Mausoleum

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Mausoleum

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Film and Media Studies from William & Mary

by

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Accepted for Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Williamsburg, VA
December 10, 2021
Mausoleum - pilot

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INT. JAMIE’S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bedroom is a clash of childhood and pre-teen angst. Its walls are covered in boyband posters ripped out of magazines but they’re lit by star shapes from the revolving nightlight on the bedside table.

A YOUNG JAMIE (11) sleeps on the bed. She shifts fitfully, her face slightly contorted, obviously having a bad dream.

As young Jamie gets more and more restless, the shadows that the nightlight don’t reach seem to gain more ground. They bleed in from the corners of her room towards the bed, the nightlight doing little to hold them back any longer. The boys on her posters’ faces erase into murky blobs as the shadows reach them.

Just when the shadows look like they are going to touch the edges of her bed, Jamie bolts upright with a SCREAM.

The shadows quickly retreat. The nightlight once again glows against the posters with the perfectly human, teenage boys on them.

She continues SCREAMING as she frantically looks around the room, her eyes lingering on the shadowy corners.

Through the crack under her door, the hallway light starts to filter in and rapid footsteps approach from the hall.

Jamie is still SCREAMING when the door is thrown open and her MOTHER hurries inside.

She quickly rushes to her and sits on one side of her bed.

MOTHER
Shh shh. It’s ok. It’s ok.

Slowly, Jamie’s screams turn into quiet sobs. Her mother brushes away the tears with her thumbs.

FATHER
What happened, J?

Jamie looks at her with frantic eyes. When she tries to speak her words are broken by hiccuped sobs and she has to stop and start again.

YOUNG JAMIE
I- I’m ok. There was this- this thing and--

She suddenly gasps and jolts. Her eyes dart around frantically.
Her mother gently pushes her shoulders down. When she speaks it’s like she’s trying not to spook a wild animal.

**MOTHER**
Hey, it’s ok. Alex is out with Hazel tonight, remember? She’s ok.

Jamie’s shoulders relax slightly and when she speaks next it’s like she’s trying to reassure herself.

**YOUNG JAMIE (CONT’D)**
I’m ok. I- I just... it was a bad dream. It was just a dream?

Her mother moves the hand that had been resting on Jamie’s shoulder down to rub her back.

**MOTHER**
Do you want to talk about it?

Jamie stays silent and doesn’t look at her mother.

Her **FATHER** appears in the light of the doorway.

**FATHER**
Everything ok?

Her mother looks towards the door and speaks softly to her husband.

**MOTHER (CONT’D)**
Why don’t you go back to bed? I got this.

**FATHER**
Ok... Get some sleep, J. It’ll all be ok in the morning.

Once he leaves, her mother turns back to Jamie, who has moved to lie back down already. Her back is to her mother.

**MOTHER**
You know, I used to get really bad nightmares, too.

She looks at Jamie’s figure, waiting to see if she’ll turn back towards her before she continues.
MOTHER (CONT’D)
When I was really young and I had them, my mom used to tell me this story. As I got older and I kept having them, and even though I said I was too old for stories, she kept telling it to me... Now I don’t think I could forget it if I tried and sometimes when I get nightmares, I still tell it to myself.

Jamie wiggles a bit and pulls the blanket higher on her shoulder. She still doesn’t turn around.

MOTHER (CONT’D)
The story goes, “once upon a time, there was a girl who lived in a cave. It wasn’t a dark, damp cave. No, this cave was warm and bright. The girl would burn a fire all day and night, that way there was no where for the shadows to build a home. That way they couldn’t get to her.

Jamie looks over her shoulder briefly but doesn’t turn around.

MOTHER (CONT’D)
When she fell asleep, though, the girl couldn’t protect her fire. One night, the wind came into the cave and blew the light out. The girl woke up in the cold, dark cave alone and ran to the mouth, where the sunlight shone through. The shadows couldn’t get her there.

Slowly, Jamie rolls back over and faces her mother. Her mother never stops telling the story.

MOTHER (CONT’D)
She tried to reach out for the sun, to collect some of its light and safety in her hands. How was she supposed to face the darkness alone? She tried and she tried but the sun stayed in the sky and the light in her hands faded as she descended into the darkness. Finally, the girl realized that the only way to relight her fire was to go into the darkness.” The end.
Jamie looks up at her mother expectantly and scoffs.

JAMIE
That’s it? What happened to the girl when she went into the darkness?

MOTHER
I asked grandma the same question when I first heard it.

She hesitates for a moment before speaking again, her eyes look off into the distance.

MOTHER (CONT’D)
I think... I think that the girl went back into the cave. She felt along the wall in the inky blackness, stumbling along until she found the remains of her fire. She heard noises in the darkness--claws on stone, low growling, deep laughter. The girl fumbled and failed until she finally made a spark and the fire relit. Once the light was back she saw that she was alone in the cave, but she still heard the noises. The girl realized that the monsters were all around her, even in the light.

Jamie looks up at her mother somewhere between confused and terrified.

YOUNG JAMIE
(hesitantly)
Mom?

Her mother blinks once. Twice. Then she laughs as she shakes her head.

MOTHER
I must be more tired than I thought. Sorry, sweetie. Next time, I’ll leave the bedtime stories to Alex.

She leans down, places a kiss on Jamie’s forehead, and pulls the blanket up higher before she turns to leave.

She steps into the hall and sticks her head in the half closed door.

MOTHER (CONT’D)
Get some sleep. It’ll all be ok.
Jamie’s mother flicks off the light and closes the door.

Jamie is alone in the almost darkness once again.

The nightlight still cast dimly lit stars on the wall and as Jamie closes her eyes, the shadows start to move again.

EXT. CHILDHOOD HOME - CONTINUOUS

Outside the house, all is quiet. The front yard and the wildlife all sleep soundly. The stars are faintly shining.

The house itself is old and brown. It’s looming and looks likely haunted-- a large bay window and lots of harsh lines. It almost looks like a typical San Francisco home’s moody teenage cousin. Beyond the house, somewhere in the backyard, there is an outline of a dock against a lake.

From the front yard, we can see the hallway light on from a window on the second floor and another light on the same level from the parents bedroom.

The hall light goes off first. Then the bedroom light a moment later.

All is quiet once again and the night seems to settle back into place.

Suddenly a loud, female SCREAM comes from the house, breaking the silence.

The second wave of the same woman’s scream is cut off half way through and silence settles once again. It’s almost as if nothing happened.

[[end of teaser]]

BEGIN OPENING TITLES

MONTAGE OF HOUSE OVER THE YEARS: quick sequence of the house’s exterior over days and nights-- the porch being repaired, the shudders slowly decaying until one falls off, the tower on one side of the house slowly loosing shingles.

The montage ends by walking up the steps and to the front door.

The front door is made of an old oak and has two small stained glass windows. The panels depict the story of Icarus-- the one on the left shows a male figure with wings flying towards the top of the frame, a few feathers float down to the bottom of the panel. The one on the right is a clear sky with a large sun slightly above the winged figure of its neighbor.
INT. FOYER—DAY

The entryway of the house is empty but well lit—the sunlight streaming in from the stained glass on the door casts colorful beams of light on the floor.

The lighting overall, however, is just slightly “off,” like a photo that was just a touch overexposed. If someone were to look closely, they can tell that it isn’t natural but the difference isn’t glaringly obvious. This effect will be present in Alex’s narrative until otherwise noted.

ALEX (O.S.)

Noah?

To the right of the front door is a set of stairs, directly across from the door is a hallway, and to the left the entrance to the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM—CONTINUOUS

To the left of the foyer, the living room is also empty and bathed in sunlight.

Through the connecting doorway, the kitchen seems to be deserted as well.

ALEX (O.S.)

Hazel?

Through the doorway between the foyer and the living room, ALEX (late-20s), with her shoes on, keys in hand, and her purse on her shoulder, walks down the stairs to the right of the front door.

At the bottom of the stairs, she stops and looks into the living room. Then she looks right, down the hall.

Alex continues to call out.

ALEX

Charlie?

She walks past the living room entrance and towards the hall.
INT. KITCHEN—CONTINUOUS

Alex enters the kitchen from a doorway in the hall and flicks on the lights.

She sets her keys and purse down on the island before turning to the living room door and scanning the area again.

ALEX
Hello?... Anyone?

After confirming that there seems to be no one home, she walks around the island and to the fridge. There’s a note stuck to the front with an oversized fruit magnet.

The grocery list has four different handwritings and gets more chaotic the closer it gets to the bottom of the page: “Milk, bread, eggs” are written neatly on the lines at the top, but “avocados” is written at an angle and half covered by a green smudge and “coffee” is written vertically on the margin in huge, Led Zeppelin letters with a crying face below it.

A slightly crumpled pink post it note is attached to the bottom of the list. In one of the more orderly handwritings from the list, it says: “Got called into work, something about a small fire?? Coffee later? My treat! :)

Alex smiles slightly at the note before taking the list off of the fridge. She grabs her stuff from the island and turns off the kitchen light on her way out.

EXT. LAKESIDE—DAY

JAMIE (now early/mid-20s) sits beside a lake, sketchbook resting on her lap and basking in the sunshine. Everything is picturesque-- the birds chirp and the wind blows through the grass.

Faintly, from the edge of the clearing somewhere behind Jamie, a voice starts to whisper. It’s soft but familiar: Alex.

ALEX (O.S.)
Jamie.

At first, Jamie doesn’t hear anything thing. She keeps her attention on making sure that the dock meeting the water in her drawing is perfect.

Alex’s voice gets louder, now somewhere between a whisper and a speaking volume.

ALEX (O.S.)
Jamie.
Jamie stops her movements and still completely. The wind rustles the grass and after a moment she returns to her drawing.

Alex’s voice gets louder, as if she’s right behind her now.

ALEX (O.S.)

Jamie!

Jamie quickly drops her sketchbook, stands up, and turns around.

She looks frantically around the clearing. There’s no one there.

As she’s distracted and has her back to the lake, something starts to emerge. A long black tendril of shadowy darkness exits the lake, making a move towards Jamie.

Jamie, having found no one else there, lets out a breathy laugh.

JAMIE

You’re fine, dummy. Calm down.

The tendril moves steadily towards her.

Jamie looks around once more before shaking her head. She bends down to pick up her discarded sketchbook.

The tendril hangs right behind her where her shoulder was a second ago.

Jamie stands back up and turns around, her gaze down on her sketchbook.

She takes a half of a step forward before she looks up, the shadow hovering in front of her.

She freezes when she sees the shadowy tendril and goes completely still.

Both the darkness and Jamie freeze for a moment. Both holding their breath and waiting for the other one to move.

Jamie lets out the breath that she’d been holding, unable to contract her lungs any longer.

The tendril lunges forward and locks Jamie in its grasp.

The sunshine vanishes, replaced by a dark, cloudy blue. The wind stops and the birds go silent.

She doesn’t have time to scream before she is pulled towards the lake.
EXT./INT. LAKE- CONTINUOUS

The shadow pulls her over the lake’s surface and under the water.

Jamie tries to claw at her captor and kick free but it’s useless.

From beneath the surface, she can see a figure standing on the lake’s edge, looking down on her. Alex.

She finally screams as the tendril pulls her lower into the dark depths of the lake. The bubbles linger in the water and float to the surface as she disappears into the blackness.

INT. JAMIE’S BEDROOM- NIGHT

Jamie frantically sits up in her bed, panting. Her hand shakes as she pushes the sweaty hair off of her forehead.

She breathes heavily in the darkness for a moment.

When she speaks her voice is quiet but erratic.

JAMIE
It was just a dream... It’s ok... I’m ok.

She turns on the lamp on the bedside table, giving the room a soft glow.

Jamie pulls her legs up to her chest and hugs them tightly, creating a ball.

She talks lowly to herself, still quiet but more reassuring.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
Once there was a girl who lived in a cave... tried to bring handfuls of sunlight into the darkness... there were no monsters in the dark after all... there were no monsters after all.

After a moment she unravels herself.

Jamie reaches for the phone on her nightstand. The alarm clock behind the phone reads “3:00.”

She scrolls through her contacts and hesitates with her finger above Alex’s name.
She looks at the clock then back at her phone. She lets out a breath before hitting the call button and bringing the phone to her ear.

**INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY**

A steaming mug rests in front of CHARLOTTE (late 20s), who sits alone at a table next to a widow. She holds on to one but the other sits in front of the second chair. The cafe is cozy and filled with plush chairs and chalkboard signs.

Charlotte plays with her phone as she waits.

Outside the window, Alex hurries down the street. She smiles and speeds up a little when she sees Charlotte through the glass.

Alex speeds to the table and sits in the second chair.

Charlotte puts down her phone as Alex flails in her chair, trying to pull her jacket off.

    ALEX
    Hi! Hi. Sorry I’m late!

Alex finally untangles herself and looks at Charlotte.

She wraps her hands around the mug in front of her and leans forward on the table.

    ALEX (CONT’D)
    A fire?

Charlotte laughs and takes a sip of her drink before leaning forward on her side of the table too.

    CHARLOTTE
    Yeah! Remember that new kid we hired?

    ALEX
    Joe? James?

    CHARLOTTE
    Jessie. Apparently he has a few bad habits, one of which is doing coke in the customer bathroom.

Alex leans back in her chair, bringing her mug with her.

    ALEX
    No... the customer bathroom?
    (MORE)
ALEX (CONT’D)
I mean I’ve seen where you work and people suck, I respect the decision... but the customer bathroom?

Charlotte takes a quick drink from her mug and nods. She talks more animatedly with her hands when she continues.

Alex smiles as she talks.

CHARLOTTE
Right? And that’s not even what happened today. Apparently another one of his bad habits is forgetting that the oven is on in the back when he’s taking a nap in the walk in! I mean...

Charlotte’s lips keep moving, but her voice becomes fainter and fainter as it is overtaken by a high pitched ringing.

As the noise grows louder and more prominent, Alex shakes her head and looks around.

When it fully covers Charlotte’s voice and the ringing is what accompanies her hand gestures, Alex hastily places her mug on the table.

She subtly wiggles the flap of skin above her ear cannel and nods along to Charlotte’s story.

Alex’s smile looks forced now though and her eyes are slightly panicked.

Charlotte sets down her mug and leans over the table to place a hand on hers.

Slowly the ringing fades and Charlotte’s voice comes back into focus.

CHARLOTTE
-ex? Are you ok?

Alex takes a deep, shaky breath once the ringing is gone. She gives Charlotte’s hand a squeeze and fixes her smile.

ALEX
Yeah... yeah, I’m good. Too much caffeine today, I guess.

Charlotte looks skeptical.
ALEX (CONT’D)
I’m serious, I’m good. Tell me
more about Jessie’s stunning
combination of pyromania and
narcolepsy.

Charlotte leans back to her side of the table and stares at
Alex for a moment. Alex gives her another nod before she picks
up her mug again.

CHARLOTTE
Alright... what part where we
at?... Oh yeah! So I get there and
Jessie is still in the walk in,
banging on the door, and the oven
is fully in flames...

Charlotte’s voice fades to the background again as Alex shakily
takes a drink from her mug. She lightly places it back on the
table, keeping her hands wrapped around it.

INT. OFFICE- DAY

A modern, clean office with a wall of windows overlooking the
city. The fluorescent lighting of the office’s interior and the
natural light coming through the windows create the blueish
tint that will be associated with Jamie’s storyline until
otherwise noted.

Jamie sits at small desk in front of an office, the door is
open. Her desk is scattered with post-it notes and there’s a
large calendar under her raised desktop.

She leans on her elbows, hands massaging her temples.

Slowly, the room around her fades until she’s surrounded by
darkness.

INT. EMPTY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jamie stands alone in an empty room. There’s no furniture or
objects of any sort, just Jamie enclosed in four black walls.
Black fog surrounds her.

She’s confused and disoriented, frantically looking around in
the darkness. She calls out.

JAMIE
Hello? Is anybody there? Hello?

For a moment, nothing happens. Jamie continues to look around,
trying to see anything beyond the dark fog.
Then, a voice calls back from the darkness. It’s just as scared and frantic as Jamie’s was when she called out.

ALEX (O.S.)
Jamie? Jamie?

Jamie stills when she hears the voice. Recognition dawns on her and she moves forward, frantically searching for her sister in the shadows.

JAMIE
Alex? Alex? Hello?

The voice calls again. Closer this time.

ALEX (O.S.)
Jamie!

The voice shifts. It’s no longer Alex speaking but Jamie’s Boss.

BOSS (O.S.)
Jamie!

INT. OFFICE- CONTINUOUS

Jamie snaps back to reality. She bolts upright at her desk.

BOSS
Jamie! I need coffee!

Jamie sighs and walks away from her desk. She pokes her head into the office.

JAMIE
(flat)
Sure thing, boss.

Jamie disappears down the hall.

INT. KITCHEN- CONTINUOUS

Alex and HAZEL (late 20s) sit at the dinner table on one side of the kitchen while Charlotte and NOAH (late 20s) stand at the island finishing dinner. There’s soft indie music playing quietly from a speaker on the island.
HAZEL
So I’m standing there, vomit covering my scrubs, holding this lady’s hair back, and this old guy walks up to me and says, “Excuse me? I’ve been waiting here for over an hour, I want to be seen now!” I looked up and gave him a look that Jamie would have been so proud of. Seriously, you should have seen it!

Alex laughs.

ALEX
So what’d you do?

Hazel takes an exaggerated sip of her water before she speaks.

HAZEL
I wanted to tell him that his cautionary case study of “what could happen when you take that little blue pill” wasn’t very high on the triage list today... but obviously I wanted to keep being a resident so I smiled and said that someone would be with him when they could. Then I helped my patient back onto her gurney, changed into a spare set of scrubs, and angry cried while I ate lunch.

Noah and Charlotte approach the table at the end of her story, serving bowls in their arms.

They set down the pasta and bread in the middle of the table and sit in the available chairs.

NOAH
Another day living the dream?
Still glad you choose to help people for a living instead of just cutting them open postmortem?

Hazel throws a piece of bread at him from across the table.

HAZEL
Haha. How was your day then, Noah?
Anyone choke on your watch?

Noah puts his hand over his heart in mock offense. He picks up the closest serving bowl and puts the food on his plate before passing it to Charlotte next to him.
NOAH
Haze, you wound me.

Everyone laughs. Charlotte and Alex make eye contact, Charlottes rolls her eyes. She passes the bowl to Hazel

NOAH (CONT’D)
No, nothing that fun. Just a day full of rich people wining and dining, emphasis on the whining. We had to cut off an old lady at the bar because she kept aggressively hitting on the waiters... Keep in mind that this was at eleven in the morning.

They all keep laughing and finish passing out their food.

NOAH (CONT’D)
Oh and one of the bussboys caught himself on fire today. It was wonderful.

Noah laughs but looks up from his plate when no one reacts. Everyone else is frozen, looking at him as if an excess head just sprouted from his neck. He puts his hands up in surrender.

NOAH (CONT’D)
He’s fine! It was a small fire and he shouldn’t have been trying to flirt with the sous chef around an open flame. She’s not interested and in my kitchen we practice a very high standard of kitchen safety.

He emphasizes his point with a stab of his fork and takes an exaggerated bite of his dinner.

They all laugh again. This time, however, the laughers is slightly diminished, as if underwater. The voices are muffled but the music playing on the island is clear.

CHARLOTTE
Amazing Segueway, Noah, because today...

Charlotte’s voice gets quieter until her lips are moving but all that can be heard is the soft music in the background.

Alex looks around the table, watching the pantomime of her friends reacting to Charlotte’s story.
The music gets louder. It’s no longer the soft, calm song from before. Instead, it’s morphed into a quicker, discordant string ensemble. The plucking strings are evenly spaced out, almost like a pattern.

Alex looks around the table again then back at Charlotte. She’s already looking at Alex, her face concerned, but still telling her story. Her eyes linger on Alex as she keeps talking to the group.

The music picks up at a quick but steady pace until it reaches an eerie crescendo and is replaced by the same tinnitus from the coffee shop. The pattern from the string music is still there, but this time it’s more of an evenly spaced BEEP below the tinnitus.

Charlotte turns back and smiles, her voice is Stepford wives pleasant when she speaks and is the only noise that cuts through the low ring.

CHARLOTTE
There’s something wrong with Jamie.

Alex looks around the table, confused. Hazel and Noah haven’t reacted, they continue to eat their food.

Alex’s voice sounds like it’s underwater, barely perceptible and echoey.

ALEX
What?

The sound returns to normal once again-- forks and knives hitting plates with the soft music in the background rush back in as if they never left.

CHARLOTTE
I said, how was the rest of your day?

Charlotte tilts her head and studies Alex’s face.

CHARLOTTE (CONT’D)
Are you feeling ok?

Alex pick up her glass and shakes her head.

ALEX
Yeah, yeah... I’m fine.

She takes a shaky sip and sets the glass back down.
INT. BREAK ROOM—DAY

Jamie grabs a mug off of the counter next to the coffee maker and places it under the machine. She puts in a coffee pod and waits until it begins to pour liquid into the mug before she turns around. Jamie closes her eyes and leans heavily on the counter.

DANIEL (40s) walks into the break room.

He lets out a low whistle when he sees her.

DANIEL
Whoah. Late night? Oh to be young again.

Jamie opens one eye and slowly stops leaning on the counter.

Daniel comes to a stop next to her, placing his own mug next to the machine.

JAMIE
Haha. No, just didn’t get much sleep.

Daniel looks concerned and shifts slightly closer.

DANIEL
Are the nightmares back?

Jamie doesn’t answer, instead she avoids eye contact like she did with her mother as a child.

Daniel hesitates before he speaks again.

DANIEL (CONT’D)
Did you talk to anyone about it? Your therapist? Your sister, maybe?

JAMIE
I tried to call Alex but I keep getting voicemail... I-

He waits.

When Jamie finally speaks, it’s slow, like she’s considering each word as she says it.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
I just...
(MORE)
JAMIE (CONT’D)
I’ve got this bad feeling and I’m worried about her... I know--

She pauses for a moment and then stops being so careful with her words.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
I know they’re just dreams but they feel so real and now she’s not answering her phone and I’ve just got this sinking feeling in my gut that there’s something-- something’s wrong.

She looks back up at Daniel. He’s already observing her.

The coffee maker beeps, drawing his attention away.

He places Jamie’s full mug on the side of the machine, replaces it with his mug, and puts in a new pod. His movements are methodical and he’s clearly taking a moment to gather his thoughts.

Jamie watches him in silence.

DANIEL
I don’t really believe in God or religion or faith-- whatever you want to call it-- but I do believe in the universe giving us signs. I... When I was a kid, one of my brothers gave me his old bike. He’d gotten a new one, it was really cool and had flames painted on the side. He loved that bike...

The coffee machine beeps again. He picks up his coffee and a stirrer from a nearby jar.

He starts stirring his beverage before he speaks again.

DANIEL (CONT’D)
He was supposed to go to the skate park with some buddies one weekend to try some new tricks, and for weeks before I kept having this dream of him falling off his bike. At first I thought I was just jealous-- I was too young to hang out with him and his friends. I thought the dream would change, that may be it would go away... I ignored it.

(MORE)
DANIEL (CONT’D)
I tried to forget about it and I almost did... until that weekend rolled around.

He stops stirring his coffee and looks blankly at the wall across from him. His eyebrows furrow.

DANIEL (CONT’D)
He’d been gone less than an hour when my mother got the call. He’d been run off the road on the way to the park. He fell off of his bike when it went into a ditch. Seventeen stitches and a nasty concussion that landed him in a coma for over a month.

Jamie continues to watch him, waiting for him to continue.

JAMIE
What are you trying to say?

Daniel seems to snap back into reality. He takes a sip of his coffee and stops leaning on the counter.

DANIEL
I don’t know exactly... I guess that if you have a bad feeling, you should listen to it.

He starts to walk out but stops at the door.

DANIEL (CONT’D)
If nothing else, maybe try some sleeping pills.

He nods at the coffee cup behind her.

DANIEL (CONT’D)
You better hurry up. It’s getting cold.

Jamie stares after him for a moment.

She turns around and grabs the coffee mug from the counter.

[[end act I]]
INT. OFFICE BATHROOM - DAY

The office bathroom is clean and tidy, the fluorescent lights casting a bluish tint on the sterile space.

It appears to be empty except for Jamie who stands at the sink, head down.

She jolts suddenly and snaps her head up. Her eyes are unfocused but slowly become more aware as she takes in her surroundings.

She looks back to the mirror in front of her. Her nose is bleeding, the thin streams dropping a few spots on her white shirt.

JAMIE (whispering frantically)
What the fuck? What the fuck?

Hurriedly, she pulls a handful of paper towels from the dispenser, wets them, and scrubs the spots on her shirt.

Jamie looks back to the mirror and moves on to the blood on her face.

Her breathing is heavy now and her hands shake as she wipes her face.

She steadies both her hands on the sink and takes a deep breath before talking to herself. Jamie looks into her eyes through the mirror.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
sink... mirror... shirt.

She takes a few more breaths and closes her eyes.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
water... breathing... lights.

Another breath.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
bleach... soap... gasoline?

Jamie opens her eyes and looks around the bathroom. There is still no one else there.

She looks confused as she puts the collar of her shirt up to her nose.
The bathroom door swings open. Jamie drops her collar quickly.

An OFFICE LADY enters the bathroom. She smiles at Jamie through the mirror.

OFFICE LADY

Hi Jam-

She breaks off as she sees the faded spots on Jamie’s shirt and the bloody, crumpled paper towels in the sink.

Office lady rushes to the sink.

OFFICE LADY (CONT’D)

Are you ok? What happened?

JAMIE

Yeah, yeah, I’m fine. It’s nothing, just a nose bleed.

Jamie tries to gather all the paper towels from the sink. She stops when office lady puts a hand on her arm.

Jamie looks up at her.

OFFICE LADY

Are you sure you’re ok?

Jamie looks past her for a moment, staring unfocused at the bathroom wall. Then she blinks, shakes her head, and looks back at office lady.

Jamie puts on a smile and puts a hand on top of office lady’s.

JAMIE

I’m ok, really. The blood just freaked me out.

Office lady hesitates, but after a moment gives Jamie’s arm a quick squeeze and removes her hand. She smiles at Jamie one more time before entering one of the bathroom stalls.

Jamie looks back at the mirror once more. She gives herself a quick once over and gathers the paper towels.

The Jamie in the mirror is different than the one from moments before. Her posture is straighter, eyes somehow sharper.

This Jamie winks at herself before turning and exiting the bathroom.

MATCH CUT TO:
INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

The bathroom is white but dotted with the green of house plants: on the windowsill, on the floor next to the sink, printed on the shower curtain.

Alex is at the counter, washing her face in the sink. She looks at her reflection as she spreads the cleanser on her face.

When she bends down to rinse, her reflection stays. The mirror Alex looks down at her from the glass.

Real Alex stands back up and pats her face with a towel. The reflection mirrors her, as if still attached to her form.

Suddenly, a faint BEEPING from outside the door grabs her attention.

Alex turns to open the door.

Mirror Alex is terrified. She bangs on the glass, screaming for real Alex to listen to her. No noise comes from her protests.

Real Alex opens the door and is consumed by darkness.

INT. JAMIE’S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - NIGHT

Alex stands in the middle of the empty room. The lights are off but the hallway light is on and a small portion of moonlight comes through the windows.

This is no longer the teenager’s room from the beginning. Instead, it looks like a typical guest bedroom in someone’s house. The only things that hint that it was once Jamie’s are the pictures and frames on the wall: her high school diploma, an old family photo taken before their parents died, a picture of Jamie in front of her apartment holding the keys.

Alex’s eyes are closed and she sways slightly in the semi-darkness.

Suddenly her eyes snap open.

She blinks once. Twice.

Alex shakes her head and looks around, disoriented.

    ALEX
    What? I was just...

The scene shifts.
The lamps on the bedside tables slowly turn on. The walls gain Pop Tiger magazine posters and the bed is populated by more pillows and a stuffed penguin. It is back to how it looked when their mother came in the night of Jamie’s nightmare.

A young Jamie (11) sits on the edge of the bed. Her hair is wet and she looks frail under the too big shirt she’s wearing.

A YOUNG ALEX (18) and YOUNG CHARLOTTE (18) sit on either side of her.

Young Alex looks at Jamie, Charlotte looks at young Alex, and Jamie looks at the ground in front of present Alex.

Jamie’s hesitant when she speaks.

YOUNG JAMIE
Are we going to move?

She glares up quickly at young Alex before looking back at the ground.

Alex hesitates for a moment. She glances up at Charlotte.

A look passes between them and Alex turns back to Jamie. Alex puts a hand on Jamie’s shoulder before responding slowly.

YOUNG ALEX
Well that depends... do you want to move?

Jamie stills for a moment.

YOUNG JAMIE
No... No, I want to stay here. I-

Her voice cracks and she stops.

Young Alex crouches a little lower and tries to catch her eyes. She rubs Jamie’s shoulder with the hand she has there.

Jamie finally looks up at young Alex, her eyes wide and full of tears. Her words come out wild and quick.

YOUNG JAMIE (CONT’D)
All my friends are here. My favorite teachers are here. Buster is buried in the backyard. Mom and dad-- I... I don’t know anything else.

The tears fall silently down Jamie’s face.

Young Alex uses her other hand to brush them away. She looks over Jamie to Charlotte.
Another look passes. They hold eye contact as Alex starts to speak.

**YOUNG ALEX**

Ok...

Young Alex nods resolutely at Charlotte and maintains eye contact.

**YOUNG ALEX (CONT’D)**

Alright then. We stay.

Young Alex looks back down at Jamie.

Softly, beneath the sound of Alex talking to Jamie, a very faint BEEPING can be heard. The noise is evenly spaced and very faint but clear.

**YOUNG ALEX**

We’ll stay here. We’re going to be ok, J. I won’t let anything happen to you.

Young Jamie launches herself into young Alex’s arms in a tight hug.

Present Alex stumbles back in the room.

The BEEPING is fractionally louder.

Present Alex looks back at the scene. She shakes her head and shuffles back once again.

**INT. HALLWAY- CONTINUOUS**

The hallway is brightly lit as Alex careens out of the room and up against the banister.

The faint BEEPING is the only sound in the hallway.

She grabs her head and squeezes her eyes shut.

Alex straightens quickly and pulls herself along the banister towards the top of the stairs.

Jamie’s door is still open, the younger trio still sitting on her bed.

The door next to Jamie’s is also open. Through the doorway a YOUNGER HAZEL (20) is hunched over a pile of books on her bed.

Alex stops at the banister railing across from the door.
Younger Hazel looks up the creak of the banister.

She makes eye contact with Alex but when Hazel goes to open her mouth, her face shifts into something else. Her eyes darken and sink in while her mouth pulls into a silent scream.

The BEEPING gets louder.

Alex looks on in horror for a moment then rushes to the top of the stairs.

INT. FOYER—CONTINUOUS

Alex rushes down the stairs and into the foyer. All of the lights are on in the entryway and the living room beyond.

When she reaches the bottom of the steps she’s breathing heavily. She looks around frantically before her gaze settles on the front door.

She moves towards it quickly.

The BEEPING gets another notch louder.

EXT. CHILDHOOD HOME—DUSK

Alex throws open the front door but stops at the threshold. There is another scene playing out in front of her.

A YOUNGER ALEX (17) and YOUNG JAMIE (11) sit side by side on the back of an ambulance. They’re both wearing shock blankets and holding hands. The red and blue lights from the emergency vehicles cast alternating shadows across their face.

Younger Alex’s face is vacant and staring straight ahead, there are dried tear tracks on her face.

Young Jamie is actively crying. Her face contorting with sobs.

Slightly behind them, in front of the house, two officers are putting up police tape.

A POLICE OFFICER comes up to the pair. His face is somber as he removes his hat.

Present Alex stumbles back into the house and slams the door before the officer opens his mouth.

The stained glass image on the window cracks with the force.
INT. FOYER- CONTINUOUS

Alex locks the door quickly before turning around and holding her back against it, like her body will stop the horrors outside from entering their home.

The BEEPING is persistent now, the same volume of someone speaking next to you. The BEEPS get closer together.

She’s still heaving heavy breaths when she looks towards the living room entrance.

The lights are on and voices are coming from inside but the owners are not visible from her angle.

She pushes off the door and towards the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM- CONTINUOUS

Once again she stops at the threshold of the room.

YOUNGER ALEX (around 20), YOUNGER CHARLOTTE (20s), YOUNGER NOAH (20s), YOUNGER HAZEL (20s), and YOUNGER JAMIE (early/mid teens) all sit around the living room.

It’s the middle of a party. They’re all laughing. Noah and Charlotte are dancing in the middle of the living room while the others cheer them on.

Jamie sits in the middle of the floor, slightly away from the group. She’s watching them and clapping to the music we can’t hear.

Suddenly they stop and all turn to look at present Alex.

Their faces slowly morph into something different. Their facial features melt off until they’re just blobs with open mouths-- silently wailing at her.

The BEEPING is loud now, almost a wailing itself. The tones are closer together now too, one after another.

Present Alex throws her hands over her ears to block the noise.

She looks at the ghouls facing her, silently screaming at her, as if the shrieking BEEPS are coming from them.

She then looks over them-- beyond them-- into the darkness of the kitchen.

Hands still clamped over her ears, Alex runs through the living room. The ghouls of her family try to grab at her as she dodges them.
INT. KITCHEN- CONTINUOUS

Alex bursts into the darkness of the kitchen, her shadow bleeding in with the others in the darkness.

The BEEPS grow louder and more insistent, the loudest it could possibly be.

Alex squeezes her eyes shut and pushes harder on her ears at the noise.

She gets disoriented and stumbles again.

This time, she runs head first into the kitchen’s other doorframe. A loud CRACK is heard as her head makes contact with the wood and she falls.

The BEEPING stops as the darkness consumes the scene.

INT. JAMIE’S APARTMENT- LIVING ROOM- SUNSET

Jamie’s apartment is cozy but messy-- blankets thrown haphazardly across chairs and old mugs piled on the coffee table. The light coming in through her windows looks more blue than gold, casting a haze over the apartment.

Jamie paces the length of her living room. Her hair is mussed from running her hands through it multiple times.

She fidgets with the cellphone in her hand as she walks. Flipping it screen side up then back down, again and again.

Finally, she stops pacing and looks out the window on the other side of the room. She stares into the distance for a moment before she shakes out her arms, nods, and picks up her phone.

She quickly types in a phone number and brings the device up to her ear.

It rings once. twice. Three times.

VOICEMAIL (O.S.)
We’re sorry, the number that you have dialed is currently unavailable. At the tone, please leave a message.

Jamie lets out a shaky breath as the line BEEPS.

She hesitates a moment before speaking.

JAMIE
H- Hey Alex, It’s Jamie.
(MORE)
JAMIE (CONT’D)
Obviously, I mean I know you know
who I am, you have caller ID...
anyway... I’m sorry for calling so
much...

She trails off and takes a deep, shaky breath before she starts
talking again.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
I- I just had this weird feeling
and... I don’t really know how to
describe it... I just needed to
make sure you were ok.

She runs her free hand through her hair again.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
I know I was supposed to come home
in a couple weeks but I was
thinking about coming up early?
Using some of that time off you
guys keep reminding me I have, ya
know...

When she speaks again it’s faster, a nervous string of words.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
Maybe Friday? Do you guys have
plans this weekend? I don’t want
to crash...

Her voice cracks slightly when she speaks next.

JAMIE (CONT’D)
I just- I just miss you, Lex. And
I’m sure you’re fine but I’m
worried... Just give me a call
back when you get this? Please?
Love you.

She hangs up the phone and throws it on her couch. It bounces
off and falls on the floor.

She looks back out the window for a moment, watching the last
beams of sunlight disappear over the city. Then she nods her
head resolutely and walks into her bedroom.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

The hallway is dark, the only thing illuminating it is the
little moonlight coming from the windows at the end.
The doors along the hall are all closed, everything is still and silent-- except for a table towards the front of the hall that is slightly skewed.

Suddenly, Alex runs into the hall from around the corner on the other end. She’s stumbling and running into the walls on either side as she goes.

Her clothes are now torn and dirty. There’s a trail of blood down the right side of her face from a source around her temple.

She’s favoring her left leg as she limps down the hall. There’s a strip of fabric tied on her left thigh that was once a light color and now has red practically drenching it. Her jeans below the make shift bandage are also red with the spill over.

As if someone hit the “unmute” button, the sound of this scene finally cuts in. Alex is breathing heavily, picture frames CRASH to the ground from their spots on the wall.

She gets closer to the mouth of the hallway-- to freedom-- when she looks back. With her focus no longer on the way forward, she doesn’t see the skewed table and runs into it.

Alex falls forward, tripping head first over the table and landing hard on her left side.

ALEX
(quietly)
Shit!

She groans as she slowly scrambles into a moveable position on the floor. Alex shuffles backwards frantically, away from something at the other end of the hall.

We can’t see what she’s looking at, but we see the terror on her face.

The only sound in the hallway is Alex’s heavy breathing and the echoed sound of footsteps from deeper in the hall. They’re not fast, they’re slow and methodical-- almost as if they have no need to hurry.

She tries to scramble faster, but catches on the fallen table and stumbles again.

The footsteps are loud enough now that they must be almost in front of her.

Alex looks up, the fear and anguish clear on her face, and she SCREAMS.
INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

The hospital room is pristine and sterile. There are no cards or flowers—just monitors and a single bed. Alex sleeps on the bed.

The specific lighting—the slight overexposure—that has been present in Alex’s narrative up until this point is now gone. Instead, it looks normal, natural. It will stay that way in her narrative unless otherwise noted.

She is attached to the machines at the head of her bed with an IV in her arm. Although most of her is covered by the thin hospital blanket, the uncovered portion of skin is a collection of bruises and gauze. There is a thick white bandage on her right temple. Her left leg is sticking out from under the blanket with a widely wrapped bandage on her thigh.

The heart monitor BEEPS at a quick pace and steadily grows louder.

Suddenly, Alex gasps and shoots into a sitting position. She SCREAMS, clawing at her chest.

Her eyes wildly look around the room, her screams only broken up by choked gasps.

The door is flung open and nurses rush in.

An announcement is made over the intercom as the room explodes into chaos.

   NURSE (O.S.)

[[end of act II]]

EXT. DRIVEWAY—SUNSET

A taxi pulls up in front of Alex and Jamie’s childhood home. The victorian facade is as looming as it was the night of Jamie’s nightmare but somehow it seems more sinister in the light of day.

It’s raining when Alex steps out of the taxi.

She pulls the back of her sweater over her head as she quickly pays the driver.

She hurriedly runs up the driveway to the porch.
The taxi drives off behind her.

**EXT. FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS**

Once under the awning of the porch, Alex pulls her sweater back down and shakes the water off of herself.

The stained glass windows depicting the fall of Icarus stand brightly against the dark facade of the front door and porch. The glass has a crack in the left panel, just like in Alex’s coma.

The door and its panels are bisected by two bright yellow strips of tape labeled “POLICE LINE. DO NOT CROSS.”

Alex looks up from the water droplets she flung on the ground around her to look at the tape on the door.

For a moment, she just stares.

Then she takes a deep breath and pulls down the tape.

She hastily crumbles it up and throws it to the side of the porch.

Alex reaches into the front pocket of the backpack she’s carrying and pulls out a set of keys.

Selecting an older silver key, she places it in the lock and twists.

Alex takes another breath before turning the knob and opening the door.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. KITCHEN- DAY**

The kitchen looks like it did in Alex’s coma, but obviously less lived in. Although there are still notes and pictures on the fridge and random pieces of mail stacked on the corner of the counter, a thin layer of dust and lack of visible dishes is a stark contrast from before.

**CUT TO:**

**INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY**

Everything is silent.

The lights are off in the living room. However, the room is still well lit from the sunlight coming through the bay window.
Nothing in the living room matches. All of the furniture seems to be a hodgepodge of things stitched together from thrift shops and garage sales. The coffee table is a solid oak, but there’s a crack along the middle. There are plants (mostly dead or dying) on the windowsill and throughout the room.

The centerpiece of this room-- the focal point-- is the fireplace on the main wall. The fireplace tool stand is disheveled and missing a poker.

INT. FOYER- CONTINUOUS

Through the door into the entryway, Alex sits in the middle of the foyer, among the little light that the living room and the stained glass window of the door offer.

She has her legs pulled up to her chest, her arms hanging loosely around them-- matching Jamie after her nightmare.

She stares at a spot in the middle of the foyer-- a large dark patch right under the banister from the second floor.

Everything is still and silent-- too silent. It feels eerie and almost oppressive.

Beyond Alex, in the darkness of the hallway, there’s a shadow-- a body shrouded in darkness. There are no distinguishable features. It’s just a human shape, darker than the rest of the shadows in the hall.

The figure-- the ghost-- is facing Alex. It’s looking at her while she stares vacantly at the floor. There’s moment of stillness and it almost seems as if the shadow will move.

The tenuous silence is broken by a knock at the front door.

Alex startles out of her trance and slowly gets up.

She pulls back the curtain and looks out the window next to the door. Once she sees who it is she closes the curtains again.

She moves to the door but before she opens it she rests her head on the wood and keeps her hand on the knob.

Alex takes one last labored breath before standing straight and opening the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

Alex sits on one of the couches in the living room. Her arms are crossed and her legs are pressed together; she looks uncomfortable and small.
Her THERAPIST sits across from her on one of the old love seats, holding a legal pad. He wears a grey cardigan and Clarke Kent-esque glasses.

The two people in the room sit in silence, staring at each other.

Her therapist looks at her, observes silently for a moment, and then looks down at the notebook in his hands. He’s still looking at his notes when he speaks.

THERAPIST
So, it’s been five months...

He looks up at her, one hand still holding open the pages in his legal pad.

THERAPIST (CONT’T)
Five months and you’re still not sleeping? Not even with the Ambien?

Alex looks around the room, anywhere but the doctor. She shakes her head.

Her therapist lets out a sigh, takes off his glasses, and rubs his eyes.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
Do you want to try another medication?

He waits for Alex to respond. She just barely shrugs.

Her therapist heaves out a sign, takes off his glasses, and leans forward with his elbows on his knees. He tries to catch Alex’s eye as he talks.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
Alex, I’m going to level with you for a second... It’s been five months. Five months of not sleeping, five months of being alone in this house. All we’ve talked about so far is your parents-- how they loved you and how you feel about their death. That’s great and I’m glad that you’re willing to unpack that. But Alex...

He waits to see if she’ll look up.
you know that’s not why I’m here. We need to talk about what happened here, why I’m here. If we don’t start talking about that soon, I’m going to have to help you find someone else who you do want to talk about that with.

Her therapist waits a moment before leaning back, putting on his glasses, and bracing himself to stand.

Just before he stands up fully, Alex tentatively speaks.

ALEX
I know it sounds dumb... staying in this house after all that death and all the tragedy that seems to happen here.

She pauses for a moment before starting again.

ALEX (CONT’D)
After our parents died, I wanted to move. I wanted to take J and get as far away from this beast as possible... but her life was here. Her friends were here and our parents were here-- their bodies are here...

Alex trails off and continues to stare at the spot on the ground.

After she hasn’t continued speaking for a moment, her therapist prompts her.

THERAPIST
So you stayed for her?

ALEX
Sort of? I guess we stayed so she didn’t have to fall apart somewhere new.

She sighs, looks up from the spot, and sits back in her chair.

ALEX (CONT’D)
I thought that if I filled the house up with more life than it took that it would be ok. Charlotte-

Her voice breaks when she says Charlotte’s name but she pushes on.
ALEX (CONT’D)
Noah, Hazel... they were my rocks. They moved in and they helped me when I couldn’t seem to help myself... it was warm again and for a while I thought we’d be ok.

THERAPIST
...And you weren’t?

She lets out a bitter laugh before she responds.

ALEX
Obviously not. You know why you’re here, doc.

Alex shakes her head in disbelief.

THERAPIST
So you think that this is your fault? Everything that happened?

She hesitates for a moment before answering.

ALEX
I know it’s my fault. I should have seen it-- seen something... but I didn’t...

THERAPIST
And?

She finally looks back up and meets her therapist’s eyes as she answers his question.

ALEX
And now I’m the only one not being punished.

INT. KITCHEN- NIGHT

Alex picks up her mug from the island counter. The string of the tea bag hangs limply off the side. There is a second mug next to hers, the same tea bag hangs out of the cup.

The lights are off in the kitchen, it’s illuminated just enough by the moonlight to function. It’s silent-- the kind of thick silent that comes from world being asleep around you.

In the farthest background of the kitchen, there is a shadow lurking. It’s half hidden by the doorway that leads into the hall but it’s there-- watching and waiting.
She brings the steaming mug up to her face and inhales. Her eyes close.

ALEX
I know you’re there. You might as well come out.

She opens her eyes slowly and sets down the mug. Alex leans heavily on the counter.

The figure is now closer behind her. Still a good distance away and far enough that their features are indistinguishable but closer than before.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Come on, you haven’t missed our nightly hang outs since I’ve been back. Get out here.

She waits a moment before speaking louder, like she’s talking to someone in the next room.

ALEX (CONT’D)
I even made you a cup of tea, I’ve got your favorite blend.

She waits a moment. Nothing happens.

She lets out a breath and closes her eyes again.

The next time she speaks it’s almost a whisper.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Please.

She opens her eyes.

Charlotte’s ghost now stands on the other side of the island.

She looks the same as she did in Alex’s coma, dressed in the same clothes she wore at dinner. However, as she stands in front of Alex now, her hair is slightly mussed and she’s covered in blood. There’s a large patch on the stomach of her shirt and smaller cuts on her forearms-- defensive wounds. Her eyes are sunken in and she looks pale, like she’s lost a lot of blood.

Alex looks at her for a moment, taking her in. Her chin quivers.

She slides the second tea cup across the island to sit in front of Charlotte.

Alex’s voice is thick and quiet when she greets her.
ALEX (CONT’D)
Hey, Charlie.

Charlotte stares at her. She doesn’t move, doesn’t speak. Her gaze is fixed on Alex but it’s cold, empty.

Alex clears her throat and looks down at her tea cup, sloshing around the liquid.

Her voice breaks as she tries to speak.

ALEX (CONT’D)
I’m sorry. I’m so sorry, Charlie.

When she looks back up there are tears on her cheeks.

Charlotte hasn’t moved. Like a macabre statue, she stares ahead.

Alex waits a moment to see if she’ll speak. Charlotte doesn’t.

ALEX
Charlie please...

She’s begging now, slowly getting louder.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Please just talk to me. Say something, please. Please.

Alex is screaming now, tears streaming down her face.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Say something! Say anything! Scream at me! Tell me it’s all my fault! Don’t just stand there!

She turns around and throws her mug across the kitchen, it shatters against the cabinet.

When Alex turns back, Charlotte’s gone.

Alex looks around frantically and sees nothing.

She falls back against the counter and sinks to the floor.

She pleads into the darkness.

ALEX (CONT’D)
No, please come back. Please come back. Please don’t leave me.

FADE TO BLACK

[[end of act III]]
INT. LIVING ROOM—DAY

The living room looks similar to how it did when Alex came back into the house but it’s more obviously lived in and inviting now. There’s a fire burning in the fireplace and photos on the mantle. It’s palpably cozy and the light is so golden that it almost looks ethereal.

A younger Jamie (in her late teens), dressed in a worn out college sweatshirt, sits on one of the loveseats in the living room. The chair is facing the entryway into the kitchen and she watches the people inside. Her face is blank.

INT. KITCHEN—CONTINUOUS

Noah is at the stove, stirring the various pots on the burners with one hand while sprinkling salt on an oven sheet of vegetables with the other.

Hazel stands behind him at the island, cutting bread.

Noah puts the pan in the oven and turns around to check on Hazel.

Alex sits at the island across from Hazel, watching the pair work. She has a cup of coffee in her hands and a second cup with tea next to her.

NOAH

No, no, no. Stop.

He takes the bread knife from Hazel and hip checks her out of the way.

NOAH (CONT’D)

Haze, light of my life, my love, if you don’t stop hacking the bread like it’s one of your practice cadavers I will have an aneurism.

Hazel and Alex look at each other across the island. Hazel makes a face and Alex laughs behind her mug.

NOAH (CONT’D)

Like this, see? Gentle. Gentle.

He finishes his brief demonstration that Hazel didn’t watch and gives her back the knife. Noah stands over her shoulder as she makes the next cut. He gives a satisfied nod before turning back to the stove.

Hazel and Alex make eye contact again and don’t hold back their laughter this time.
NOAH (CONT’D)
Alright, alright. Laugh all you want now but you’ll thank me later when you’re in food heaven.

Charlotte enters the kitchen from the opposite door that leads into the hallway. She sticks her finger into a bowl next to the stove, grabbing a green bean as she passes. Noah smacks her hand as she reaches for it but she manages to snag one anyway.

NOAH (CONT’D)
Hey!

Noah’s cries of indignation fade into background chatter as Charlotte walks to the other side of the island and stands next to Alex. They look at each other for a moment and offer small smiles.

Alex pushes the mug next to her in front of Charlotte and gives her a quick wink before sipping from her own mug.

Noah’s rant comes back into full focus.

NOAH (CONT’D)
No respect for the process.

He puts one hand on his hip and imitates a higher pitched voice.

NOAH (CONT’D)
Noah’s a chef, of course he can just whip up Thanksgiving dinner. No problem.

He stirs the pots angrily as he talks, back still to his companions. The trio behind him make faces and try not to laugh as he speaks.

NOAH (CONT’D)
Animals, all of you. I swear--

He turns around and sees them trying not to laugh.

NOAH (CONT’D)
Alright, all of you out. That’s it, out of my kitchen.

Hazel puts down the knife, Alex and Charlotte grab their mugs. He herds them to the door leading into the living room.
INT. LIVING ROOM- CONTINUOUS

Jamie, who had been watching this play out from her seat in the living room, watches them all flood in.

Her face that had been blank of any expression morphs into the same conspiratorial smirk that Hazel had in the kitchen when the groups’ eyes meet hers.

She laughs as they all tumble in, finding new spots on different couches. Hazel sits in the chair next to Jamie’s while Charlotte and Alex sit on the couch across from them.

Noah stands in the threshold of the kitchen. He has a tea towel thrown over his shoulder with one hand on his hip and the other pointing at the group.

NOAH (CONT’D)
New rule: you all are banned from the kitchen until I say dinner’s ready. Capische?

Hazel, Alex, and Charlotte attempt to look scolded but quickly dissolve into a fit of laughter.

Jamie watches them for a moment before following in their footsteps-- the exact same movements and laughter.

Noah shakes his head and rubs his temple. He lets out a labored sigh.

NOAH (CONT’D)
Jamie, sweet baby J, I need a sous chef. You up for the job?

Jamie stops laughing and walks to the doorway. Alex sticks her hand up for a high five as she passes and swats the back of her leg after their hands tap.

JAMIE
Where do ya need me, chef?

Noah looks over Jamie’s head into the room, he raises one eyebrow as if to say “see?”

He looks back down at Jamie, places a hand on her shoulder, and leads them into the kitchen. Through the doorway, the trio watch as Noah walks Jamie through what is cooking in the pots on the stove.

Hazel picks up the remote from the coffee table in the middle of the chairs and turns on the Macy’s Parade. She curls up and settles into the chair, watching the program.
Alex and Charlotte turn slightly so that they can see the screen over the fireplace. Their eyes meet again and Charlotte shifts back slightly so that their shoulders touch before turning back to the tv.

The sound of Noah’s instructions to Jamie in the kitchen can faintly be heard beyond the noise of the parade.

    NOAH (O.S.)
    -need to make sure that the sauce doesn’t bubble...

Alex takes another sip of her drink, smiling as she brings the mug to her mouth.

    FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

The lighting slowly shifts from the golden hue of the scene before it to the natural lighting of Alex’s reality. With the fade in lighting, the scene shifts as well— the pictures on the mantle get sparser and dusty, the fire no longer burns, the poker set looses a rod.

Alex sits alone in the same spot she occupied in the previous scene, a mug still in her hand. She looks to her right, where Charlotte had been, as if she could still see her there.

Behind her, through the kitchen doorway, in the darkness, there’s a shadowy figure. It doesn’t move, it just watches from its spot in the shadows.

    THERAPIST
    -ex? Alex?

Suddenly she looks up, as if woken from a dream.

    ALEX
    I’m sorry, what?

    THERAPIST
    I said, have you been sleeping any better?

Alex hums instead of giving a real answer.

    THERAPIST (CONT’D)
    I’ll take that as a no...

Alex still seems a little dazed, looking at the spot next to her every so often. Her therapist follows her gaze to the empty spot then looks back at Alex.
Alex looks fully at her therapist now, as if startled by the question.

She raises one eyebrow and rolls the question off her tongue slowly.

ALEX
How am I doing?

She stills for a second then places her mug on the coffee table. She leans forward and rests her elbows on her knees before looking back at her therapist.

ALEX
How am I doing? Let’s see, we’ll do an inventory real quick. My life is crumbling around me. I’m not sleeping. I’m stuck here talking with you. All my friends, my family, they’re-

Her voice cracks and she stops abruptly.

Her therapist leans forward.

The figure from the kitchen steps out of the shadow and slightly closer. The features are still indistinguishable but the figure is clearer.

THERAPIST
They’re what, Alex?

Alex clams up again, curling into herself on the couch.

The figure is just beyond the doorway now. Half hidden behind the doorframe and shrouded in shadows.

ALEX
Can we be done for today? I’m not feeling well.

The therapist keeps pushing.

The figure stays still but too still, like a lion waiting for the right second to pounce.

THERAPIST
You’re not sick and we’re not done. They’re what, Alex?

ALEX
I said I’m done.
THERAPIST
They’re what, Alex?

The figure appears closer in the room. One second it’s on the doorway then suddenly it’s in the far corner of the living room, the only corner with any shadows.

Alex doesn’t say anything. She looks at the wall behind her therapist’s head.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
You need to say it. They’re what, Alex?

The figure is right behind Alex now. Standing with its hands on the back of the couch behind her is Noah’s ghost.

He’s wearing the same outfit as he was at dinner in Alex’s coma, but they’re bloodied and askew. He’s paler than before—the blood from his cheeks and under his skin is gone. The most striking feature of this new Noah is the dent on the side of his head.

He doesn’t say anything. He just stands behind Alex, not touching her, not moving, but looking ahead at the wall behind the therapist.

Alex stands abruptly, knocking the mug off the coffee table and on to the floor.

ALEX
No! I said I’m done.

The therapist sits back a bit in shock.

ALEX (CONT’D)
I think you should leave now.

The therapist quietly picks up his briefcase from the floor next to his chair and closes his folio.

He stand up to leave and stops at the entryway of the living room.

THERAPIST
Alex, we’re getting to a critical point where you’re going to have to make a choice... I can’t start to help you recover until you admit that there’s something to recover from.

Alex still refuses to look at him. The therapist lets out a labored sigh.
We’ll discuss this next time, Alex.

Alex sits back down on the couch, looking blankly at the wall once again.

Noah’s ghost hasn’t moved, but he watches the therapist exit the living room and continues to look at the front door, even after it shuts behind him.

**INT. HAZEL’S BEDROOM - NIGHT**

Hazel’s bedroom is, in short, a mess that some people may call “controlled chaos.” Her bed is made and the floor is visible, but there are books stacked so high on the desk that they’ve fallen over and clothes have spilled out of the dresser drawers.

Alex sits alone among the clutter on Hazel’s bed. She clutches one of the pillows to her chest and buries her face in the top.

She stays that way for a moment, completely still, until she takes a deep breath and looks up.

Hazel’s ghost now sits next to her on the bed.

She also wears the same outfit that she did at dinner, but it’s dirty and slightly torn. There are scratches on her forearms and her face has taken on a purplish tint at the eyes and mouth. The most glaring change to this version of Hazel, however, is the fire poker sticking out of her stomach.

For a moment, neither of them move. Alex takes in all of Hazel’s appearance, her eyes sticking on the poker for a long minute before she pulls her focus away. Hazel looks on indifferently, seemingly bored with the interaction.

When Alex finally speaks, her voice is barely a whisper.

**ALEX**

Happy birthday, Haze.

A single tear falls down her cheek.

Hazel looks away from Alex, her body shifting and inadvertently displaying the other end of the fire poker that continues through her back.

Alex stares at it and more tears fall.
INT. LIVING ROOM- DAY

Alex and her therapist are in session once again. This time, however, the atmosphere feels tangibly different. Her therapist sits on the edge of his seat, posture tense. Alex stands on the other side of the living room, lazily leaning on the fireplace, looking down at the fireplace tools. The poker is still missing.

The room’s usual sunlight is absent, the overhead lights on in its place. The rain can be heard as it pounds against the house and the dark sky is visible through the previously inviting bay window.

The shadows in the corners of the room and in the kitchen are darker. There is a vague outline of a body hiding in the shadow of one of the corners in the living room.

ALEX
I... I want to apologize for shouting last time. That was rude, I’m sorry... I don’t know why I got so mad.

Her therapist seems to relax a fraction but stays on the edge of his seat.

THERAPIST
Thank you for your apology... but an apology doesn’t change the fact that we need to talk about it. Why don’t you take a seat, Alex?

Alex doesn’t move.

ALEX
I’d actually prefer to stand today.

The therapist takes a labored breath but pulls out his notebook.

THERAPIST
Alright then... last week, when you got mad, we were discussing your family.

Alex stops leaning on the fireplace at the mention of her family and instead starts pacing behind the couch across from the therapist.

The therapist sighs at the action and seems to change course. The mask of formality seems to drop for a moment.
THERAPIST (CONT’D)
Listen, I’m going to be honest with you. I’m sure you’re aware that this is a unique arrangement that we have here. It’s... unusual that I make house calls in my line of work but your situation garnered my sympathy and I wanted to help. I still want to help.

Alex stops pacing and stands still behind the couch, arms crossed.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
But here’s the deal, Alex. I can’t keep trying to help you if you act like you did last time... and if I can’t help you, the state will send you someplace that you can be supervised until you want to be helped.

Alex tenses at this.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
I know you’ve been through a lot and I know that you know you’ve been through a lot.

Alex scoffs.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
The problem is that some parts of your story are shaky at best and now you’re not sleeping and exhibiting violent tendencies... this isn’t looking good.

Alex takes a seat on the couch.

The pair sit in silence for a moment, letting the words hang. Alex’s face is hard to read.

The shadow in the corner of the living room is joined by another that stands in the kitchen.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
I don’t want to see that happen and I don’t think you want that to happen, so I’d like to give this one more shot, ok?

The therapist waits for a response.
Alex hesitantly nods.

THERAPIST (CONT’D)
For this to work this time, I’m going to need to you start talking more. No more nonverbal cues.

Alex clenches her jaw for a moment then answers quietly.

ALEX
Ok.

There is suddenly a third shadow in the opposite corner of the room. All three are still hidden in the darkness, nothing more than outlines of human shapes.

THERAPIST
Alright... I want to pick up where we left off last session. I think that, although it didn’t end well, we were making progress. So tell me, Alex, your family is what? What happened? Why am I here? Why are you here?

The shadows move in closer, still just dark figures but now at the edge of their dark shrouds. They almost seem to be waiting for something, unseen muscles taut in anticipation.

Alex looks conflicted. Her eyes are anywhere but the therapist and her body is unnaturally still.

She hesitates for a moment before opening her mouth. When she does, her voice is soft and broken.

ALEX
They’re... They- They’re gone.

The figures hiding in the shadow are suddenly out of the darkness and standing behind her. The ghosts of Noah, Hazel, and Charlotte, all mangled and bloody, are now in focus. Their eyes unnaturally vacant and staring ahead.

Alex’s therapist relaxes slightly in his seat at Alex’s quiet admission. He waits for her to continue.

ALEX (CONT’D)
All of them are dead-- Noah, Hazel, Charlie-- they’re all gone...

Her voice starts to get louder and more frantic as the words come out faster. She sounds like Jamie when she left her last voicemail: scared and disoriented.
Silent tears fall from her eyes as she starts to speak again.

ALEX (CONT’D)
They’re gone and I’m still here
and it’s my fault. I- I should
have seen it coming. I should have
done something. It was my
responsibility-- she was my
responsibility and I... I failed
them. I failed them.

The ghosts behind her turn their vacant gazes to Alex. Their expressions don’t change and their blank stares feel heavy.

Alex’s shoulders hunch under the invisible weight. The tears come faster as she looks up at her therapist.

ALEX (CONT’D)
They’re gone and I’m here because
I didn’t save them. They saved me
more times than I can count and I
couldn’t save them and now I’m
alone... I’m alone and they’re
gone and I- I-

The tears are no longer silent and a sob escapes the confines of her throat.

INT. KITCHEN- NIGHT

Alex sits alone in the darkness of the kitchen.

She’s seated at the the table, a bottle of vodka and two small glasses in front of her. One of the glasses is empty, the other one is filled halfway with alcohol.

She takes a long pull from the glass with liquid in it, emptying it.

Alex reaches for the bottle, but freezes when her hand closes around it.

ALEX
I was wondering when you’d show up.

She moves again, lifting the bottle to pour herself another drink.

Behind her, half hidden in the shadows of the room, stands Jamie’s ghost. Like the other ghosts, she too is covered in blood spatter. Unlike the other ghosts, however, she does not seem to have any visible wounds.
Alex pours her drink and pauses, the bottle hovering over her glass.

She gestures to the empty one and still doesn’t look back at Jamie.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Are you going to join me or are you going to make me drink alone?

Jamie’s ghost walks-- more so glides-- silently over to the chair across from Alex.

As she walks behind Alex, her back is visible, showing the bruises across the exposed skin of her arms and the flat back of her skull.

Once Jamie sits, Alex pours some liquid into the other glass and slides it across the table. Her gaze stays on the table.

She sets the bottle back down and takes another long sip of her drink before she looks up at Jamie’s ghost.

In the little light of the kitchen, Jamie’s face looks almost translucent. Her eyes are blank and stare through Alex, but there’s a hint of something else there. They possess an uneasy catlike quality, like they are watching closer than they appear.

Alex holds Jamie’s vacant stare.

Her voice is icy and raw when she speaks.

ALEX (CONT’D)
Come to sink your teeth in more? I don’t have anything else for you to take.

Jamie’s ghost doesn’t move, doesn’t change her expression or her stare.

Alex leans forward on the table and searches the vacant eyes of her sister for a moment.

She suddenly leans back in her chair, deflated.

Jamie’s vacant eyes almost seem to track the movement.

Alex lets out a long shakily breath.

Her voice breaks when she speaks next.

ALEX
I’m so sorry.
Alex silently cries as she tips back her glass and finishes her drink.

Jamie stares blankly ahead, her eyes devoid of emotion and life.

FADE TO BLACK
MAUSOLEUM
SHOW BIBLE
MADISON CAREL
"Monsters are always hungry, darling, and they're only a few steps behind you, finding the flaw, the poor weld, the place where we weren't stitched up quite right, the place where they could almost slip right into through if the skin wasn't trying to keep them out."

Richard Siken

"You say I killed you-- haunt me then!... I believe-- I know that ghosts have wondered on Earth. Be with me always-- take any form-- drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!... I cannot live without my soul!"

Charlotte Bronte

"Ghosts don't haunt people, their memories do."

Alexandra Bracken
Isolated and without a family, Alex struggles to come to terms with loss and her new title of "final girl." At the same time, the ghosts of Alex's past tell their own side of the story.
Setting

The majority of this story takes place within Alex and Jamie's childhood home—a haunted-looking building with a personality and characteristics that make it feel like a human character itself.
A HOUSE FULL OF GHOSTS

Sunlight– Hozier

Red Run Cold– World's First Cinema

Deep End– Holly Humberstone

Spirits– The Strumbellas

Little Talks– Of Monsters and Men

Howl– Florence + The Machine

Things We Lost in the Fire– Bastille
CHARACTERS
Alex struggles to cope with the loss of her last blood relative and the destruction of her found family, all while being haunted by their ghosts.
Jamie is an unknown. Her motives are unclear. Her past is shaky. One thing's for sure, she is more than the scared little sister that Alex and the rest of the family thought she was.

Bad Guy– Billie Eilish
Hunger– Florence + The Machine
Psycho Killer– Talking Heads
Charlotte is the heart of this found family. She's the metaphorical glue that holds all of them together—always there with a joke, a hug, or a shoulder to cry on.
Noah is the sarcastic, comedic side character that all of the viewers will eventually love the most. He's a vital part of this found family but doubts his importance.

**Sail**– AWOLNATION

**Signed, Sealed, Delivered (I'm Yours)**– Stevie Wonder

**Swoon**– Beach Weather
HAZEL

If houses and people are made up of different parts, Hazel is simultaneously the brain and the heart. She's the epitome of "the dumbest smart person I've ever met."

Dance Magic–David Bowie

God is a Woman– Ariana Grande

The Feels– Twice
Episode I: Pilot

This episode introduces the characters and storylines that will be explored throughout the series. In each episode, Alex's narrative in the present will be intersected by another character's narrative of the past. In this episode, Alex and Jamie's stories are in dialogue with each other on the day of the tragedy. The conversation ends when Alex wakes up from the coma she's been in and is thrust out of the idyllic past and into her isolated reality.
Episode II: Hazel

This episode focuses on Hazel's connection to the story-- how she met Alex, how she joined their found family, what she was like in life, and how she died. The teaser for this episode will open with Hazel and Alex pulling up in front of the house on the night of Alex and Jamie's parents' death. Jamie will walk out of the house shell shocked, Alex will rush to her, and Hazel will stay with Jamie outside while Alex goes inside. Alex's storyline will focus on grieving for all of her family but emphasize the grieving of her oldest friend, Hazel.
Episode III: Noah

This episode will focus on Noah-- how he met Alex and the others, what role he played in their group, who he was as a person, and how he died. Noah's place in this family is less clear than the others-- Charlotte and Alex have a clear connection, Alex and Jamie are related, and Hazel and Alex met on the first day of school. How did Noah get here? It will focus on Noah's past and how there's a more troubling emotional state underneath the comedic facade. Alex's storyline will focus on how she felt about Noah and how she's supposed to grieve the loss of someone who meant more to their family than he realized.
Episode IV: Charlotte

This episode will focus on Charlotte—how she met Alex and Jamie, how she felt about the life they all created together, how she felt about Alex, and how she died. The past and present storylines in this episode will be woven together much more tightly with more graphic matches and more emphasis on Charlotte's ghost in the house. It's a bitter end to a love story that will continue to live on as long as Alex does. Although Charlotte and Alex are intrinsically tied together in this narrative, there needs to be a clear message that their personhood does not depend on the other. They are full, autonomous people on their own, but they are complemented by the other. This will be a major turning point in Alex's grieving process.
Episode V: Jamie

This episode will focus on Jamie—her childhood with Alex, her emotional state, her motivations, her feelings about her family, and how she died. Jamie's storyline will be slightly different from anything we've seen in any other episode up until this point. Instead of the events in her narrative centering on her interactions with Alex and the family, some of the events will revolve around things that happened when she was alone. In a way, this will be when Jamie tells her own story. Alex, in her narrative, will be coming to terms with Jamie's death and her actions. Why did she do this? If something was going on, why didn't she come to Alex? Did Alex fail her somehow? As Alex asks these questions, Jamie's narrative will answer them in real-time. The climax of this episode is the murder of the found family from Jamie's point of view.
Episode VI: Alex

In the final episode, Alex looks at her past, present, and, to an extent, her future. She's worked through the trauma of all of her family--Hazel, Noah, Charlotte, Jamie--and now she has to work through her own. The episode will crosscut between memories of Alex's past as she works through her present and future with her therapist. Throughout the episodes, as Alex grieves and heals, she enters more spaces throughout the house and around the grounds. For the last shot of the episode, Alex will walk out the front door and down the long driveway. She disappears from view as the ghosts within the house watch her leave.
FINAL NOTES

This show taps into the complex network of grief, love, anger, and sadness in a way that, until recently, has not been explored in television horror. By releasing all of the episodes at once on a streaming platform, the dedicated horror fanbase will devour it quickly. However, it's not just for horror fans. This show straddles the line between drama and horror, making it more accessible to both audiences.
Honors Thesis Reflection

When I was eight years old, my mother showed me *Children of the Corn* (1984). She said that the graphics were old and it wouldn’t be scary; and I, excited to hang out with her and my older sister, jumped at the chance to watch it. As an eight-year-old, I thought I was the biggest, toughest person ever because I made it halfway through the movie before I ran away screaming and promising to never watch it again. Over the next thirteen years, I watched horror movies in the same way fire consumes books. My mom, older sister, and I had weekly horror movie nights (Freaky Fridays or Scary Movie Saturdays), and I was the champion of middle school sleepovers. I say this not only to show that my mom is the coolest but also to demonstrate that my love of horror started early.

At William and Mary, I’ve had the opportunity to learn about film as a social force, as a technological advancement, and as a community event. However, I didn’t have the opportunity to explore the creative side of film until I studied abroad my sophomore year. When I was in London, I took a film production class and a screenwriting class. Although I was sent home after a month when a global pandemic started, I realized that while I enjoyed learning about film from a theoretical perspective, my passion lies with production. Once I started my classes back at William and Mary, I decided to pursue an honors thesis on the creative side of film. Originally, I was going to write, direct, and edit a short film; however, with the uncertainty of COVID-19, I decided to explore a different route: screenwriting.
When I pitched this project to my advisor, Professor Jennifer Taylor, all I knew was that I wanted to make a horror script. I thought I wanted to write a pilot of a television series, but I was still toying with the idea of writing a short film instead. Before I had my first real meeting with JT, I watched copious amounts of horror movies and what few horror television shows that I could find. Horror as a genre, when it comes to television especially, has been overlooked and written off. However, in recent years, there has been more of an exploration into this genre and how it could work with television. Mike Flanagan’s recent horror anthology series, *The Haunting of Hill House* (2018) and *The Haunting of Bly Manor* (2020), served as major inspirations for my project. I decided that is what I wanted to do: to attempt to blend horror and drama in a way that makes your heart physically ache for the characters. At the time I didn’t know what I wanted to write about or what specifically I wanted to address; but, I knew that I wanted to do horror and that I had two great examples to aspire towards.

When it came time for me to submit my proposal, I started thinking more about what I may want to write about. One of the main concepts that I was hooked on from the early stages of this project was an exploration of the final girl. I specifically wanted to look deeper into the psychology of the final girl and what happens to her after the last scene of a horror movie fades to black. That, however, wasn’t much of a plot. It also fell slightly outside of horror and more in the realm of drama. I knew I needed something more, something that I could incorporate into a good horror plot. In an attempt to find that extra something, I made a list of everything I thought was interesting about horror and a separate list of my worst fears. The things I liked about horror were: ghosts, the house as a character, and trauma confined to spaces. While this isn’t a horror-specific aspect, I also wrote down that I enjoyed the found family trope (the concept of friends or strangers forming a family unit) in media. When I went to find what could be scary
about horror movies, I broke it down even further into two lists: things that are spooky in horror movies and things that personally terrify me. On my spooky horror tropes list, I wrote: shadows, reflections that move when the person doesn't, ominous warnings, and the unknown. Although I say that my biggest fear is snakes, I took a look into myself so deep that my therapist would be proud, and tried to find more innate fears. The main fear that I came up with was the loss of my family, specifically the loss of my sisters.

Three notebook sheets of paper, two hours, a cry, and three cups of tea later, I had an idea of what I wanted to write about. My first concept was about a ghost and a final girl-- two sisters-- whose narratives parallel in opposite directions. By that I mean, one of the sisters (the final girl) would be alive and her narrative would continue normally. At the same time, her sister (the ghost) would be dead and her narrative would be of the past. I wanted the two storylines to intercut throughout the episode and create a dialogue about a specific unknown event-- a trauma. I thought about how all of the fears and tropes on my list could be melded into a traumatic event. Eventually, I decided that the only thing worse than losing a sibling or a family, in general, would be the inability to save them. The trauma-- the event that forged the final girl-- would be when the ghost killed the found family and was killed herself. This culmination of betrayal, loss, and agonizing grief would make an interesting narrative and an environment for interesting characters to thrive.

When I started my first draft-- my first scene, really-- I realized that this was going to be a larger undertaking than I anticipated. The first draft of this script wasn’t really a draft, it was more so two scenes held together by a graphic match. It was my first attempt at creating a dialogue between Alex, my final girl, and Jamie, my ghost. The scene had no actual dialogue, but it was a narrative conversation introducing the pair. It opened with Alex as she steps out of
the cab and walks up to the front door-- the scene that began Act II in the final draft. When Alex opens the door, there was a graphic match to Jamie closing the door to her apartment and walking down the street. It was very simple, very rudimentary, but it got me thinking about how the two mirror each other. In the Weimar Horror class that I took with Professor Taylor in Fall 2019, we talked a lot about doubling in horror and what that represents. In the films that we discussed in that class, doubling was used to show the parallels between two characters. Doubling, in some cases, can be used to show the fears and subconscious emotions of the characters. In this case, I wanted to show that their lives mirror each other in both the way that comes from prolonged common exposure and in the way that moments echo across time. I wanted to show that they were intrinsically connected, across time and space, by mirroring their movements across their narratives.

With the first attempt under my belt, I realized that this model of my script would be unsustainable. Focusing on these two characters on their own for the entirety of the pilot was hard enough, and if I tried to create a show based on this premise it would be painful to watch. In an attempt to combat this, I expanded my character list and added another aspect to my plot. I decided that “the event” that turns Alex into the final girl and Jamie into a ghost would be the murder of their found family. This gave me three new character arcs to follow and play with in relation to my two main characters. I didn’t want these characters to be meaningless side narratives, however, I wanted them to be an integral part of the story. Firstly, there was Noah, who was my version of every comedic relief side character that audience members want a spinoff about. Secondly, there was Hazel, the slightly eccentric culmination of every kid that was called “a pleasure to have in class” and social anxiety rolled into a person. Finally, there was Charlotte. This character is hard to describe in a sentence, like Noah and Hazel, because her character is
less about comic relief and more about the emotional core of this show. All of them-- Noah, Hazel, Alex, Jamie, and Charlotte-- represent family, love, and loss; but I wanted Charlotte to represent another layer of love: a romantic and gut-wrenching kind of love. With this new cast of characters developed and fleshed out, the story started to take on a clearer shape.

Throughout this project, I learned how to execute a vision, explain it to others, and advocate for it, even when someone else didn’t like it as much as I did. Going into this project, I had taken one class on screenwriting that was cut short due to the pandemic, and I was flying blind in terms of what this would look like. Professor Taylor is one of the best professors I’ve ever had the privilege of taking a class with and she knows horror cinema, but she doesn’t know anything about screenwriting either. Needless to say neither of us knew if what we were doing was how it was supposed to be done, but we were trying our best. JT always tried to push me to think beyond aesthetics and try to write something with a deeper meaning. In some instances, however, after thinking about some of her concerns, I decided to keep what I had written. These discussions and challenges helped shape my work as I was writing it and helped me feel confident in my choices after it was written.

One of the first, and longest lasting, comments that JT had about this script was that she didn’t care about the characters. She said that I clearly had characters and we see them going through strong emotions, like pain and fear, but she wondered why we should care about them. Why should the audience feel an emotional attachment to these people so quickly? Where in my script did I make them care? This was one of the first things we talked about in my earliest drafts, and I thought that maybe I could fix it as I wrote more. However, even as I wrote more of the story and I thought that I added more to the characters, JT still didn’t feel an emotional attachment to them. Some ice cream, three new character playlists, and a lot of procrastination
later, I took a step back and tried to figure out how I felt attached to characters in the shows that I liked. What made me root for them? What made me feel their pain when they failed and want to cheer when they succeeded? When did that occur in the episode? How soon or how late? Was it a collection of subtleties or a major event that cemented my thoughts on these characters?

In an attempt to answer these questions, and to justify my procrastination as work, I watched the pilots for some of my favorite television shows and took notes on what I saw. I found that I cared about my favorite characters for a plethora of reasons. Sometimes, when they were introduced, I saw a piece of myself within them, and no further work was required for me to support them. In other cases, the surface of the character was masking something below, and the possibility of further exploration intrigued me. Sometimes I liked the role they played within one of the larger dynamics the show had created (i.e., the family, the team, the larger society). These were all things that I thought I had done with some of my characters already, but they weren’t coming through to my audience. This brought me to one of the earliest and most important lessons I learned about writing in the course of this year: your audience is not in your head, and sometimes the things that make sense to you don’t make sense to them. Vigor renewed and lesson learned, I tried to make my audience care about my characters as much as I did. Even after edits, however, JT still had a hard time caring about them and thought I should be more obvious with my characterization. I thought that the detriment to the work from being obvious and clunky would outweigh the possibility that people would take longer to care for the characters, and decided to keep it as is.

The next issue that JT raised was that the timeline was hard to follow. This was a very valid concern and fair assessment. When I started this project, I grossly underestimated how difficult it would be to write a script, let alone one that jumped back and forth in time and
between people. In the earlier drafts, it was, I’ll admit, a bit of a mess. I was trying to weave Alex and Jamie’s stories together in a way that created a conversational flow with each other before I really knew what they were trying to say. As my script took more of a shape, the timeline cleaned itself up and the cuts made more sense. JT still had some reservations about it. She didn’t understand the lighting changes in relation to the narratives or the timeline itself. The lighting was a uniquely challenging piece of the script. In my mind, Jamie (in the past) and Alex (in her coma and in the present) had different lighting associated with their timelines and stories. Jamie, and all of the ghosts from the past, would have a bluish tint to their stories to connotate the past. Alex, on the other hand, would have two different lightings in this episode. In her coma, the lighting would be natural but just a touch overexposed or have a slight filter on it. I wanted this to show that the coma was close but not truly reality. When she gets out of the coma and goes back to the house-- back to reality-- it would be without filters or tints. That was a visual aspect that was confusing to describe, but it would look very dynamic if it was ever produced. There wasn’t anything to “fix” there. As for the timeline, after many diagrams and discussions and after moving the order or two scenes, JT understood it more.

The other throughline from JT about my script was that it was unsatisfying, specifically that Jamie’s motivation was unsatisfying. Jamie’s motivation was a major struggle for me throughout the conception and execution of this script. In my first draft, Jamie was going to suffer from sociopathy and kill the family because they’d figured it out. The problem with that, however, is that I didn’t want to fall back on the excuse that people are crazy and do crazy things just because they have a mental illness. JT also found this ending deeply unsatisfying. In my next draft, I thought about demonic possession. Maybe when Jamie was younger, she was possessed by something, but that something stays dormant sometimes? She gets backouts and nightmares
and bad feelings as a result of the darkness living within her. That’s why she dreams of shadows pulling her under and thinks that her sister is in danger. It’s also why she seems confused by the nosebleed in the office bathroom and her personality shifts at the end of that scene. That was the one I settled on in the end. I liked the idea that the paranormal events in this series could be read as real world issues instead. The ghosts in Alex’s world could be real, or they could be manifestations of her grief. Jamie’s possession and emotional turmoil could be read as demonic interference, or as a deeper psychological issue. JT still found this explanation unsatisfying.

These discussions taught me, arguably, the most important lesson I learned from this experience: know when you’re happy with your work and advocate for it. I had a hard time at the beginning of my meetings with JT, because she wasn't liking it as much as I hoped and she was pushing me to think more critically about certain aspects of the work. I really look up to Professor Taylor and I was torn between wanting her to like it, and thus making changes I wasn’t sure about, and staying true to my vision and disappointing her. It took me a long time to feel confident enough in my work that I could say, “thank you, but this is the vision that I have and I’m happy with it.” It took me an even longer time to work up the nerve to talk to JT about it. Obviously, Professor Taylor is here to support me and help me work through my project, and this conversation was not the massive event that I had made it to be in my head. This interaction, however, taught me how to deal with a future studio executive or network producer who might not understand my work. It taught me how to be confident in what I’m doing and be ok with the fact that not everyone will understand or like it.

When the script was finished, my project was still far from done. Originally, in my thesis proposal, I intended to write the script and then also write a shooting script. That version would be broken down, shot by shot, and include any notes that a director who was making this would
write down. As I got further into my project, however, I decided that I wanted to do something more creative for my supplemental portion. I decided to make a “show bible” instead. A show bible is essentially a lookbook for the show that includes anything that might help people visualize the show when you’re pitching it. I had an idea of what they looked like from a quick Google search, and one of my professors from when I studied abroad showed us some of the ones she’d been a part of over the years. What I gathered from these examples was that there is no one format for show bibles, and there is no right or wrong way to present your idea.

In my show bible, I took the images that floated in my mind when I was writing and tried to put them on the page for others to see. Before I truly began making my show bible, I decided that the best way to avoid any copyright infringement or intellectual property issues would be to use as many of my own images as possible. I made this portion of my project in a design software called Canva, so I thought that the stock photos would be alright. However, I still wanted to use as many of my own pictures as possible. That quickly proved difficult, especially with the images of how I pictured the characters. Luckily for me, getting pictures of my Alex and Jamie proved fairly easy. My best friend and her younger sister look very similar and were gracious enough to let me take their pictures for my project. I didn’t picture Alex or Jamie specifically as my friend and her sister, but I pictured them looking enough like each other that they seem clearly related. “Hazel’s” picture was also easy to take, because my roommate lives in the same apartment and can’t hide when I ask for help. The “Charlotte” and “Noah” pictures were a bit more difficult to acquire. In the midst of midterms and breaks, I forgot to schedule a time with my friend to take “Noah’s” picture. Luckily for me, one of my friends, once again, came to my rescue and got her brother to take the picture for me. The “Charlotte” picture was done with a projector on an upside down laundry basket and my phone’s camera set with a self
timer on the handle. It was definitely an experience, but the aesthetic was what I pictured and the images were mine, so I’d consider that a success. That being said, the images aren’t what I exactly pictured my characters to look like, and if this was actually created I would definitely like to see more diversity in the casting.

Another important aspect of my project that I wanted to include in my show bible is music. One of my favorite parts of any show or movie that I watch is the soundtrack. That, in conjunction with my role as a DJ at the college’s radio station, WCWM, since I was a freshman, led me to listening to copious amounts of music while I was writing. I made a playlist for each character. As a general playlist and for the house as a character, I made “A House Full of Ghosts.” For Alex there was an emotional rollercoaster of songs on a playlist titled, “The Final Girl.” For Jamie, it was all of the best villain songs with a hint of humanity sprinkled in on “psycho killer.” Charlotte’s playlist was more based around the kitchen scene between her and Alex in Act II and was called “Lover, Please Stay.” Hazel’s was a mix of pop and broadway named “the dumbest smart person you know.” For Noah, it’s a mix of songs with great beats and some “sad boi hours” songs on a playlist titled, “sarcastic, dark haired side character.” This seems like a small piece of the project, but I think that the music a person listens to tells you a lot about them as a person. These playlists helped me flesh out my characters and get to know them on a personal level. I incorporated them into my show bible by including the spotify codes that can be scanned and take you to the playlist. I also included the top three songs from each character’s playlist that best describe them on their individual pages. By combining these playlists with the images of what they may look like, I hope that my reader will be able to better visualize the story and feel more connected to the characters.
The last major section of my show bible is a summary and collection of key points for the rest of the episodes in the series. Thinking beyond the pilot was slightly easier than I anticipated. In fact, JT had to keep reminding me to lay pipe in the pilot instead of just saying that it’ll be addressed in a later episode. While I didn’t, and still don’t, have every aspect of all the future episodes mapped out, I did have certain scenes worked out. I knew that I wanted each episode to focus on a different character’s past timeline. Every character and every episode would have a slightly different voice and tone to it, in the same way that people have different speech patterns and tones in a conversation. On a broad level, I knew that I wanted Alex’s world to expand as she continued to grieve. In the pilot, she’s confined to a few rooms, mostly on the first floor. They’re usually dark, and the confined space reinforces her isolation in the house and in life. As she works through her grief and pain, she’ll have more space to move around. In my mind, the rooms and spaces that Alex gains access to have to do with the stories the ghosts are telling that episode. On a more micro level, I had the teaser for Hazel’s episode worked out in my head for a while. Alex was with Hazel the night her parents were killed, so to open Hazel’s episode, Alex and Hazel would arrive at her house. The music is playing in their car, and everything is normal until they see a bloody Jamie standing in the doorway through the windshield. Noah’s teaser was also planned out ahead of time. Instead of opening with a first meeting or a memorable event, Noah’s episode would start right after he died. There would be a close up of his eyes right after he falls to the ground, but then the camera would pull back and the scene would rewind like an old VHS tape to when Noah meets the sisters for the first time. Jamie’s episode would start with one of her birthday parties, everyone (including Alex) is focused on her, except for her parents. The teaser would end and the opening credits would roll after she blows out the candles and it goes black. Alex’s would start in a hospital when she gets handed a baby Jamie for the first time.
I have a few ideas for how to start Charlotte’s but the most likely one centers on her meeting Alex for the first time. I also had the last shot of the series in my mind as I finished writing the pilot. Alex, having faced her reality and accepted her title of the final girl, as well as its implications, walks outside. As she goes down the driveway and disappears from view, the ghosts inside the house watch her leave from the window. At the conception of this project, I barely had a fleshed out idea of what I wanted to write about, let alone how that would look at the end of the series. However, as I wrote more and the story started to come together, it was very clear how the rest of the events played out in this world.

The last page of my show bible addresses the aspects of television production and development that networks would be most interested in: would it sell. Horror has been, until recently with Mike Flannigan’s horror anthology series, a relatively untapped genre of television. Previously, if a television series was part of the genre, it was on the fantasy end and focused on vampires, werewolves, and monsters. This show fits more into the overlap in horror and drama, which has increased in popularity in recent years. With the increasing popularity in mind, this show has a promising outlook. Given that it's about characters from their early twenties to their early thirties, it would most likely be most popular with that demographic group. The script is almost fifty pages, so around forty-five to fifty minutes in run time. The length coupled with the limited series amount of episodes means that it will be best suited for release on a streaming platform. A service like Netflix or Amazon that has already dipped their toes into the horror television pool would best capitalize on the show. However, other networks that have a gap in their content would also benefit from this series streaming on their platform. Overall, it has a promising outlook as a straight to streaming title, especially amongst the twenty and thirty year olds.
With my script and the creative aspect done, there was one final part of my project left: this paper. After a year of work that culminated in an almost fifty page script and the hours it took to design a show bible, I thought this reflection paper would be a cakewalk. That was incorrect. This portion of the project was, quite frankly, the most tedious and stressful part of my entire thesis. This is a school whose film program is not only relatively new, but also rooted in academia rather than film practice. I understand the need for a reflection for creative projects instead of research based ones; however, a fifteen page reflection about an already lengthy script is on the negative side of busywork. In theory, if a student is writing a reflection paper as a part of their thesis project, they’ve created a piece of “art” instead of a research paper. If that’s an accurate statement, this paper is fifteen pages of an explanation of art-- art that should, in theory, make you think on its own. If students have to figure out what to ramble on about for fifteen pages, they’ve most likely explained most of the nuances of their work to you. You no longer have any reason to think about their project, or read it for that matter. I’m not arguing that a reflection on what we’ve learned over the course of a year isn’t necessary, I am simply reflecting on my thoughts about this project and thus this paper. In the future, shortening the reflection paper for creative projects would not only inspire more creative projects but also allow students to write better papers. Without the, for lack of a better word, oppressive page count assigned here, honors students wouldn’t have to drag out everything they were trying to say. Instead, they could briefly discuss how this project changed their thought process or how it helped them figure out what they wanted to do with their life or how they spent a year procrastinating until they finally found inspiration in a cheese-it that looked like a giraffe. Trust me when I say that we are all adept at the practice of fudging long papers; but, for something as important and time consuming as this project, it deserves a well thought out and eloquent reflection. Maybe you
should keep the length requirement, though. How else would you have these little moments of honest reflection from your students?

When I first proposed this paper, I stated a main goal for my project: try to figure out if this is something that I could see myself doing for the rest of my life. This project has been a year of brainstorming, drafting, editing, scrapping, and finalizing, and I’ve loved every second of it. Going into this project, I had the most miniscule amount of experience with screenwriting. My should-have-been-semester-long screenwriting class was cut short due to the pandemic, and I left England only knowing the format of a screenplay. My advisor, who has been an absolute rockstar, doesn’t know anything about screenwriting either. We spent an entire year making it up as we went and doing our best, and it was phenomenal. JT not only helped me with my thesis and let me bounce ideas off her, but she also taught me to believe in my work and let me meet her dog when I was having a bad week. I learned that I am really good at visualizing stories and that I really enjoy making the creative portion of my project. I had a great time conceptualizing and bringing this script to live, but I’m not sure if screenwriting is what I want to do, specifically. Being a part of the process and watching people slowly care about a story as much as I do was extremely satisfying. However, I think that my specific skill set may be best suited for the more production based aspects of film. After completing this project and working on other production based projects outside of the classroom this year, I know for sure that I want to work within the film industry. I think that I would be happy working as a writer, but I don’t know if I have the skill and internal drive to write stories for a living. After exploring the writing side of production, I would love to explore the more visual aspect of storytelling within this medium, like directing or set designing. Looking back at my script, I clearly have a strong mental image of how everything should look and how the scenes should fit together in a smooth way. With that in
mind, my final answer to my proposal question is: maybe but I think I may be best suited for something more visual.

I would be remiss if I turned in a reflection paper on this project without reflecting on everyone that helped me along the way. I’d like to say a special thank you to my advisor, Professor Jennifer Taylor, for helping me with this project and for always challenging me to do better. I’d like to thank Professors Castleberry and Blossom for agreeing to read my lengthy work and caring enough to ask me questions about it. I’d also like to thank Lexi Mays for always being there to answer my questions and read the newest draft. This project would not have been possible without all of you and I truly thank you for everything.