamie is asleep. A bottle of sleeping pills sits on the bedside table, tablets scattered around it.

For a moment, it is only Jamie's steady, rhythmic breathing we can hear...

...but then another sound is introduced.

At first, it could be Jamie -- until it drowns him out.

Sobbing.

Jamie's eyes flutter open. He tunes in to the guttural moans.

His vision adjusts in the darkness, scanning the room; past the door, past the furniture covered in white sheets, until they STOP DEAD on something.

A figure is hunched over in the corner by the window, whimpering, its back to Jamie. The figure's head rests in its hands - MIRRORING the image we saw of Mary crying in the opening scenes.

Jamie BOLTS upright in bed, adrenaline kicking in.

He glares at the figure for a long beat.

JAMIE

Ella?

Immediately, the sobbing CEASES and the figure stands up, turning around to face Jamie.

Shrouded in shadow, it resembles an OLD WOMAN - her pale face catching what little light there is.

A sudden gust of wind sends the drapes billowing outwards, obscuring the woman.

Only the old woman's eyes pierce through the sheer lace fabric; eerily WIDE and unblinking. Staring right at Jamie. Then...

...the drapes settle, and she is GONE.

Heart in his throat, Jamie switches on the bedside lamp and gets out of bed, going over to the window. He checks all corners, finding nothing.

BANG!

The doll falls out of its chair, splaying across the floor.

Jamie picks it up. As he lifts it, he sees a faded inscription on the back of the doll's neck.

It reads M. SHAW.

INT. ENTRANCE HALL, ASHEN HOUSE - MORNING

The house awakens.

Jamie descends the stairs quickly, heading for the front door.

He catches sight of Ella, who is busying herself in the kitchen with pots and pans.

ELLA

Oh, Jamie, you're up. Would you like some breakfast?

JAMIE

No, that's okay.

ELLA

Are you going somewhere?

He doesn't answer.

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - MORNING

The sun rises over Ashen House for a new day.

Jamie flings open the front door, rushing towards his car - then stops in his tracks.

A FALLEN TREE is blocking the driveway.

Boz hacks away at it with a saw.

Jamie approaches.

JAMIE

What happened here?

BOZ

Storm.

JAMIE

What storm?

BOZ

Storm last night.

JAMIE

Okay...so, how am I supposed to get my car out?

BOZ

Have to wait.

JAMIE

How long?

BOZ
A day maybe.

Jamie can't believe it.

JAMIE
A day?! But that's...you can't...

Ella appears in the doorway.

ELLA
Jamie, can I get you to help me
with something? I'm just not as
strong as I used to be.

A twinge of nervousness spreads across Jamie's face. He looks from Ella to the gate like a trapped animal. He chooses the front gate.

JAMIE
I...I would...but I have to go
somewhere.

ELLA
Well, when will you be back? I'm
making lunch.

Jamie quickens his pace, not looking back.

JAMIE
Later...I'll be back later, I
promise.

Boz and Ella watch him go.

EXT. FOREST ROAD - DAY

Jamie marches skittishly down a winding, tree-lined road; a vein cut through the heart of the forest by men.

The forest does its best to claim the land back, gnarled branches over-hanging it and trapping a MIST that keeps Jamie from seeing too far ahead of himself.

He keeps going anyway...

EXT. VARIOUS STREETS, RAVENS FAIR - DAY

...through the streets of Ravens Fair, past quaint houses that have seen better days.

He looks over at a group of children, playing together on a street corner, as children do...except for one thing.

They sing under their breath, not making a sound.

EXT. WALKER FUNERAL HOME, RAVENS FAIR'S MAIN STREET - DAY

Marion sits in her chair, cradling her crow.

Jamie approaches. She doesn't seem to notice.

He kneels down, apprehensive.

JAMIE

Ma'am...I have to talk to you.

She strokes the head of the dead bird, smiling.

JAMIE

You said something to me about my wife yesterday...you said a woman named Mary Shaw did it.

Marion looks up slowly.

Leans forward and whispers in Jamie's ear.

MARION

She's standing right behind you.

As much as we can actually SEE a shiver run down someone's spine, we see it with Jamie.

He turns around. No one is there.

He grips Marion's shoulder - desperation in his eyes.

JAMIE

Who is she? Tell me.

HENRY (O.S.)

Mister Ashen, I would prefer it if you left her alone.

Jamie STARTS as Henry interrupts. He stands up, dejected, backing away from Marion.

MARION

Henry'll tell ya about Mary Shaw. He saw her once, in the flesh herself. Didn't ya Henry?

Jamie looks at Henry.

Busted.

INT. WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Henry peers through the shop-front window, then flips the 'OPEN' sign to 'CLOSED', locking the door.

He begins pulling the blinds closed.

HENRY

There are things you remember, and
there are things you can't forget.

Jamie sits in an old armchair, listening attentively.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Despite the inarguable fact that I
am getting on in years, I remember
a lot of things from my life.
Remember them well, in fact.

He turns to face Jamie.

HENRY (CONT'D)

But the look on old Mary Shaw's
face when she died...that's
something I just can't forget.

Henry paces the room, nervous as ever.

HENRY (CONT'D)

What would you say if I told you
that, sixty years ago...in this
very town...I saw a face that
looked exactly as your wife's did?

JAMIE

I'd say go on.

Henry lowers his volume, as if someone were eavesdropping.

HENRY

Her name was Mary Shaw.

(beat)

The woman who lost her voice.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. GUIGNOL THEATER - NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

Lights glitter on the surface of a large lake, cast by a
majestic building which rises up from an island in the lakes
center.

This is the Guignol Theater. The pride of Raven's Fair.

Streams of people cross a footbridge which runs to the island, dressed in their Saturday night best.

HENRY (V.O.)

Back when I was a boy, the one horse they had in this town hadn't been shot yet. Some people even said it could become a boomtown, a real cultural hot-spot. And so, somebody built a grand old theater on the edge of town.

INT. AUDITORIUM, GUIGNOL THEATER - NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

A cocky young boy of about ten maneuvers his way through the plush seats of the auditorium. This is YOUNG HENRY.

Young Henry finds his seat, settling on one near the front.

HENRY (V.O.)

I only ever went there once.

The lights fade in the auditorium.

A spotlight comes on, singling out an old man in a bright red suit, standing on the stage. It is MARY'S HUSBAND, whom we met in the opening scenes.

MARY'S HUSBAND

Ladies and gentlemen, prepare to be astounded...prepare to be amazed...witness Mary Shaw give life to the boy made of wood!

The spotlight switches off. Mary's husband leaves the stage.

Henry squints at the stage, seeing a figure which limps out from behind the curtain, shrouded in shadow. The screech of something heavy the figure is dragging pierces the hush.

The figure stops at the lip of the stage.

A spotlight illuminates the figure. It is an old woman, her angular features sticking out like accusatory fingers, a shock of white hair framing her face. This is MARY SHAW.

She bends down, unlocking the large wooden trunk she was dragging and heaving the lid upwards. She removes a top hat from the trunk and then rolls the trunk onto its side - it is empty.

MARY SHAW

Where is Billy?

She casts a suspicious eye over the audience.

MARY SHAW

Have any of you seen him? Was it
you who let him out?

She begins to potter around the stage, searching high and low.

MARY SHAW

Billy? Where did you go? Billy?

VOICE (O.S.)

You won't find me!

Henry JUMPS out of his skin as the voice screams out -- from RIGHT BEHIND HIM! He whirls around, heart in his throat. No one is there.

Mary whips her head up, shielding her eyes from the flare of the spotlight.

MARY SHAW

I knew you were hiding!

She makes out Henry, a few rows from the front.

MARY SHAW

You there, could you check under
your seat for me?

Henry reluctantly gets up, peeking under his seat.

The cherubic face of a VENTRILOQUIST'S DUMMY stares back at him, with the vacant gaze of the dead. Mouth stretched into a grin. It is a dummy we know well.

YOUNG HENRY

He's here.

MARY SHAW

Would you mind bringing him to me?

Henry hauls the dummy out from under the seat, carrying him up the aisle to the stage. Mary takes the dummy in her arms.

MARY SHAW

Say thank you, Billy.

The dummy's head swivels around slowly to face Henry.

BILLY

Thank you.

Henry returns to his seat. Mary takes her place on a stool, the dummy's head lolling back and forth as she props him up on her lap, placing the top hat on his head.

MARY SHAW

Why must you run away, Billy? Don't I treat you well?

As he talks, the dummy's jaw lowers and shuts vigorously.

BILLY

You do treat me well, mother. The best I could ever hope for. It's just that...

MARY SHAW

Yes, Billy?

BILLY

Well, it's just that...it gets so dusty inside that box. It makes me want to...

MARY SHAW

Want to what?

Billy leans back, as if he is about to sneeze.

BILLY

It makes me want to...

Mary whips the handkerchief out of his top pocket, holding it up to his nose.

BILLY

Ahhhh-choooooo!!

As he sneezes, the handkerchief blows outwards, propelled by the force of the sneeze.

The audience laughs and claps.

MARY SHAW

Bleechhh! Shoe!

BILLY

Bless me?

MARY SHAW

No, I said Bleechhh--

She holds up her foot.

MARY SHAW (CONT'D)
--shoe! You sneezed all over my
shoe!

The audience laughs again.

BILLY
I'm sorry for that, mother. I--

VOICE (O.S.)
I can see your lips move!

Mary and Billy stop their act and turn to face the accusing audience. The moment hangs in silence for a beat.

MARY SHAW
Who said that?

At first no one admits it...until a red-headed boy of about ten pipes up from a middle row.

RED-HEADED BOY
I did. I saw your lips moving.

MARY SHAW
What do you say to that, Billy? He
doesn't think you're a real person.

BILLY
What do you mean, mother?

Mary keeps her eyes fixed on the boy. Her and Billy's voices have lowered. With his new, less sprightly tone, Billy's grin now seems malevolent.

MARY SHAW
He thinks you're a dummy, and that
I'm doing your voice for you.

BILLY
But...but that can't be true.
(beat)
There's no way you'd give me ALL
the good lines!

Laughter from everyone.

MARY SHAW
Just forget about him, Billy. There
will always be doubters.

BILLY

I don't want to forget it, mother!
I think we should show this boy
that I'm real.

MARY SHAW

No, I'm afraid we must go on with
the show.

BILLY

I refuse to go on until he believes
that I'm real!

Mary and Billy's shouting begins to OVERLAP.

BILLY

Let me go mother! I just want
to talk to him! I want to
teach him!

MARY SHAW

No! Sit still, child! Do you
hear me?

The audience break into applause, amazed by the performance
...all except Henry, who shrinks back in his seat, afraid.

The clapping dissipates, and Mary turns to face the red-
headed boy. Her eyes DRILL into his, a grin spreading slowly
across her face.

MARY SHAW

Now who's the dummy?

INT. LIVING ROOM, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY -- PRESENT

It is clear that afternoon's events are seared into Henry's
brain.

HENRY

Some weeks later, that disbelieving
little boy went missing. Gone,
without a trace. Eventually the
search for him was abandoned and
the case left unsolved...but I
always felt in my gut that Mary had
played some role in it.

(beat)

I only saw her one other time.

He points towards the stairs with a trembling hand.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Down there...in the basement.

INT. STAIRWELL, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

Henry, the young version we just met, tip-toes stealthily down the steps leading to the workroom.

He reaches the last step, stealing a glance inside.

HENRY (V.O.)

I never did find out the exact details of her death. I do know that whatever she looked like when she died...it must have been quite something to turn my fathers head.

A man in a 1940's police uniform stands over a cot, covered by a sheet. Henry's father, RICHARD (40's), listens to the officer's whispered utterances.

The officer lifts the sheet. WE DO NOT SEE. A flash crosses Richard's face, a tremor of repulsion he barely contains. He looks away. The officer lowers the sheet, handing a thick contract to Richard.

DETECTIVE

This is her last will and testament. All the instructions are inside.

He turns on his heel, leaving as if he couldn't get out of there fast enough. Henry slinks back into the shadows, watching him go by.

HENRY (V.O.)

Having a body in our home was nothing new to me. It didn't give me so much as a goosebump to know that I was sharing shelter with a corpse.

(beat)

But for the next few days, things were...different around our house.

INT. FRONT DOOR, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY -- FLASHBACK

Richard opens the front door, letting a tall man, who is carrying a familiar VENTRILOQUIST DOLL - BILLY - enter the house. They shake hands.

Henry watches through a crack in his bedroom door.

INT. STAIRWELL, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY -- FLASHBACK

Henry pokes his head through the bannisters, spying the Tall Man, arguing with his father in the hall below.

TALL MAN

You have to give me time. This is not what I do. A wooden toy is something quite different to a human being.

RICHARD

It's unusual for me also. I've never had someone request this in their will before.

INT. STAIRWELL, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY -- FLASHBACK

Henry listens to his father work as he lurks down the stairs.

INT. BASEMENT WORKROOM, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY --
FLASHBACK

Henry peeps inside the room.

Richard and the Tall Man toil away at Mary Shaw's body, which we CANNOT SEE.

While he works, Richard keeps looking up to study Billy, the dummy, sitting in the far corner.

The whole room is a mess of paint brushes and tools.

Richard sets up an old box camera next to the bench. He aims the camera at Mary, clicking off a picture.

Henry watches. He leans a little too far forward, knocking a mop over.

Richard whips his head up, fuming.

RICHARD

Henry, out of here while we're working!

He charges over as Henry scurries away, SLAMMING the door.

INT. HENRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

Lightning flickers outside.

Henry lies awake in bed.

HENRY (V.O.)

The thing that intrigued me the most, though, was not how Mary had died, or even who she was before she died. It was her final request.

Henry sits up, climbing out of bed and padding through the room, past the sleeping figure of his sister, MARION(8).

INT. STAIRWELL, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

Henry creeps down the stairs. He stops after every step he takes, listening to the darkened house.

HENRY (V.O.)

It was said that, as her last wish, she had asked to be buried looking exactly like her doll.

(beat)

To become a doll herself.

A low rumble of thunder seems to warn him as he reaches the workroom door.

Henry scans - there is no one else around.

He takes out a key, unlocking the door.

INT. BASEMENT WORKROOM, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - CONTINUOUS

Henry takes a moment. Steps inside.

The room's only light-source is a small desk lamp in the far corner.

In the centre of the room, atop the workbench, is an open coffin. Opposite the coffin, angled to one side in a chair, is Billy the dummy. Eyes staring off at the far wall.

Henry takes a few paces inside. Keeps watching the dummy.

Lightning blinks in the window, casting long shadows.

He edges closer, reaching the bench.

He gets up on his toes, placing his hands on the edge of the coffin.

He glances over at the dummy. It hasn't moved.

He hauls himself up, straining to get a look inside the coffin.

The light flicks on.

Richard stumbles into the room, bleary eyed and angry.

Mary Shaw is but a lifeless corpse once again, lying on the floor like a discarded rag doll.

Richard surveys the scene. Turns to Henry.

RICHARD

You had better start talking right now, son.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM, WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY -- PRESENT

Henry gazes at the wall, reliving memories he'd clearly like to forget. Now we know why he's the nervous wreck he is.

HENRY

She'd had her tongue cut out, apparently. Without her voice...her livelihood...she couldn't go on. She hung herself.

(beat)

After that, it was said that her ghost would roam Raven's Fair at night, stealing the tongues of those who would scream in her presence.

Jamie is silent for a beat.

JAMIE

You're telling me that my wife was murdered by a ghost?

HENRY

I think it's better that I don't tell you anything more...and show you instead.

Henry gets up and opens a drawer.

He takes out an old, black-and-white photo, handing it to Jamie, along with the Polaroid he took of Lisa.

Jamie takes them both -- and they TAKE HIS BREATH.

The faded image is of an old woman, her face garishly painted up -- like a doll.

Jamie's eyes switch between the photo of Mary Shaw, and the Polaroid of Lisa. Mary's death face is eerily similar to that of Lisa's; those eyes - like a victim who glimpsed hell before their last gasp.

Jamie holds up the picture of Lisa.

JAMIE

You took this picture?

Henry nods. Jamie charges up to him, furious. Henry flinches.

JAMIE

What kind of a sick bastard are you?! I brought her here to be buried, not to be a memento in some necrophilic's photo album.

HENRY

I have to take pictures. It's part of my business. I can't work without them.

Jamie backs down.

HENRY (CONT'D)

You seem to be forgetting that you came to me, Mister Ashen. I never wanted to share this with you. You asked.

Jamie paces. Shredded nerves.

JAMIE

You're talking about a woman who died sixty years ago.

HENRY

No, we're not. We're talking about a woman who died three days ago.

(beat)

Whether you believe in ghost stories or not, you cannot deny what you have in your hands.

Jamie stops. Examines the pictures.

JAMIE

The night Lisa died...somebody sent her a package. We opened it up, and there was some sort of...dummy in it.

(MORE)

JAMIE (cont'd)

(beat)

A ventriloquist's dummy.

He turns and drills Henry with a fearful look.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

It has Mary Shaw's name written on it.

Now it's Henry's turn to look fearful.

Jamie studies the picture of Mary Shaw, THINKING BACK.

JAMIE

Mary Shaw...

A few words of rhyme drift back into his memory from the fog of childhood. He recites them as they come to him.

JAMIE

...then late one night,
when she returned to her room,
hidden high above the stage,
dark and cramped like a tomb...

Jamie looks over at Henry.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

She lived at that old theater,
didn't she? The one on Lake Seerie.

He throws the photo's on the table, heading for the door.

HENRY

Where are you going?

JAMIE

I'm going up there.

HENRY

Nobody ever goes up there.

(beat)

And nobody smart wants to.

Jamie opens the door.

HENRY

If you're trying to find a ghost,
Mister Ashen, you're going to
regret it. I promise you.

Jamie turns around.

JAMIE

I'm not trying to find a ghost.
I'm trying to find out what
happened to my wife.

He closes the door behind him.

EXT. WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Jamie steps out onto the street. Looks both ways, as if searching for a cab.

JAMIE

God damn it, I need my car.

MARION (O.S.)

You can take ours.

Jamie whirls around to see Marion dangling a set of car keys.

MARION (CONT'D)

Henry doesn't let me drive.

INT. WALKER FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Henry watches through the window as a monstrous black HEARSE speeds off down the main street of Ravens Fair.

HENRY

Son of a...

Jamie is behind the wheel.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Jamie pilots the hearse along an off-the-map road that is bordered by towering trees.

Speckles of sunlight dapple the windshield, peeking through the branches.

Jamie slows down, seeing an old weatherboard house on his left.

INT. WEATHERBOARD HOUSE - SAME

Behind a grimy pane of glass that passes for a window, we see the hearse roll past the house.

Someone is WATCHING through a chink in the curtain.

The dark figure turns, going over to a phone and dialing.

INT. HEARSE - SAME

Jamie continues along the road, which gets darker as the foliage overhead thickens.

The dirt turns to mud, squelching beneath the tires. The road narrows.

Jamie glances over through the passenger window, then turns back --

-- and hits the BRAKES!

He has reached a DEAD END. At least, that's what the sign says. The sign also says 'PRIVATE PROPERTY'.

Below these words, someone has spray-painted 'NO ONE GOES IN...NO ONE COMES OUT!!'

Trees block the road behind the sign like giant wooden sentry's.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Jamie steps out of his car.

He moves past the sign, clawing through the thick brush and stumbling out onto --

-- the shore of a swampy lake.

A sodden, makeshift jetty juts out over the water - all that remains of the footbridge that once ran to the theater. A small boat is lashed to it with a frayed rope.

In the center of the lake is an island, and on that island...

...is the Guignol Theater.

A lone crow caws in the distance.

Jamie steps out into the boat. It rocks as he sits in it. He unties the rope and begins rowing out towards the island.

EXT. GUIGNOL THEATER - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Jamie alights the boat, tying it to a stake, then stares up in awe at the building before him.

Like an aging former movie-star, you can still glimpse the glory behind the brittle bones. Tall and imposing, it is obvious someone put a lot of work into this place, but nature has stripped away her dignity.

He approaches the building.

Nothing appears to grow on the island - all the trees are skeletal relics, tortured into impossible shapes by starvation.

Dead ravens litter the ground, as if some sort of bird holocaust had occurred.

Jamie steps up to the double doors, and then sees something on the ground below him.

A footprint.

It's recent, the mud fading but still clear enough to make out.

The footprints lead to the door. Jamie knocks on it lightly...and it groans open.

Somebody has already been here.

INT. AUDITORIUM, GUIGNOL THEATER - DAY

Inside is the same story as out - a palace once grand, now derelict. A curtain of red velvet hangs across the stage; once regal, now moth-eaten.

Jamie makes his way down the aisle, scanning around.

Shards of sunlight cut in from outside, highlighting ornately sculpted statues that gape down at Jamie from the corners of the high ceiling, above a huge audience balcony.

He reaches the stage, clambering up onto it.

He looks around the auditorium. Not a hint of movement. All that we can hear is his quivering breath.

He steps behind the curtain.

INT. STAGE, GUIGNOL THEATER - CONTINUOUS

It has been a long time since anyone trod these boards.

An old piano at the side of the stage is all that remains.

Jamie lifts the key cover, tapping a few of the keys. The sound is eerily discordant, neglected by time. Matches the feeling in here.

Jamie paces around the stage, seeing a pile of wooden planks in one corner.

He looks up into the lighting rigs high above him, spotting a door which is slightly ajar. Nailed across the door are a few random wooden planks, most of which have been torn away.

Somebody has already been here.

The only way to reach the door is across a narrow catwalk, which runs over the stage like a suspension bridge.

Jamie finds a set of stairs which lead up into the lights. He ascends them, vertigo setting in as he sees the stage below.

At the top of the stairs, he takes a tentative step onto the rickety catwalk, then scampers quickly across it.

He pushes the door open...

INT. PASSAGEWAY, GUIGNOL THEATER - CONTINUOUS

...entering a short passageway with a rounded door at the end of it.

Jamie advances, reaching the door and trying the handle. It opens.

INT. MARY'S LIVING AREA, GUIGNOL THEATER - CONTINUOUS

He crouches through the portal into a squalid living area.

Pale shafts of light filter through a window, showing Jamie a small dinner table, with a crude kitchen in the corner, quilted in spider-webs.

In another corner, a threadbare mattress and sheet, next to which is a STAGE-MIRROR, framed by light-bulbs. MAKE-UP is spread out on the table beneath the mirror.

A shelf on one wall is crowded with assorted junk, among it dozens of STUFFED ANIMALS, SEWING KITS, NEEDLES and JARS OF EMBALMING FLUID.

Jamie goes to the shelf, picking up a taxidermic BLACK CAT - face frozen in mid-hiss. Yellow eyes glaring.

He searches the shelf further, finding a small doll, wearing an old fashioned dress. One of its eyes is missing.

His fingers find a string at the back. He yanks it and a voice croaks to life, age slowing it down to a masculine drawl.

DOLL

Mommy...

Creeped out, Jamie looks up from the doll --

--and GASPS!!

Reflected in the stage-mirror, strung up in a noose and tied to a beam - STARING at him with bulging eyes - is the figure of MARY SHAW!!

Jamie WHIRLS -- seeing nothing. Whips back to the mirror -- she is gone.

Jamie's chest heaves, the shock still COURSING through him. He pokes the mirror nervously...

...then notices something in the reflection.

A wooden trunk in the corner behind him.

He goes over to it. The chest has been thrown open, its lock shattered. Rosary beads are scattered around it.

Jamie peers into it.

A tattered TOP HAT sits inside it...and nothing else.

The top hat is lined with a red velvet that matches the suit Billy wears.

An axe lies strewn next to the trunk. It looks brand new.

Jamie wipes sweat from his brow, examining the axe blade. He smiles.

EXT. LAKE - DAY

Jamie rows back across the lake. The axe lies in the boat next to him, wrapped in a rag.

He looks up, seeing four figures standing on the shore.

JAMIE

Shit...

It is a man in Sheriff's uniform, an unidentified woman, Henry --

-- and Lipton.

EXT. LAKE SHORE -- MOMENTS LATER

The woman, AUDREY (30's), rushes up to meet the boat as it arrives.

AUDREY

I want him arrested. He's a god damned trespasser!

SHERIFF

Audrey, let me handle this.

The sheriff spins him around, slapping cuffs on him.

SHERIFF (CONT'D)

You're under arrest for trespassing, theft of a motor vehicle--

JAMIE

(to Henry)

Your sister gave me the keys!

HENRY

They weren't hers to give.

Jamie looks around at the group.

JAMIE

I must be a popular guy - everyone but the mayor is here.

LIPTON

My brothers in law enforcement here in Ravens Fair were kind enough to let me know when they got a call about you.

JAMIE

I don't believe this. It's a derelict building nobody gives a crap about!

AUDREY

It's private property. My property. There's a sign that says so.

LIPTON

Can't argue with that.

Jamie laughs - more of a snort actually.

JAMIE

Well shit, looks like you got me red handed, Detective. Open and shut case of trespassing. You could push for the chair on this one.

Lipton smiles.

LIPTON

No.

(beat)

We save the chair for wife killers.

Jamie LUNGES at him. With his hands cuffed, Lipton easily side steps, KICKING Jamie in the back.

Jamie lands face down in the mud with a SMACK. Lipton drives a knee into his back.

LIPTON

Assaulting an officer, resisting arrest - you're writing a shopping list here, buddy.

He grabs Jamie's hair, yanking his head up.

LIPTON

What the hell are you doing up here?

JAMIE

I'm trying to find out what happened to Lisa, which seems to be more than you're doing.

LIPTON

Oh really? Well, right now I'm on top of the number one suspect.

JAMIE

God damn it, I didn't kill my wife!

LIPTON

Then you got three seconds to tell me what it is you're doing here.

JAMIE

Something about Lisa's death leads to this place.

LIPTON

What are you talking about?

JAMIE

There was a woman...named Mary Shaw. She lived in the theater.

AUDREY

No one has ever lived in there.

JAMIE

Yes, they have. She lived in there
and she hung herself after her
husband cut her tongue out.

Lipton looks up at the Sherrif, who shakes his head.

SHERIFF

If somebody had hung themselves in
there, I would know about it.

JAMIE

Tell them Henry, tell them what you
told me about Mary Shaw.

Everyone looks to Henry.

HENRY

What is he talking about?

JAMIE

Mary Shaw! Tell them!

Henry turns to the Sheriff.

HENRY

The last time I spoke to him was
when we were arranging the funeral.

JAMIE

You're a liar!

Lipton eases off Jamie's back, watching all this with
interest. The Sheriff hoists Jamie to his feet.

SHERIFF

Let's go.

JAMIE

(to Henry)

You know what you said to me!

SHERIFF

(to Jamie)

I called your father. You're lucky
he made arrangements for you to be
taken home.

JAMIE

I don't want to go to my father's house, I want somebody to fingerprint that axe and tell me who it was that broke into that theater.

AUDREY

I know who it was.

She steps up to Jamie.

AUDREY (CONT'D)

It was you.

The Sheriff leads Jamie towards the car.

Lipton picks up the axe, examining it.

LIPTON

I'll take him, Sheriff. If that's okay with you.

The Sheriff gives Jamie the once over.

SHERIFF

Fine by me.

INT. LIPTON'S CAR, MOVING - DAY

Jamie sits in the back. Lipton drills him in the mirror.

JAMIE

They're lying.

LIPTON

About what?

JAMIE

Mary Shaw. They know who she is.

Jamie stares off out the window, aware that he sounds crazy.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

The night Lisa died, somebody sent her a package. There was a...doll in it.

LIPTON

A what?

JAMIE

An old ventriloquist's dummy. And it belonged to a woman named Mary Shaw. A woman who died in that theater a long time ago.

LIPTON

You mind telling me what the hell that has to do with the death of your wife?

JAMIE

Something's not right about Lisa's death. I don't know what it is... but it's there. You said it yourself - no fingerprints, no signs of forced entry.

LIPTON

You're not making any sense.

JAMIE

That package, that doll, came from here. I want to know who sent it.

Lipton furrows his brow, incredulous.

LIPTON

So you think whoever sent it killed your wife?

JAMIE

I don't know...all I know is that ever since I got here, things have been happening to me. Strange things. This place is...suffocating me.

LIPTON

It's just a harmless little town.

Jamie watches the trees whip past the windows.

JAMIE

No. I've always said that it's not where you are, it's what happens to you while you're there.

(beat)

I was born in this town. It's who I am...but all I remember when I'm here are the daily beatings from my father and the death of my mom.

He meets Lipton's gaze in the mirror.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Do this one thing for me. Help me.
After that, you can do whatever you
want.

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - DAY

Lipton walks Jamie up the front path towards the front door.

Boz clears away branches to the side, staring at Lipton.

Lipton knocks and the door is opened by Ella.

LIPTON

Special delivery.

ELLA

Is he in trouble, officer?

LIPTON

Well, that depends. The Sheriff's
department here would like to speak
to him tomorrow. As long as he
stays out of trouble between now
and then...

ELLA

We'll keep him here, officer. Thank
you very much. Goodbye.

JAMIE

Wait.

(beat)

There's something I'd like to give
to the detective before he goes.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - DAY

The door opens. Jamie enters, picking up the box which he has
shoved Billy into.

He hands it to the detective.

LIPTON

I can't promise anything.

Ella appears in the doorway.

JAMIE

You sure you don't want to lock me
up for the night down at the
station?

Lipton smiles.

LIPTON

That's not up to me.

He turns and leaves.

ELLA

I'll walk you to the door, officer.

Jamie goes to the window, staring out through the bars.

He hears Lipton and Ella clomp down the stairs, then watches
as Lipton exits the house and heads for his car.

Then, from somewhere deep in the house, an angry bellow.

CHARLES (O.S.)

Son.

Jamie turns towards the voice.

CHARLES (O.S., CONT'D)

May I see you please?

INT. LIBRARY, ASHEN HOUSE - DUSK

A roaring fireplace licks out at a stately library.

Ella walks up behind Charles, whispering in his ear.

She spins Charles' wheelchair around, so that he can see
Jamie, standing in the doorway of the darkened room.

CHARLES

Where have you been all day?

JAMIE

I got caught up. Sorry.

CHARLES

You sure did. The police told me
all about it.

Jamie stares at his shoes - a child being punished.

CHARLES

So what do you have to say for yourself? Stealing cars and breaking in to places - is that how you spend your days?

JAMIE

No.

CHARLES

So why did you do it?

JAMIE

I was trying to....

(beat; reconsiders)

I don't know.

ELLA

Your father and I aren't mad at you, Jamie. We just want to protect you. We care about you.

CHARLES

Yes. In fact, Ella spent all day making you a special lunch.

Jamie looks up at Ella.

JAMIE

I'm sorry, Ella.

ELLA

It's okay.

CHARLES

The reason we wanted you to be here for lunch is that it's Ella's birthday today.

JAMIE

Happy birthday, Ella.

Ella beams.

ELLA

That's quite okay.

(beat)

We're going to have a birthday dinner tonight instead. What do you say?

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Candles flicker on a cake, before Ella blows them all out.

Jamie is once again seated at the end of the table, opposite Charles and Ella.

He prods his dinner; hasn't touched any of it. Looks nervous.

ELLA

I love birthdays. Especially my own.

CHARLES

Until you remember how old you are.

Ella hits him mockingly.

ELLA

Be quiet, you.

She cuts into the cake with a large knife.

ELLA

Would you like some cake, Jamie?

JAMIE

No, I'm fine.

CHARLES

No thank you, is what you say.

Ella removes a slice.

ELLA

I know this is a very hard time for you, Jamie, but I've always found that, even in a small way, there's nothing like a piece of chocolate cake to raise your spirits.

CHARLES

Or raise the needle on the scales.

Ella bursts out laughing, pointing the knife at Charles.

ELLA

One more word out of you and it's off with your head.

Jamie shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

CHARLES

What about a birthday song?

ELLA

No, darling. Jamie's probably had enough of us.

CHARLES

Come on, we'll sing one for him.

Jamie smiles nervously.

CHARLES

One, two, three...

He takes a deep breath.

CHARLES

(singing)

For he's a jolly good fellow, for
he's a jolly good fellow...

Ella beams even wider than usual, joining in.

CHARLES/ELLA

(singing)

...for he's a jolly good fellow...
which nobody can deny!

Jamie starts to shake, the fork in his hand quivering.

CHARLES/ELLA (CONT'D)

(singing)

Which nobody can deny! Which nobody
can deny!

JAMIE

Thank you...thank you, that
was...very nice.

And back to awkward silence.

ELLA

You sure you don't want any cake,
Jamie?

Jamie casts his eyes down, fidgeting.

JAMIE

No, no, thank you.

SUDDENLY - Charles EXPLODES, screaming at Jamie.

CHARLES
LOOK AT HER WHEN YOU TALK TO HER
YOU UNGRATEFUL LITTLE BASTARD!!

ELLA
Charlie, calm down.

CHARLES
No, I won't. This is the way it's
always been with him. All he does
is take.

Jamie pushes himself up from the table.

CHARLES (CONT'D)
All we've done since you got here
is make you feel welcome, but it's
never good enough.

JAMIE
Good enough for what? A hug and a
fucking apology?

He turns to Ella.

JAMIE (CONT'D)
Just to keep you up to date, Ella,
the last time I saw Charles here,
twelve long years ago, I was
squinting at him through a black
eye that he gave me.

CHARLES
Yes, it's easy to get sympathy with
only one side of the story.

Bile rises in Jamie's throat as years of frustration and hurt
erupts from within him.

JAMIE
I was a kid, dad. That's the whole
story, end of story.

CHARLES
I gave you everything and you still
fought me.

JAMIE
Toy cars don't mean shit when
you're locked in your room all day
listening to you hit mom.

CHARLES

How dare you say that in front of
my wife!

Ella can't take it anymore.

ELLA

Why can't we all just be a happy
family for one night on my
birthday?

JAMIE

Because of me, that's why. I'm the
ungrateful bastard. So I think I
should just go.

He storms out.

CHARLES

You come back here!

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Jamie storms out the front door, hurling his suitcase into
his car.

Ella comes after him, pleading.

ELLA

Jamie...

JAMIE

I'm leaving, Ella.

He jumps inside his car, starting it up.

ELLA

You can't leave, Jamie. I'm afraid
of what will happen if you leave.

He takes off, speeding down the driveway - and SLAMMING ON
THE BRAKES.

The front gate is PADLOCKED shut.

Jamie glances in his rearview - sees Boz approaching with a
garden stake.

Sweat pours down Jamie's forehead. He reverses the car up, as--

-- Boz breaks into a run.

Jamie throws the car into drive, STOMPING on the gas and BARRELING through the gates, SMASHING them down and fish-tailing into the night.

Charles is sitting at the upstairs window in his wheelchair. Staring down at the ruined gates.

There's something cold and detached about his look.

Boz slows down, giving up the chase. Ella appears next to him.

BOZ
I tried to stop him...I'm sorry.

ELLA
Mr Ashen would like to see you.

CUT TO:

EXT. 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

The motel's sign sways in the wind, creaking.

INT. LIPTON'S ROOM, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - SAME

This ain't the Hilton.

Lipton sits on his bed, examining Billy.

He sits the dummy on his lap, wedging his hand into the back of its head.

LIPTON
Hello there.

He takes a stab at a bit of amateur ventriloquism, doing his best to keep his lips from moving.

LIPTON
(as Billy)
Hello to you, detective. How are you tonight?

He's pretty bad at it.

LIPTON
Well, I'm just great.

RIIIINNNGGG!!

He jumps as the phone rings. Puts down the dummy and takes the call.

LIPTON
 Detective Lipton.
 (beat)
 I'll be right there.

EXT. LIPTON'S ROOM, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - MOMENTS LATER

Lipton leaves his door ajar, exiting his room and marching down towards the front office.

As he walks, he looks over and notices Henry's sister MARION, standing in the center of the parking lot. Silently watching.

INT. FRONT OFFICE, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

Lipton enters, approaching the counter.

LIPTON
 You got a fax for me?

The hotel manager hands Lipton an envelope. He opens it, flipping through the pages.

LIPTON
 This everything that came?

The hotel manager nods.

LIPTON
 You don't say much, do ya?

The hotel manager shakes his head.

EXT. LIPTON'S ROOM, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

Lipton walks back towards his room. As he gets closer, he notices something strange.

A VOICE is coming from within his room.

He tenses up the way a cop does. Edges towards the door, listening.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 Is that what you want?

A second voice answers - deeper, muffled.

VOICE (O.S.)
 I want what you have.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
 What? What is it?

VOICE (O.S.)

A family.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Don't you have one already?

VOICE (O.S.)

No.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S.)

Why not?

VOICE (O.S.)

It was taken from me.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Who took it?

Lipton reaches his door, pushing it open and peeking in.

INT. LIPTON'S ROOM, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

He sees MARION, sitting on his bed opposite BILLY THE DUMMY. Billy is sitting up, looking straight at Marion.

MARION

Who took it?

There is no answer forthcoming from the puppet.

MARION

Hey! Why aren't you talking anymore? Say something.

Lipton watches, confused, then opens the door fully. He steps towards Marion but she doesn't hear him.

LIPTON

Madam?

Marion turns around, fear in her eyes.

LIPTON (CONT'D)

What are you doing in here?

She points at the doll.

MARION

He talked to me. He won't shut up when no one else is around.

Lipton looks to the doll, then takes Marion by the arm.

LIPTON

Madam, I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

He guides her to the door, easing her outside. She wanders outside and then turns back.

MARION

She's in there with you.

LIPTON

Excuse me? Who's in where?

Marion is about to answer when she takes her dead raven out of her pocket, smiling at it.

MARION

Best bird I ever had.

Lipton nods.

LIPTON

Right. Good night, ma'am.

He closes the door.

INT. JAMIE'S CAR, MOVING - NIGHT

Jamie steers the car through black oblivion, pushing it to its limits.

Flying past the windows are the darkened streets of Ravens Fair.

Not a soul can be seen anywhere. The town is lonely...the wind its only tenant.

Jamie slows the car to a stop, his mania subsiding. He collapses onto the steering wheel as a clap of thunder roars its disapproval from the sky.

Finally he looks up, staring at something through the windshield, atop a hill on the town's highest ground.

The cemetery.

CUT TO:

INT. LIPTON'S ROOM, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

A frenzied symphony reaches its crescendo on a tinny radio in the corner.

Lipton fixes a pair of reading glasses to his face, scanning the fax papers he received.

What he DOESN'T SEE is the EYE of the ventriloquist's dummy move toward him.

Glaring at him.

Lipton glances over at the dummy.

Its eyes are facing front again.

Lipton goes back to the fax papers...and this time we see what he doesn't notice in his peripheral vision.

The dummies whole head TURNS TO FACE HIM.

Lipton looks up...but its not the dummy that has gotten his attention - its a sound.

A VOICE.

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)

Help me...please help me...

Lipton furrows his brow. Did he just hear something?

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)

...can you help me?

Lipton switches the radio off.

Listening.

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)

Please...

The voice is guttural, female.

Lipton follows the whisper - it's coming from behind a cabinet.

WHISPERED VOICE (O.S.)

...help.

Lipton snatches up his gun. Cocks it.

LIPTON

Who is that? Who's there?

He approaches the cabinet, heaving it aside --

-- and revealing a small wooden door, about waist-height.

He grabs a flashlight from the desk, crouching down.

He opens the crawlspace door.

Slowly.

Carefully.

He stares into the pitch-black square of darkness beyond the door.

LIPTON
Identify yourself.

He wriggles his way into the crawlspace.

INT. CRAWLSPACE, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

He lashes the flashlight in all directions.

Undefined objects clutter the space. Rotted, wooden pillars support the low-ceiling, running the entire length of the building.

LIPTON
Who's there?

Lipton crawls forth, his hands crunching in the gravel.

Suddenly --

-- the door shuts behind him!

Lipton rushes to it, smashing on it.

LIPTON
God damn it, this isn't funny!

He STOPS abruptly. Feels something behind him.

A presence.

He whirls around, aiming his flashlight into the inky void-- nothing moves but the shadows cast by its light.

He turns around again, jerking on the door.

As he does, the feeling looms behind him again. RISING.

He stops. Then spins around--

--COMING FACE-TO-FACE WITH THE GHOULISHLY PAINTED VISAGE OF MARY SHAW -- so close he can smell her rotten breath, her eyes burning like candle flames in open wounds.

He REELS back in fright, smashing into a pile of stacked up junk. The flashlight falls out of his hand, cutting out.

TOTAL BLACKNESS once again.

We hear Lipton clawing at the gravel. Terror in his voice.

LIPTON
Jesus fucking Christ!

For a moment, only the wooden beams around him reply, creaking under their own weight...

...until a sickening SNORT erupts - right next to Lipton.

He fires his gun -- each shot illuminating the nightmare vision of Mary Shaw...crawling toward him...unaffected by the gunfire.

Smiling.

Lipton's gun clicks empty and he SCREAMS!!

We hear the sound of his scream being CUT SHORT -- followed by the wet, throaty sound of his tongue being RIPPED OUT.

For a moment, all we hear is Lipton gurgling, sucking in short breaths. They decrease in volume as his life fades...and then we hear Mary Shaw.

She is whispering to Lipton -- IN HIS OWN VOICE.

MARY SHAW
(in Lipton's voice)
This is necessary.

Then silence.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Lightning casts long shadows across this field of the dead...

...and one living soul.

Jamie kneels over his wife's grave, head bowed.

The wind whistles through the trees. Jamie is truly alone.

RIIIINNGGG!!!

His cell phone startles him out of it. He fishes it out of his pocket. The call is from an UNKNOWN NUMBER.

He stabs the answer key.

JAMIE

Hello?

Electronic hiss replies...like breathing.

JAMIE

Hello?

A single word emerges from the white noise, like a cry for help in a snowstorm.

LIPTON'S VOICE (V.O.)

...Jamie...

The line is a bad one - static interrupting.

JAMIE

Detective?

The electronic hiss grows louder.

JAMIE

Detective, I can't hear you. You're breaking up.

Syllables pop in and out, all that Jamie can make out, and then--

LIPTON'S VOICE (V.O.)

...you're innocent...

Jamie gets to his feet. Stunned.

JAMIE

What did you say?

LIPTON'S VOICE (V.O.)

...the theater...go...theater
...now...it's...

The hiss drowns his words again.

JAMIE

Detective I'm losing you.
Detective? Detective?!

The line goes dead.

Jamie stares at the phone, speechless.

He turns and RUNS through the headstones towards his car.

INT. LIPTON'S ROOM, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

A bloodied hand spears out of the CRAWLSPACE door, grabbing at the carpet. It hauls a body forward - LIPTON'S body.

He gags, lurching forward on his hands and knees, clinging to life. He claws his way out of the crawlspace, towards the phone...

...until his body gives in and collapses under him.

Then--

--a light falls across his face as the door opens. Lipton's eyes widen in terror as a shadow falls across him.

An UNSEEN figure is entering his hotel room.

Lipton follows the figure with his eyes, blood seeping from within his mouth.

The UNSEEN intruder picks up the doll calmly, pausing to stand over Lipton.

He makes a noise, all that his tongueless mouth will allow; a throaty bark from deep within his gut. The last noise he will ever make.

And with that, the UNSEEN figure leaves, taking the doll.

The door closes.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Night has turned a sea of lush, fall color into a black forest.

Then - -

-- a pair of headlights spear along the road that winds through the trees.

From high above, the car is just an insect, DWARFED by the royal pines around it.

EXT. ROADSIDE - SAME

Jamie climbs out of his car, scanning around.

There are no other cars or signs of life.

EXT. LAKE SHORE - MOMENTS LATER

Twigs crunch underfoot as Jamie steps out onto the lake.

A thick MIST hangs over the water like a vaporous blanket, obscuring any view of the island at its center.

Next to the boat, an old gas lantern hangs on a post, the flame inside flickering. Jamie takes it and steps into the boat.

He pushes off from the jetty. The mist envelopes him.

As he rows towards the theater, the soft glow of the lantern floating through the thick fog is all that we can make out.

EXT. GUIGNOL THEATER - NIGHT

The theater. It looms against the black sky, daring brave souls to enter it.

One such soul steps up to it - Jamie. He clammers out of the boat, gawking up at the building.

He leans into the open door.

JAMIE

Detective?

His query echoes throughout the theater...and then is answered by a distant voice.

LIPTON'S VOICE (O.S.)

Inside.

Jamie hesitates, then pushes the door open.

INT. GUIGNOL THEATER - NIGHT

By day, this theater is dim...by night, it is an impenetrable fortress of darkness.

Jamie gropes down the aisle, exploring the auditorium with the lantern held out in front of him.

JAMIE

Detective?

No answer.

He peers up into the lights. The door to Mary's living quarters swings open.

Jamie ascends the ladder which leads up to it.

Cautious, he begins to pace across the catwalk that runs to Mary's living quarters. He stops halfway across.

JAMIE
Detective?

Again, there is no answer.

INT. MARY'S LIVING AREA, GUIGNOL THEATER - NIGHT

Jamie edges into Mary's meager lodgings.

The room is empty.

JAMIE
Lipton, where are you?

He holds up the lantern, swinging it around --

-- as someone's HAND COVERS HIS MOUTH!

Audrey is standing in FRONT OF HIM, pointing a long, double-barreled shotgun at him with one hand and smothering his mouth with the other.

AUDREY
Shhh...if you know what's good for you, you'll be very, very quiet.

She raises the gun, whispering to him.

AUDREY (CONT'D)
I told you not to come in here. We all did. You wouldn't listen though, would you?

JAMIE
Hold on a minute...

AUDREY
I saw you take that boat. You think it's the only one I got?

JAMIE
Put the gun down, please.

AUDREY

You don't know what you've done,
boy. Coming in here. Disturbing the
place.

JAMIE

I'm sorry, I --

AUDREY

What is it you're hoping to find?

JAMIE

Detective Lipton called me, he told
me to meet him here.

AUDREY

Bullshit.

Audrey edges forward, gun trained.

JAMIE

Detective Lipton is in here
somewhere, I swear it.

AUDREY

There ain't no one here but you.

JAMIE

I heard him.

AUDREY

Well, then where is he?

LIPTON'S VOICE (O.S.)

Right in front of you.

They both WHIRL when they hear the voice.

It did indeed come from right in front of them...but there is
no one there - just a wall.

AUDREY

Who is that? Get out of there!

JAMIE

Wait...

Jamie steps forward, holding the lantern out in front of him.

Audrey stops breathing, cocking the shotgun.

Jamie reaches the wall, examining it with the lantern.

He looks back at Audrey, then holds out his arm --

-- and instead of hitting the wall, his arm extends THROUGH it.

That's because it is not a wall at all, but a HIDDEN DOOR, disguised by the patterns of the wood.

AUDREY

Good God...

Jamie disappears through the hidden door. Audrey takes a flashlight out of her pocket and follows him through it.

INT. THE DOLL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Foul air hits them as they step into an adjoining room.

They step forward -- straight into a sheet of cobwebs.

Jamie swats at it, clearly not a fan of spiders. They claw the webbing away, revealing a better view of the chamber.

It is long and narrow, with ratty DRAPES covering shelving that lines the walls on either side of them.

A single beam of moonlight leaks though a small window on the wall facing them.

JAMIE

Detective?

Audrey swathes the tenebrous cavern with her flashlight.

Neither of them dares breathe.

Finally, Jamie sizes up the TAUT CLOTH which covers up one side of the dust-choked dungeon.

He approaches it, careful.

Picks up one corner of it.

Audrey's heart is in her throat.

Jamie RIPS the curtain away...

...revealing a large, GLASS-FRONTED CABINET. Behind the glass, all perched on shelves in neat rows like obedient children, are DOZENS UPON DOZENS OF VENTRILOQUIST DUMMIES.

All of them wearing the exact same tuxedo BILLY wears.

The flashlight gives each wooden face a moment in the spotlight. All those sets of eyes...all STARING EERILY at Audrey and Jamie.

Jamie finally turns to face the cloth on the opposite side of the room. There appears to be someone or something under it.

Jamie looks back at Audrey, who grips her shotgun. Jamie tears the sheet away.

Audrey stifles a gasp.

Instead of more wooden dolls, Audrey's flashlight finds a hideously atrophied HUMAN BODY - slumped over, its head bowed forward.

Like all the other dummies, the body is dressed exactly like Billy.

Audrey steps in close to the body, examining the hardened, leathery flesh of its face. She bends down, trying to get a better view.

AUDREY

This body has been preserved...
like a hunting trophy.

Wires are coiled around the bodies chest, neck and wrists. The wires run up to the ceiling, strung over wooden beams. They dangle down in front of Jamie, tied to blocks of wood.

He grips one of the four wooden handles, pulling down on the wire.

The bodies head SNAPS upwards!! Audrey recoils in SHOCK.

The wire has acted like a pulley, lifting the bodies head to reveal a YOUNG BOY - his features drooping like melted wax, his mouth elongated into a permanent smile that belies his dead, unblinking eyes.

It is the disbelieving RED-HEADED boy we met in Henry's flashback...once alive, now just EMBALMED FLESH, filled with sawdust.

Jamie pulls down on another of the wires and the boys hand is lifted.

He is a HUMAN PUPPET.

Jamie lets go of the wires, repulsed -- realizing he has been operating the boy like a marionette.

The walls behind the boy are plastered with damp, faded newspaper articles. Headlines scream out at them: MISSING CHILD, SEARCH FOR CHILD GROWS DESPERATE, RAVEN'S FAIR MYSTERY.

AUDREY

I think we just solved a sixty year old mystery.

They stare at the boy, transfixed...

...but there is something they don't see.

Behind them, one of the dummies in the cabinet MOVES. It's eyes turn slightly. Creaking.

Jamie whirls around and snaps the lantern onto it.

AUDREY

This boy--

JAMIE

Wait.

Then:

The dummies whole head moves.

It pivots to the right with a click, as if staring off at something.

Another head follows...then another...then another. Like a SPREADING WAVE, every one of the devilish dolls swivels its head to the right, all FOCUSING on something at the end of the room.

Terrified, Jamie and Audrey follow the many sets of eyes to what they are all looking at: a FIGURE, sagging in a rocking chair in the corner.

Another ventriloquist dummy.

At first it does nothing...then its jaw moves, ever so slightly. Emits two hoarse, whispered words, in the voice of LIPTON.

THE DUMMY

(in Lipton's voice)

Found me.

Jamie and Audrey stand before the ghoulish gallery.

AUDREY

Mary Shaw...

The doll's eyes turn to Audrey. It's voice becomes a dread-filled rasp.

THE DUMMY

Cleyer.

Audrey looks back at the corpse of the young boy.

AUDREY

You killed that boy...

THE DUMMY

No. I gave him a new voice.

FLASHCUT TO:

INT. DOLL ROOM - NIGHT -- FLASHBACK

The red-headed boy is slumped on Mary Shaw's lap - the dead and mummified version of the boy we have just seen.

Mary strokes his hair.

MARY SHAW

Don't I treat you well, Billy?

Mary then provides the VOICE of the boy - as she would a ventriloquist dummy.

MARY SHAW

(in the voice of the boy)

Yes, mother. The best I could ever hope for.

FLASHCUT TO:

INT. DOLL ROOM - NIGHT -- PRESENT

Audrey and Jamie are horrified by what they are hearing.

AUDREY

Why have you come back? Why after all these years?

THE DUMMY

So hard to find the perfect child.

(beat)

Sometimes you have to make one.

Jamie's chest heaves, unable to believe what he is hearing.

JAMIE

What happened to Lisa?

The dummy seems to be revelling in Jamie's pain. Grinning.

THE DUMMY

I took her tongue.

JAMIE

Why? Why her? Why would you take her?!

THE DUMMY

I did it to bring you back.

JAMIE

What do you want with me?

THE DUMMY

Come closer and I'll tell you.

Jamie takes a step toward the grotesque puppet. Audrey reaches out to grab him but he shakes free.

THE DUMMY

Closer.

He takes another step.

THE DUMMY

I'll whisper it to you.

Jamie leans down, near enough to touch the dummy.

Time stops.

Then--

THE DUMMY

It's time to make another perfect child.

As the dummy whispers these words, A LONG FLESHY TONGUE POURS FROM THE ITS MOUTH, licking Jamie's face! He REELS BACK, as the doll's cackling rings out.

SUDDENLY--

A bone-white hand, covered in dead flesh, clasps the side of the dummies head from behind, followed by another hand on the other side of the dummies head.

Someone is crouching BEHIND the dummy. The new figure begins to rise.

It is **MARY SHAW**.

She holds the dummy up in front of her, hiding her face, her tongue writhing through the back of the its head and projecting out of its mouth, lolling and flicking at them.

The tongue is made from SEVERAL OTHER TONGUES -- ALL MELDED TOGETHER TO FORM ONE SERPENTINE APPENDAGE THAT STRETCHES AT LEAST A FOOT IN LENGTH.

Jamie SCRAMBLES back as Mary advances.

Audrey FIRES the shotgun, hitting the dummy and BLOWING IT BACKWARDS THROUGH THE WINDOW!

Mary Shaw SCREAMS - and vaporizes into THIN AIR.

One of the dummies in the cabinet turns its head to face Jamie and Audrey.

It begins to LAUGH, filling the chamber with a NERVE-SHATTERING chorus of sadistic pleasure.

From WITHIN THE DUMMY, a ghostly APPARITION begins OOZING out of the eye-sockets, forming Mary Shaw's face.

BOOM! - Audrey fires another shot - SHATTERING the glass and destroying the dummy before Mary's spirit can fully form.

Mary rips out another inhuman SCREAM.

Audrey fumbles through her pocket for more shells.

A third dummy turns its head, and Mary ONCE AGAIN starts to SLITHER out.

Jamie watches this, realization crashing down on him.

JAMIE
Destroy all the dolls!

He seizes the gas lantern and heaves it at the cabinet. The lantern smashes and the shelves IGNITE.

Mary WAILS in pain.

The whole cabinet is ablaze.

Jamie yanks Audrey towards the doorway.

Behind them, the body of the YOUNG BOY begins to move. His head lifts, turning towards them, his arms reaching out as a SHAPE begins to LEAK from within him.

Stumbling, Audrey and Jamie retreat into --

INT. MARY'S LIVING AREA - CONTINUOUS

-- Mary's living quarters, and then --

INT. PASSAGEWAY, GUIGNOL THEATER - CONTINUOUS

-- down the corridor that leads to her quarters, stumbling out onto --

INT. BACKSTAGE, GUIGNOL THEATER - CONTINUOUS

-- the catwalk. It trembles under their feet.

They walk backwards, eyes LOCKED on the door to Mary's living area.

Mary appears in the doorway - as calm as a python - ADVANCING towards them down the passageway. She flicks her tongue at them, menacing.

Jamie and Audrey back up as she glides out onto the catwalk.

MARY SHAW
(in Lipton's voice)
I can make you scream.

She STOMPS down on the metal grill beneath her feet, and the force is enough to DISLodge the catwalk. It pitches downwards, Jamie and Audrey PLUNGING off it --

Jamie SNATCHES a curtain rope with one arm as he falls.

Audrey isn't so lucky. She SCREAMS as she flails in the air -- and that's when it happens.

Her tongue begins to separate from her throat MID-SCREAM. It LAUNCHES from her mouth in a geyser of blood, Mary Shaw collecting it from the air between them and SLURPING it down like a large, tasty slug.

JAMIE
Audrey!

Audrey's body smashes to the stage below, bones cracking.

Jamie dangles high above the stage, his force swinging the rope wildly from side to side.

He looks down, seeing a halo of blood spreading around Audrey's body.

He goes for broke -- letting go of the rope as he reaches the curtain, grabbing the red velvet and sliding down, landing so hard on the stage that he CRASHES THROUGH IT --

INT. PROP STORAGE ROOM, BELOW STAGE - CONTINUOUS

-- and lands in a body of water.

He surfaces, gagging and coughing, whipping his head around and being greeted by A CLOWN FACE.

He is treading water in some kind of STORAGE ROOM for stage props - long since FLOODED.

He ducks under the water, lunging forward and spear-swimming through MANNEQUINS, COSTUME RACKS, GARISH MASKS and more - memoirs of a glorious past, now left to drown in a basement.

He reaches a sluice gate, which spills out into --

EXT. LAKE - NIGHT

-- the lake.

Jamie pitches headfirst into the murky moat.

He resurfaces, gasping, and begins kicking for the shore.

Halfway across he stops, lost in the fog. He whips a look around. Doesn't know which way to swim. Below him --

-- UNDER THE WATER --

-- a dummy floats like a corpse in the current - the very one Audrey had blown out of the window with the shotgun.

A HAND begins to claw its way from within the dummies face.

ON THE SURFACE

Jamie kicks forward - NOT SEEING the body of Mary Shaw FORMING underneath him.

Her head breaks the surface, RISING like a leviathan.

Her shoulders clear the water - until she stands on the surface, gliding gracefully across the water.

Headed straight for Jamie.

His heart skips a beat as he sees her. He kicks and splutters, surging forward, struggling to move.

Mary is closer now, arms OUTSTRETCHED.

Desperate, he takes one last dive --

-- and lands on hard ground.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

He claws himself out of the mud, standing up and running forward...branches lashing his face...blood stinging his eyes.

He stumbles out onto the road, seeing his car up ahead.

He sprints to it, flinging open the door and jumping in. He slots his key into the ignition.

The engine screeches in protest.

JAMIE

Come on, come on!

The car roars to life.

He stomps on the gas and is gone.

INT. JAMIE'S CAR, MOVING - NIGHT

Jamie checks his face in the mirror - sweat and blood trickle down his forehead.

Something has CHANGED about him - his eyes look wild. Once he was on the edge - now he's over it.

He accelerates, the trees whipping past him on either side of the lost highway, taking him somewhere, anywhere, away from here.

EXT. 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - NIGHT

A storm is brewing.

Jamie's car screeches to a halt outside Lipton's room.

He leaps out, charging up to Lipton's door.

He pushes on it. It is already open.

INT. LIPTON'S ROOM, 'COME ON INN' MOTEL - CONTINUOUS

Jamie maneuvers inside the room, careful.

He treads forward.

And then he sees it --

-- a river of blood tracks through the room, leading from the crawlspace door into the bathroom.

Jamie prods the bathroom door open.

Lipton is there, TWISTED on the floor - his face grossly contorted. His tongue MISSING.

Jamie starts tossing the place, ransacking drawers and anything else in his path. Then--

-- his eyes land on something and he stops.

Sheets of paper on the ground. Police records.

A mug-shot of Boz glares up at Jamie, his fingerprints laid out beneath it.

Jamie plucks the papers up.

As he reads a cover letter from the fax Lipton received, we see the keywords hitting him like darts: *The fingerprints found on the axe you turned in match those of Michael 'Boz' Bosley.*

On a separate line: *'There is a second set of unidentified fingerprints.'*

Jamie looks up from the papers.

JAMIE

Boz...

He spots Lipton's gun on the ground near the crawlspace entrance and snatches it up.

He scours around, locating a spare clip of bullets. He takes it, jamming it awkwardly into the gun...

...and is on the move again.

CUT TO:

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Home sweet home.

Jamie peers through the gates, which swing in the breeze, the oil-starved hinges moaning.

He heaves them open, stepping onto the grounds of the house. The fog curls up around his legs like tentacles.

Thunder cracks in the distance, lightning blinking and illuminating the house.

He moves toward the garden shed, which is lit from within.

He swallows and cocks the gun.

INT. GARDEN SHED, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Jamie swings open the door.

The shed is empty, a lantern creaking as it swings in the wind.

Breathing hard, Jamie explores the shed.

On the wall, there is a rack of tools, held in place by nails. A hammer, pliers, a set of garden shears...and a space where an AXE should be.

BOZ'S VOICE (O.S.)

Warm...

Jamie WHEELS on the voice.

It came from outside the shed.

EXT. ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

Jamie edges outside, surveying the dark garden.

Not a soul in sight.

BOZ'S VOICE (O.S.)

Warmer...

Jamie hones in on the voice - it is coming from directly ahead, amongst the trees.

He takes a tentative step toward it, knee-deep in fog.

The shadow of a figure begins to take shape in front of him.

Jamie stops moving and aims the gun, his hand trembling.

JAMIE

I can see you there, Boz.

No response.

An agonizing beat...then Jamie steps forward again --

-- AS BOZ SITS BOLT UPRIGHT OUT OF THE FOG, HIS TONGUE MISSING!

He gags, spitting blood and gripping his throat. He GRABS Jamie's foot, eyes pleading.

We hear the sound of disembodied laughter swirl around Jamie, receding into the distance like a WAKING DREAM.

Jamie bends down, trying to help Boz.

JAMIE

No! No!

Boz sags in Jamie's arms as he sucks in his last breaths.

He is gone.

Jamie fights' tears -- more of anger than anything else.

He looks up at the house...

...clenching his teeth and fists.

INT. FRONT DOOR, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

The front door lumbers open arthritically.

Jamie steps inside.

The sole sound comes from a distant clock.

Jamie edges forward, holding the gun out before him.

INT. STAIRWELL/UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT

He climbs the stairs, every creaking floorboard a thunderclap in the dead quiet.

At the top of the stairs, a mouth of darkness beckons him to become its food - the hallway.

Intermittent pools of light are cast by the wall-mounted lamps, receding down the hall.

He creeps forward.

Tick, tick, tick. The grandfather clock ahead of him goes about its business.

There is no other sound...

...then CRUNCH.

Jamie looks down.

He lifts his foot, the slime of a dead cockroach stretching up from the floor. Several other cockroaches crawl up his legs.

He swallows his disgust, flicking the insects away.

Another cockroach skitters from underneath a door, then another.

They are coming from Jamie's bedroom.

INT. JAMIE'S BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The door whines open. Jamie fumbles inside.

He surveys the room, his eyes panning across the white sheets which are draped over the furniture in the room.

A cockroach appears from under one of the white sheets.

Jamie moves towards it, SEIZING the WHITE SHEET and ripping it away --

-- revealing an old, wooden diaper changing table. A leather bound book sits on top of it.

Jamie picks up the book, flipping it open.

A lock of hair is taped to the front page.

On the next page, an ultrasound photo. Then a tiny footprint.

Jamie reads the words written on the front.

JAMIE
 (reading from book)
 In memory of Ella and Charles'
 Ashen's daughter...twelfth of
 August, 2005.

He runs his fingers over the diaper changing table.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

She lost a baby...

Jamie sets the book down and tears one of the other white sheets away --

-- to unveil a crib, complete with hanging baby toys, dangling above it like circling vultures.

He peers into the crib.

A huge pack of cockroaches scatter around the soiled sheets in it, crawling over each other.

In the center of the swarm is a jar, filled with a yellowing liquid.

Jamie shudders with revulsion as he sees what is in the jar - IT IS A FOETUS. Curled into a ball and shriveled.

THEN--

A noise. It's coming from outside the room.

He snaps his head around.

It is the sound of someone sobbing.

INT. UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR, ASHEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

He steps out of the bedroom, stalking down the hall.

The whimpering sobs drift towards him from out of the darkness up ahead.

Jamie advances.

A light spilling from underneath a door at the end of the hall comes into focus.

It is the door to the master bedroom.

He approaches it, the crying getting louder as he does.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

And in the dark, dark house...there was a dark, dark room.

The door creaks open.

Jamie slips inside.

He glances around the huge, sparsely furnished room...

...past a four-poster bed, shielded by a sheer lace curtain...past a FIREPLACE, its flames giving off the only light...to a tall, free-standing closet.

The sobbing interrupts him again.

It is coming from within the closet.

The closet doors open a fraction, a thin blade of darkness separating them.

Jamie plays statues, staring at the closet. We can hear his heart beat.

He treads towards the closet...

...closer...

...closer...

...standing in front of it. He grips the gun tightly.

Takes a deep breath --

-- and throws open the doors.

The chime of coat-hangers greets him.

A face grins up at him from the back of the closet.

BILLY.

The sobbing melts into laughter - a slow burning cackle.

JAMIE FREEZES as he realizes the LAUGHTER is coming from BEHIND him.

That's when a mirror mounted on the inside of the door shows him a terrifying vision.

In the reflection, MARY SHAW IS STANDING RIGHT BEHIND HIM!!!

GRINNING.

He whips around to face her.

She SNARLS at him, her tongue worming across her chest like a blood soaked eel.

MARY SHAW
(in Lisa's voice)
I can make you scream.

JAMIE

No. You don't scare me.

Jamie snatches up BILLY, the dummy.

Mary HISSES at him.

JAMIE

I think you're a bit too old to be playing with dolls.

Mary CHARGES at him, arms outstretched --

-- as Jamie HURLS the dummy into the fireplace.

The flames CONSUME the doll, the paint on its face bubbling and melting as it is scorched.

Mary lets out a SHRIEK heard in hell, her body writhing in agony...

...and then she is gone. Her scream fades.

Jamie sags into the corner, EXHAUSTED with fear.

His breath subsides and he closes his eyes.

He finally opens them, looking around the room.

There is no sign of Mary. The only sound is the crackle of burning wood.

Jamie's eyes land on a figure in the corner.

It is his father.

Sitting upright in his wheelchair, he faces Jamie with the stolid expression of a coma patient, hidden in shadows.

Jamie gets up. Slow. Locked on his father.

JAMIE

Dad...

No answer is forthcoming. Jamie steps closer to him.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Dad?

He steps closer again, reaching his father.

Jamie CLUTCHES Charles by the shoulder - JOSTLING him.

JAMIE (CONT'D)

Dad?!

And then it happens.

Charles flops forward in his wheelchair.

Jamie STOPS DEAD. Cannot comprehend what he is seeing.

ALL OF THE MEAT HAS BEEN STRIPPED AWAY FROM CHARLES' BACK. INSTEAD OF AN EXPOSED SPINE, THE FLESH HAS BEEN EMBALMED, STITCHED TOGETHER AND STUFFED...LIKE A DOLL.

Jamie's mind does cartwheels as we FLASH BACK:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

We have returned to an earlier scene, where Jamie first reunited with his father.

As Jamie stands and dismisses the pleasantries, we ROTATE around to view the scene from BEHIND Charles and Ella.

From here, we see Ella operating Charles like a puppet. As he talks, we ZERO IN to see that it is Ella's throat moving, providing Charles' carcass with a voice.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

We are back at the dinner table with the Ashen's, with Ella spoon-feeding Charles at the head of the table.

ELLA

Isn't this wonderful? All of us eating dinner here together?

As she says this, we ROTATE around her - seeing that the gruel she is shovelling into Charles' mouth is not being consumed --- but DRIPPING out of a hole in the back of his head like a leaking pipe.

CUT TO:

INT. JAMIE'S APARTMENT - DAY - FLASHBACK

Back to the beginning.

The phone rings and Jamie lets it go to the answering machine.

CHARLES (V.O.)

Hello, Jamie.

INT. LIVING ROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - DAY - FLASHBACK

Ella is on the other end of the phone, speaking in the voice of Charles.

ELLA

(as Charles)

I only want to say two things.
Please allow me to do so.

CUT TO:

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT

Jamie reels back from his father's solidified body, stunned.

A shadow FLATS across the wall behind him and he whips around. There is a presence in the room. Jamie follows it with his eyes until his gaze lands on a figure, lying on the bed beyond the lace curtain.

We see the shadow fall into the figure, which then sucks in a huge breath, sitting up.

It is Ella. She is smiling at Jamie. A motherly smile.

She climbs out of the bed, walking towards Jamie.

ELLA

You don't have to be afraid of him.
He can't hurt you anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A SPOTLIGHT illuminates Ella, looking very pregnant.

We are seeing this in the same style in which we saw the Mary Shaw poem in the opening scene.

As in Mary's story, a man steps into the light and begins attacking the pregnant woman - though this time it is CHARLES striking Ella.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT

SLOW MOTION: Jamie backs away from Ella, shocked.

He turns and runs, bursting through into --

INT. UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR, ASHEN HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- the corridor.

SLOW MOTION: As he runs, we hear Ella's voice-over running over a series of images which MIRROR Mary's story in the opening scene - all played out in the harsh beam of a spotlight.

ELLA (V.O.)

He hurt a woman named Ella once,
and she lost her baby.

CUT TO:

INT. NURSERY, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

We are in Jamie's bedroom -- only now it looks more like a nursery.

Ella is curled in a ball in the corner, weeping, clutching a child's doll.

ELLA (V.O.)

After that, she went a little
mad...and started hearing my voice.

CUT TO:

INT. GARDEN SHED, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Ella takes an axe from the wall of Boz's shed.

ELLA (V.O.)

My voice calling out to her...

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S LIVING AREA, GUIGNOL THEATRE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Ella swings the axe, smashing the lock on the trunk which contains the ventriloquist doll.

ELLA (V.O.)

...telling her that it could give
her the one thing she wanted more
than anything...

INT. STAIRCASE, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT

SLOW MOTION: Jamie runs down the stairs.

ELLA (V.O.)
...a family.

INT. NURSERY, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Ella stands above the crib, cradling Billy in her arms.

We see an APPARITION rise from within Billy - ENTERING Ella's body through every orifice in her face...

...POSSESSING HER.

ELLA (V.O CONT'D)
Now Ella is no more.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Charles shaves with a straight razor.

Charles spins around to see Mary Shaw. He SCREAMS - his tongue EJECTING from his mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. ENTRANCE HALL, ASHEN HOUSE - NIGHT - PRESENT

Jamie reaches the front door, desperate.

ELLA (V.O.)
The murder of your wife brought you
back here to this house...

Jamie suddenly FREEZES.

He turns slowly to his right, staring off into the living room. Pure HORROR spreads across his face - whatever he is looking at, it must be a vision of Hell.

ELLA (V.O.)
...but now I need you to be the
perfect child. For a perfect
family.

We see what Jamie is looking at.

IT IS LISA.

Her decomposed CORPSE is sitting up on a chair. Rotting dress clinging to her body. Flesh shrivelled and pale. Mouth gaping open.

Jamie SCREAMS - a primeval cry from somewhere in the abyss.
 WE CLOSE IN on his mouth until it swallows us whole...
 ...plunging us into darkness.

We hear Jamie's scream being CUT SHORT by a FLESHY, WET,
 RIPPING SOUND, followed by THROATY GURGLING.

And then nothing.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

We are back where we began.

Two figures, hidden in shadow.

A mother reading to her son before bed, by candle light.

WOMAN

...but should you ever see her,
 and your knees go weak,
 and you forget,
 to hold in your shriek,
 remember these words,
 that I have sung -
 it won't be the cat,
 that's got your tongue.

This time, we move in close enough to see that the woman on
 the edge of the bed is ELLA.

BOY (O.S.)

So what do I do if Mary Shaw comes
 to visit me?

Ella laughs. She's enjoying this.

ELLA

There's only one thing that can
 stop her.

She picks up the candle beside the bed, leaning a little
 closer to the boy...

...who we now see is not a boy, but--

-- JAMIE.

He lies still on the bed. Eyes open. Unblinking.

A young man, once alive, now just EMBALMED FLESH filled with sawdust.

A HUMAN DOLL.

Through Ella's ventriloquism, a voice seems to escape his cold, dead, tongueless mouth.

ELLA
(in Jamie's voice)
What's that, mother?

Ella whispers for emphasis.

ELLA
Silence...

And with one breath, she blows out the candle...

...plunging us into darkness.

FADE OUT.