

THE DEAD WON'T SHUT UP!
(a.k.a. MOURNING ROUTINE)

"Pilot"

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"Pilot"

TEASER

EXT. A QUIET SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

SUPER: "YONKERS, NY, USA. 1938"

The OFF-SCREEN SOUND OF A ROARING ENGINE moves closer.

A FAMILY (MOTHER, FATHER, LITTLE BOY and GIRL) stands in front of a house, next to a car, surrounded by suitcases, and bags. The adults are terrified. The kids are confused.

The NEXT-DOOR NEIGHBORS watch with concern and curiosity, peeking between their curtains.

AN NYPD POLICE CAR finally races up and screams to a halt in front of the house.

THREE OFFICERS solicitously approach them.

COMMANDING OFFICER

'Evening, Ma'am. Mrs... Masters?

MOTHER

Yes, officer! Dear Lord! We're back from Albany--

FATHER

This is our second home--

MOTHER

There's someone in our house!

INT. ENTRANCE HALL - CONTINUOUS

The other two officers, FISHER and DONOVAN, enter the house.

LOUD THUMPS come from upstairs.

Heading to the staircase, Fisher turns on a flashlight while Donovan pulls out his gun.

INT. ATTIC - CONTINUOUS

Fisher and Donovan enter cautiously. It's pitch black. Only Fisher's flashlight cuts the darkness.

The THUMPING continues.

DONOVAN
NYPD! Show yourself!

Suddenly, a WEIRD SILENCE.

Then, the STRETCHING SOUND OF A ROPE.

DONOVAN (cont'd)
Police! Show yourself!

A CREEPY VOICE with a WEIRD REVERBERATION interrupts him.

CREEPY VOICE
(cantilena style)
Sweet babe Mary-Jane, made the
deadly swap. Sweet babe Mary-Jane,
left me for a city fop.

Fisher and Donovan look around for the source of the voice.

CREEPY VOICE (cont'd)
Sweet babe Mary-Jane, you done me
wrong. Sweet babe Mary-Jane, to me
you belong. Sweet babe Mary-Jane,
hear my pining song. Sweet babe
Mary-Jane, didn't you like my dong?

Fisher and Donovan exchange glances of comic confusion.

While the VOICE KEEPS REPEATING THIS, Fisher finds the pull-string light switch. He pulls it--

A ROTTING CORPSE

Hangs in a noose on the ceiling, UTTERING THE MARY-JANE NONSENSE with lunatic eyes.

Fisher and Donovan SCREAM.

The HANGED MAN begins to swing from the noose, faster and faster, kicking with manic thrusts one wall and then the other, like a pendulum.

Then, the Hanged Man disappears. The noose keeps swinging, and the FURIOUS THUMPS CONTINUE.

Fisher and Donovan, in horror, back out toward the staircase, carefully and decidedly.

Abruptly, the noose stops its swinging, unnaturally freezing in a perfectly perpendicular position.

HANGED MAN (O.S.)
 Yourself to this, you must resign.
 Sweet babe Mary-Jane, she is only--
 (a beat)
Mine!

The Hanged Man suddenly reappears and lunges towards the officers.

Doing this, the noose severs his head from his body, and THE TWO PARTS are launched in different directions.

The SEVERED HEAD lunges at Donovan and ferociously bites him in the face. Blood and SCREAMS flow copiously as the ghost-head chews on his face.

The HEADLESS BODY grabs a terrified Fisher and repeatedly smashes his head on the wall with atrocious violence.

EXT. EXTERIOR OF THE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The Commanding Officer and the Adults react with horror to the BLOODCURDLING SCREAMS heard from Fisher and Donovan.

A LOUD CRASH. The attic window is shattered and Fisher flies through it.

He actually flies! His body rotates in midair, an invisible force holding him by the ankles and making him spin like a pinwheel.

Commanding Officer and Adults watch with abject terror.

Kids look up with amused wonder: "WOW!"

Fisher's body is dropped and, with a DESPERATE FINAL SCREAM, he crashes to the ground, at the group's feet.

EVERYBODY SCREAMS in horror, Commanding Officer included.

The Little Girl, with innocent curiosity, cautiously pokes Fisher's body with the tip of her little pink umbrella.

COMMANDING OFFICER
 Listen, you need Detective Nick!
 She's your man!

FATHER
She?!

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

EXT. NYC 13TH POLICE PRECINCT, GRAMERCY PARK - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT: MAIN ENTRANCE OF THE 13TH PCT

SUPER: "ONE YEAR EARLIER, 1937, NEW YORK CITY"

INT. NYPD MEETING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A long table, POLICE OFFICERS are seated on all sides. Atmosphere is tense, reprimands are in the air.

The meeting is chaired by CAPT. DERRICK HOLLOWAY, a no nonsense fiftyish man with a stern expression.

A WOMAN in her early thirties, a Kat Dennings type, police uniform and hair in a bun, sits in a corner: her name is NICOLETTE "NICK" SHARPSTEIN. She writes down the meeting's minutes, mechanically and dejectedly.

DETECTIVE ONE

We're workin'on it, Captain. But we need more guys...

DETECTIVE TWO

Connolly put out to pasture... Carlyle got snuffed...

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

Maybe if you weren't such a bunch of knuckleheads? Uh?

Nick listens in with increasing irritation.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY (cont'd)

Who messed up the evidence in the Miller case?

DETECTIVE TWO

But... But, the coroner... wasn't specific... all that mumbo-jumbo about fingerprints and shit...

Almost trembling with indignation, Nick struggles to keep quiet, and eventually stands up.

NICK

Captain, permission to speak?

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

(annoyed)

What is it, Sharpstein?

NICK

You know I'd be eager to contribute... actively to the precinct's operations.

(a beat)

Why don't you add me to the Homicide Squad?

All the Detectives in the room SNICKER.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

Sharpstein... This again?

NICK

I'm fully qualified, Captain, and you know it! Think it over. Take a break! I'd be an asset!

DETECTIVE ONE

(giggling)

An ass hat...

Nick looks daggers at Detective One and approaches the table pointing her forefinger.

NICK

Hey! If it weren't for me you'd still be groping around in the dark with that Hancock case. I connected the dots!

Detective One stands up and looks at Nick, both confrontationally and paternalistically.

DETECTIVE ONE

Oh, good girlie! But you see, we're the Police. We need men. With guns. Rods...

Detective One pauses to lean towards Nick and tauntingly cheek-pinch her.

DETECTIVE ONE (cont'd)

(allusive grin)

And you, my sweetface... What you got is just... a holster.

Furious anger sparkles in Nick's eyes.

NICK

First in my class, on the Force for years now! That's the gig for me! Homicide Detective.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

You can not realistically do this job.

(a beat)

Look, there's no point in wanting to be as rich as Rockefeller if you weren't born a Rockefeller.

Nick opens her mouth to talk back, but then just shakes her head and exhales.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY (cont'd)

Look, there's plenty of lady's jobs out there. Even in the NYPD, like the ones I give you!

NICK

Oh, sure! Secretary! Or the archives! I haven't trained this hard for that! You've never put me on a single case!

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

(laughing)

A woman in the field?! I can't take the responsibility!

Nick's expression suddenly changes: a glint of excitement and determination in her eyes, an epiphany.

NICK

You know what? I can take the responsibility...

(a meaningful smirk)

And I'll do it!

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COLUMBIA UNI, LECTURE THEATER - DAY

DR. SAMUEL SHARPSTEIN, a man in his sixties, professorial look and dress including a Van Dyke goatee, gives a class. Behind him, a wide blackboard covered with diagrams and religious symbols.

DR. SHARPSTEIN

(passionately)

The Protestant Churches, with some exceptions like the Wesleyan/Methodist Church, profess a position that denies any validity of the good works of the single person. "Sola Fide", Faith only is what saves, and the works are an effect of God's Grace. On the contrary, the Catholic Church sees a co-responsibility of each single person in his or her own salvation, by way of good works. This soteriological doctrine is known as "Semi Pelagianism".

As he lectures, only A DOZEN STUDENTS are scattered around the room.

ONE STUDENT struggles to keep his eyes open.

Dr. Sharpstein looks at the desk.

DETAIL OF A POCKET WATCH ON THE DESKTOP: 12.00 P.M.

DR. SHARPSTEIN (cont'd)

Oh boy! Time really flies when you're having fun! Well, we'll continue next week.

The Student, who has dozed off in the meantime, wakes up with a start and rises.

The other students slowly leave the room.

Dr. Sharpstein collects his books and notes from the desk.

NICK (O.C.)

'xcuse me, teach. Semi Pela-what?

Dr. Sharpstein raises his eyes and see it's his daughter, Nick. She's in civilian's clothes, Katharine Hepburn-style, with a trench-coat and her hair in a ponytail.

DR. SHARPSTEIN

(joyfully)

Nicolette!

NICK

(wincing in disgust)

Please, dad. Nick?

DR. SHARPSTEIN

Nicolette is a perfectly charming name. I don't understand why you detest it so.

NICK

Sounds like the vacuous heroine of some saccharine girlish novel...

(mock melodramatic)

"Oh, the anguish of having suitors aplenty! Which fortunate one shall I exchange nuptial vows with?"

DR. SHARPSTEIN

All right, all right. De gustibus non est disputandum...

NICK

Which brings me to...

(excited eyes)

Guess what?

DR. SHARPSTEIN

(slightly worried)

What?...

NICK

I've finally got my Private-Eye license!

DR. SHARPSTEIN

(feigned enthusiasm)

Oooh, good... Good for you. Well done...

NICK

I've found a perfect place in Harlem. Rent's reasonable. An apartment/office combo.

(excited)

And lots of jazz clubs in the neighborhood!

DR. SHARPSTEIN

Good, that is... exciting.

NICK

(frowning)

What's the enthusiasm?

DR. SHARPSTEIN

No, no, I'm happy for you. If that's what you want to pursue. It's only that...

NICK

What?

DR. SHARPSTEIN

I mean, I was concerned when you were in the Police... Even more so now that you're all on your own. This line of business... It's a bit of a danger.

NICK

Don't be a Yiddish Mama! I'll be fine! And it's temporary. Valuable experience!

DR. SHARPSTEIN

It's just that...

Nick hugs Dr. Sharpstein.

NICK

Dad... I'll be careful. Look, I promise I won't get myself killed.

Nick crosses her chest.

NICK (cont'd)

May I drop dead if I ever get killed!

EXT. A STREET IN HARLEM - LATE AFTERNOON

Nick walks around to familiarize herself with her new neighborhood.

She stops in front of a door.

DETAIL OF THE DOOR SIGN: "CLUB HOT-CHA"

The door is ajar. Nick peeks inside.

The SOUND OF A SOLO TRUMPET filters through.

Finally, Nick timidly walks in.

INT. CLUB HOT-CHA MAIN FLOOR - CONTINUOUS

The place is clearly not a fancy joint, but neither is it seedy. It is deserted apart from A BLACK TRUMPET PLAYER practicing on the small stage.

Nick approaches, enraptured by the BLUESY IMPROVISATION.

The trumpet player, CHUCK "THE BARON" HORTON, notices he has an audience. He finishes with a flourish and smiles at the guest.

Nick smiles back and nods at him.

Chuck gets off the stage, approaching Nick. He is a handsome man in his early forties, with a friendly face.

NICK

Sorry I gatecrashed... I heard you from the street... Couldn't resist! You're top notch!

CHUCK

Well, thanks, Miss...?

NICK

It's Nick, Nick Sharpstein. Just moving up here.

Chuck holds out his hand.

CHUCK

Chuck, Chuck Horton.

As they shake hands, Nick suddenly stares at him, in admiration.

NICK

Horton? You're the Baron?!

CHUCK

(surprised)

Yes? How come you know me?

NICK

I have your record! "Flushing Shuffle". Love it!

CHUCK

You got my old side?! You must be a real jazz buff!

NICK

My... My mom bought it. Major Jazz lover.

CHUCK

She must be a hip lady!

NICK

(sighing)

She was...

CHUCK

Oh...

(a beat)

I'm sorry... for your loss.

NICK

(forcing a smile)

Yeah...

CHUCK

Uh... You play?

NICK

Yep. Traps. But totally amateur,
you know...

CHUCK

Swell! Then gatecrash again for
some jammin' some time!

MONTAGE: VARIOUS LOCALES - DAY TO EVENING

AN UPBEAT JAZZY DRUM-SET SOLO ACCOMPANIES THE SHOTS

-- A Harlem street. MOVERS unload boxes from a truck. Nick walks into a building holding a wicker carrier: inside is a BIG TABBY CAT, MERRIVALE, with a cranky expression.

-- Inside an apartment. Movers place a large desk, with Nick giving instructions. Merrivale observes with a bothered and contemptuous expression.

-- A PAINTER inscribes the glass pane of the apartment door with "NICK SHARPSTEIN. PRIVATE DETECTIVE"

-- Nick fills numerous shelves in her bedroom with jazz 78rpms, mystery novels, bulky law and forensics manuals. On the walls, posters of Gene Krupa and Sonny Greer, and portraits of Marie Owens, Alice Stebbins Wells, and Lola Baldwin, the first female police-officers in history.

-- A WORKMAN installs a sign over the street-door: "NICK SHARPSTEIN. PRIVATE DETECTIVE. 3rd FLOOR."

-- Promotional leaflets are printed out and distributed.

-- Adverts for Nick's agency can be seen in newspapers and magazines.

-- Posters are pasted on walls.

END OF MONTAGE, DRUM MUSIC CONTINUES AS A SOUND-BRIDGE TO--

INT. NICK'S BEDROOM - SAME EVENING

PAN SHOT OF THE NOW-FURNISHED APARTMENT ENDING ON--

Nick PLAYS ON A DRUM SET. We realize that it is she who has been playing the jazz solo all along. She is an accomplished drummer.

She closes the piece with A HIT ON THE RIDE CYMBAL, which falls on the floor with a HUGE SPLASHING NOISE.

Merrivale wakes up with a startle, and COMPLAINS WITH A "MEOW" of indignation.

Nick mouths an embarrassed "sorry" to Merrivale.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - DAY

A CLIENT, an obese and sweaty man, is slouched on one of the chairs in front of the desk.

NICK
(with enthusiasm)
What can I do for you?

CLIENT
I suspect my business associate is chiseling me. You know, skimming the company's books.

NICK
Embezzlement, I see. Well, we should have a look at the numbers--

CLIENT
Can't you tell your boss I'm here?

NICK
My boss?

CLIENT
Yeah. Detective Nick. I'd rather talk details with him, not with the reception girl.

Nick takes a deep breath.

NICK
I'm Detective Nick.

CLIENT
(confused)
You?

(MORE)

CLIENT (cont'd)
 (a beat)
 You're a gal.

NICK
 You do have a keen eye...

CLIENT
 I... I expected to meet with a
 private cop, a dick...

NICK
 (forced grin)
 And I am one.

Nick indicates the wall with a sweeping gesture.

NICK (cont'd)
 See? The diplomas? Police Academy,
 Master's in Law, P. I. License...
 So, shall we talk business?

CLIENT
 Um... I'd rather... Sorry, lady.

The client laboriously stands up and lurches to the door.

NICK
 What's the problem, mister?

CLIENT
 Problem is I've climbed six flights
 of stairs expecting to see a Nick
 guy, not a Nick gal.
 (scoffing)
Nick! You're tricking people, lady!
 (mumbling)
 Never heard of a female... dick!

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - ANOTHER DAY

A middle-age upper-class LADY CLIENT.

LADY CLIENT
 A female detective! At last!

NICK
 (proud)
 Yep! Times are changing.

LADY CLIENT
 Certain matters are a lady's
 prerogative. Issues that concern
 (MORE)

LADY CLIENT (cont'd)
us. Feminine solidarity, if you
follow me...

NICK
Er... No, I don't...

LADY CLIENT
Men. Two-timing swines. You need a
woman to catch a cheater. Now
finally we're getting female
private eyes to take care of them!

NICK
(exhales, wearily)
Yeah... That's exactly my inner
calling...

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - ANOTHER DAY

AN ELDERLY LADY in her seventies, MISS RUTHERFORD, sickly complexion and slightly jerky movements, sits in front of Nick's desk. Dressed in demode garments, with an Edwardian hairdo, she has a good-tempered but slightly senile expression, and speaks with A THICK BRITISH ACCENT.

NICK
(without enthusiasm)
What can I do for you?

MISS RUTHERFORD
Well, this.... occurrence that I
happen to experience is most
vexatious. I am sorry to impart
that I have already reported this
rather obnoxious predicament to all
sorts of Public Force
representatives. The Police
Department... The Fire
Department... Numerous independent
investigators... Pest
Exterminators--

NICK
Pest Exterminators? Er... Excuse
me, Mrs...

MISS RUTHERFORD
It's miss. Miss Rutherford.

NICK
Miss Rutherford, what seems to be
your... "occurrence"?

MISS RUTHERFORD

Well, I have recently taken notice of some implements and certain pieces of furniture in my residence being removed or displaced--

NICK

So a thief.

MISS RUTHERFORD

No. A ghost.

INT. CLUB HOT-CHA - LATER, NIGHT

Nick and Chuck are at the bar during an intermission. Nick is dressed more elegantly, for the evening; her hair is loose.

CHUCK

(sorry)

That bad?!

NICK

Yep. That bad. Should've stayed in the Force.

CHUCK

You gotta give it some time.

NICK

(sighing)

Nah... Born with the wrong water works. Everything's easier when you're a dude...

Nick belts down a SHOT OF VODKA -- the third, according to the two dead ones on the counter. Then, she SNAPS HER FINGERS to call the bartender.

NICK (cont'd)

Another round. Same poison.

Chuck watches with an ironic/impressed smirk on his face.

NICK (cont'd)

It's just days without clients, or petty two-timers, lost pets, nut cases... And today... a ghost!

CHUCK

You dealt with a ghost?!

NICK
 (scoffing)
 Of course not!

Nick points to herself and the surroundings.

NICK (cont'd)
 There's nothing after this. Souls,
 ghosts, afterlife... All hogwash!
 This old lady claimed there was
 some spook in her house.

CHUCK
 And you?...

NICK
 Told her, politely-- Well, politely
 enough, that I had other stuff on
 my plate.

CHUCK
 I don't know... Maybe just check it
 out?

NICK
 You kidding me? I'm not gonna take
 advantage of some old dame's
 delusion!

CHUCK
 I didn't mean that. Just maybe it's
 not a ghost--

NICK
 It is not a ghost!

CHUCK
 OK... But maybe it's some
 intriguing mystery for you?

NICK
 I doubt it. Uh...

Nick stares blankly into the air.

NICK (cont'd)
 You know Don Quixote?

CHUCK
 Yes?

NICK
 I thought I could fight my way to
 the job I wanted but...

(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)

(a beat)

I'm delusional. Like Don Quixote!
What was I thinking? I am the nut
case! A fail...

Nick hides her face in her hands, as if about to break into tears.

Chuck delicately raises her face and looks fondly into her eyes.

CHUCK

Nick. Nick, look at me. You're
going to make it. I've known you
for... six months? Well, I'm
positive I've never met a woman so
strong, so determined, so
brilliant. You are gonna make it, I
promise.

Nick calms down and looks at him with a reassured smile.

NICK

You really think so?
(jokingly)
Or are you just saying that to get
me in the sack?

Nick gives Chuck a look that would melt a glacier.

AWKWARD SILENCE.

Then, Chuck reacts with panicking embarrassment.

CHUCK

Er... I'm sorry... Uh... I'd better
hustle. The cats are about to take
up the gig.

Nick is a bit confused but quickly conceals her feelings.

NICK

Sure. 'Course. Chop, chop! Go work
your magic!

Chuck departs hurriedly, as if worried.

Nick watches him go away, frowning in the effort to decipher the mystery behind Chuck's reaction. Then, she just sighs.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S DOOR - DAY

ANGLE FROM THE INTERIOR TO THE EXTERIOR

The front door opens. Nick appears, standing on the doorstep, in her trench-coat and with a leather-bag.

NICK

Good morning, Miss Rutherford.

MISS RUTHERFORD

(lost)

How do you do? And you are?

NICK

Detective Sharpstein, remember me?
You came to my office yesterday...

MISS RUTHERFORD

(with a sweet smile)

Oh, yes, of course! Hallo!

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S MAIN HALL - CONTINUOUS

Miss Rutherford shows Nick in. It's a two-story Victorian house, decorated with an eye-straining mix of contrasting floral patterns. The rooms are bursting with framed old photos, china statuettes, royal commemorative plates, a collection of tea cups, doilies, and all types of trinkets.

The carpet has a conspicuous perpendicular furrow in front of the main door.

MISS RUTHERFORD

Lovely that you have found an
opportunity in your calendar!

NICK

Oh, don't mention it.

MISS RUTHERFORD

The police and all the other
individuals whom I have consulted
with derided me, very
discourteously so, if I may say--

NICK

Yes, yes... So...

(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)
(trying hard to be
serious)
You said you think it's a... ghost?

MISS RUTHERFORD
It is Aunt Agatha.

NICK
OK... Well, I think we should first
rule out the... human agency,
right?

INT. UPPER-FLOOR BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A chest of drawers is oddly located behind the door, almost blocking the entrance. Nick and Miss Rutherford slide inside.

The room, with a queen-size bed with a yellowish lace canopy, looks even more outdated than the rest of the house.

MISS RUTHERFORD
These were Aunt Agatha's quarters.

Nick looks inquisitively at the chest of drawers.

NICK
Why is this here?

MISS RUTHERFORD
It has been transported here, from
its original location over there.
By the ghost.

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S STAIRCASE - MOMENTS LATER

As they walk downstairs, the shaky Miss Rutherford loses her balance and is about to trip. Nick promptly saves her from a fall.

NICK
(compassionately)
Are you OK?

MISS RUTHERFORD
Yes, my child. Old age is a nasty
companion...

Nick holds Miss Rutherford's forearm as they walk downstairs and resume their conversation.

NICK
Any valuables missing?

MISS RUTHERFORD
Yes. The entirety of the jewels
that I have been bequeathed in
accordance with Aunt Agatha's
estate. All vanished.

NICK
Sounds like thieves...

MISS RUTHERFORD
(shaking her head)
No, no. It is Aunt Agatha.

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

DETAIL OF A LARGE WINDOW

One of the panes is broken, replaced with a cardboard sheet.

Nick looks at the base of the window.

DETAIL OF THE CARPET

Nick's hand inspects it. Nothing.

NICK
Have you swept the floor?

MISS RUTHERFORD
I have not altered a thing.

NICK
Uh...

EXT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S GARDEN, RIGHT SIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Nick finds some glass-shards at the base of the window.

NICK
Window's been broken from the
inside... Any other broken doors or
windows?

MISS RUTHERFORD
Well, yes. In the kitchen and in
the library.

EXT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S GARDEN, LEFT SIDE - MOMENTS LATER

C.U. OF NICK

She holds and examines more glass-shards.

NICK

(intrigued)

All three windows broken from the
inside. Makes no sense...

Nick notices a small glass-cut on one of her fingers.

Nick sucks on the bleeding wound.

NICK (cont'd)

Can I wash my hands?

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nick turns on the faucet. Water comes out intermittently,
with sudden bursting splashes and FART-LIKE NOISES.

NICK

(loud)

Er... Miss? I think you need a
plumber here...

MISS RUTHERFORD (O.S.)

Indeed. My apologies. I have
recently been experiencing some
malfunctioning.

Nick is struggling with the jolty and spraying water-stream.

NICK

(loud)

Maybe get a nice makeover?

MISS RUTHERFORD (O.S.)

Oh, it was renovated a mere two
years ago. State of the art.

Nick gives a more skeptical look at the spraying faucet.

NICK

(to herself)

State of the fart!

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S MAIN HALL - MOMENTS LATER

As Nick exits from the bathroom she stops to inspect something on the floor.

DETAIL OF THE SIX-FOOT FURROW IN THE CARPET

It is as precisely straight as if made with a ruler.

NICK

Is this part of...

MISS RUTHERFORD

Yes. It materialized simultaneously with the other signs.

Nick paces around the main hall. Then, she kneels down on the floor, aligning her eyes with the furrow, to trace its direction.

Miss Rutherford watches her with restrained curiosity.

Then, Nick stands up and observes the ceiling.

NICK

Aunt Agatha's bedroom's up there, right?

MISS RUTHERFORD

Yes, it is.

NICK

(indicating a point)
And the chest of drawers should be... there.

MISS RUTHERFORD

I suppose so...

Moving around the room, Nick intersects with her arms the imaginary lines extending from the broken windows.

Then, she stops at the center of the room, looking up and then down. Then, she indicates the point where she stands.

NICK

All the lines of action intersect on this spot. What's under here?

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

Nick slowly walks down a precarious flight of half-rotten wooden stairs. Hoarded along the long wall are various

belongings, furniture, suitcases and trunks. A flickering yellowish lightbulb barely dispels the darkness.

MISS RUTHERFORD (O.S.)
 You will forgive me if I am not
 escorting you to the cellar. I do
 not dare venture on those steep
 steps.

NICK
 Good thinking. Don't worry.

Nick arrives at the center of the room. She looks up and again paces around making imaginary lines converge until she determines a precise spot on the wooden floor.

She easily removes two loose floorboards.

DETAIL OF A LITTLE CHEST HIDDEN BELOW

NICK (cont'd)
 (triumphantly)
 Ha!

Nick crouches to take the chest out of the floor.

It's stuck, as if cemented. Nick pulls hard, to no avail.

NICK (cont'd)
 (pulling it)
 What. The. Heck?!
 (shouting)
 Ma'am? Have you had a chest
 cemented into the cellar floor?

MISS RUTHERFORD (O.S.)
 A chest?! I have no knowledge of
 any chest...

Nick takes some tools from her bag and starts picking the lock.

She finally manages to open the chest.

DETAIL OF THE OPEN CHEST

It is full of jewelry, a ruby ring on top.

NICK
 Score!
 (mumbling)
 Just some sick prank... Aunt Agatha
 my foot!

WHAM! A HOWLING GHOST resembling Queen Victoria pops out from the chest and attacks Nick.

EXT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Nick runs away from Miss Rutherford's house SCREAMING AT THE TOP OF HER LUNGS.

MISS RUTHERFORD
(with aplomb)
I did inform her that it was Aunt Agatha.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON, LATER

Still shaken, Nick arrives in her office.

As she enters, she finds an ODD-LOOKING SIXTYISH GUY, CAL, sitting in a chair, lazily reading a sports magazine. He has a shabby look and wears a rather frayed pinstripe suit. (All his lines are in substandard English, with an ITALIAN ACCENT.)

Cal lifts his eyes and stares at Nick flirtatiously.

NICK
(bluntly)
First: Who are you? Second: How did you get in?

CAL
First: Cal Benedetto. Second: through the door.

Then, surprised, Cal jumps up, eyes full of expectation.

CAL (cont'd)
Can ya see me?

NICK
(tiredly)
No, I can't see you now. Come back tomorrow.

CAL
Al contrario, it's now ya can see me!

NICK
(losing her temper)
What? Listen... I've had enough for one day. Leave, please.

CAL
I can't leave... Nicoletta, right?
This's my home.

NICK
(automatic response)
It's Nick!
(a beat)
And this is my home!
(a beat)
Hey, wait a minute... How did you
get in? The door was locked!

CAL
(with a smirk)
Like this.

Demonstratively, Cal traverses the closed door to disappear into the hallway, and then reappears again through the door. Standard fare for any ghost.

CAL (cont'd)
Capisci?

CUT TO:

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

DETAIL OF NICK'S HAND

It frenetically knocks on a door. The door-plaque reads:
"Superintendent."

SUPERINTENDENT (O.C.)
Coming! Jeez! Building on fire, or
what?!

The SUPERINTENDENT opens the door. He's a fiftyish white man, balding and short, and wears a stained tank top that puts his ridiculously hairy shoulders on prominent display.

SUPERINTENDENT
(harshly)
What's up?

Nick looks like someone who has just escaped from some mental institution. She tries really hard to pull it together, in vain.

NICK
I'm really, really sorry, Mr.
Nichols. Could you please come to
(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)
my apartment for just a minute? I
need you to see something? Please?

SUPERINTENDENT
What is it? You got rats?

NICK
(fake smile)
Not... exactly. Maybe yes, maybe
no...
(with crazy eyes)
I'm not sure. Would you check for
me, please?

SUPERINTENDENT
(laughing)
One little mouse, you dames go
bananas!

SUPERINTENDENT'S WIFE (O.S.)
(yelling)
What's going on?

SUPERINTENDENT
(to his wife)
It's the gal from upstairs! Looks
like she has rats.

SUPERINTENDENT'S WIFE (O.S.)
(as above)
So? Everyone has rats in this
place!

SUPERINTENDENT
(as above)
She's scared as shit. Wants me to
check.

SUPERINTENDENT'S WIFE (O.S.)
(as above)
Oh, no, mister. I ain't letting you
go alone. She looks like a floozy.

SUPERINTENDENT
(to his wife)
Keep it down! She can hear you! All
of Jersey can!
(to Nick)
Sorry. You mind if she tags along?

NICK
(impatient)
The more eyes the better!

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Nick, the Superintendent, and his WIFE (a woman who's even uglier inside than out) stand in a row, staring in front of them, all unimpressed, except for Nick.

An AWKWARD SILENCE.

Cal is standing on the opposite side of the room, observing the group, amused. He is solid bodied and not floating.

Nick gapes at Cal, and then turns her head to study the reaction of the Superintendent and his Wife.

NICK

Can't you see... it?

CAL

(offended)

Hey! It's a him! I'm no dog!

The Superintendent watches more intently. The Wife keeps a suspicious and jealous eye on Nick.

SUPERINTENDENT

(shrugging)

Nah. No rat. Besides, you got that cat to take care of 'em, right?

They all look at Merrivale, who sleeps like the dead.

SUPERINTENDENT (cont'd)

(looking at the cat)

Or not. Is that thing stuffed?

Nick keeps gawking at Cal all the time.

NICK

(eyes still on Cal)

So... you see... absolutely...
nothing?

SUPERINTENDENT

(studying Nick's
face)

Nothin'. Nada.

The Superintendent turns again and squints at the wall trying to see what it is that Nick is staring at.

SUPERINTENDENT (cont'd)

Not a livin' thing.

NICK
(as if to herself)
That's the problem...

Cal puffs in annoyance.

CAL
(to Nick)
Come on! I'm a ghost. Duh! Ya can
see me, them not. Duh! Get ov'r it!
Now get rid of the two minchioni
here. Time to talk.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. DR. SHARPSTEIN'S STUDY - LATER, EVENING

E.C.U. OF NICK

NICK

(with crazy eyes)

So... You think I'm crazy?

We are in an elegant library. A Menorah can be seen on the mantelpiece. On the walls, framed fragments of scrolls in Hebrew and Aramaic.

Dr. Sharpstein sits on a sofa, listening carefully to Nick, who sits next to him. Cal explores the room.

DR. SHARPSTEIN

(perfectly calm)

Of course not.

(a beat)

Ghosts are real. Actually, I'm rather glad this happened.

NICK

(confused)

Glad?

Cal tries to make sense of the inscriptions on some scrolls.

DR. SHARPSTEIN

You've always struck me as a bit too much of a... positivist. You see, as a matter of fact, there is a hereafter--

NICK

(wearily)

Oh, please, I can't take a lecture now!

DR. SHARPSTEIN

(unabated)

There are things we cannot see nor measure! Now, God has given you this sign. You know, like Saint Thomas: "Unless I see it, I will not believe it."

NICK

(more confused)

That's Gospel... Aren't our people sticking by the... other books?

DR. SHARPSTEIN
Well, yes... The point is...

Dr. Sharpstein affectionately takes her hand in his.

DR. SHARPSTEIN (cont'd)
Nicolette--

NICK
(automatically)
Nick.

DR. SHARPSTEIN
Yes... I think this might be
something to embrace! A gift.

Cal turns to her and indicates Dr. Sharpstein.

CAL
What I tell ya? I'm a gift! Listen
to yar papa.
(looking at the
scrolls)
Professor of Chinese?

NICK
(bluntly)
That's Hebrew.

Dr. Sharpstein notices that Nick talks to the air.

DR. SHARPSTEIN
(excited)
Is... Is it here?

CAL
It's a he! What's wrong with ya
people!

NICK
Right over there. He won't leave my
side. You can't see him, can you?

DR. SHARPSTEIN
I wish! Is it--

NICK
(fast exchange)
He...

CAL
(fast exchange)
Thank ya!

NICK

Cal.. that's his name. Cal says I have this gift, that I can see ghosts. Claims that if we have met, me with this new "gift" and him being clueless as to why he's still stuck here as a ghost, it must mean something. He thinks I have some mission, and his mission is to help me with my mission...

(wearily)

I don't need this mess...

DR. SHARPSTEIN

No, he might be right. Maybe your mission is specializing in investigations involving ghosts?

NICK

Say what?

CAL

Told ya. Gee! Doc's good!

DR. SHARPSTEIN

Ghosts are said to linger here on Earth because they have some unfinished business. They won't leave until things are resolved. To cross over, ghosts need closure. And you can help them get that closure.

(enthusiastic)

And I'd be delighted to back you up!

INT. NICK'S CAR - SAME EVENING, LATER

Nick is at the wheel of a Cadillac Series 60 coupe. Cal is in the passenger's seat. Nick still looks perplexed.

COMPLETE SILENCE for a while.

CAL

(breaking the ice)

Fancy wheels ya have. Me, also drove a Caddy-laccky in my days...

NICK

So... This "gift" to see ghosts... How come it showed up all of a sudden?

CAL

I dunno. Probably when ya touched that Agatha dame ya told me... That unlocked yar gift.

NICK

Can't I re-lock it?

CAL

Nope. Once it's done, it's done.

(a beat)

Look, 'tis not common, I tell ya! I been... ghostin' 'round for...

(confused)

Um... What year's this one?

NICK

1938. How come you don't know it?!

CAL

'Cause we float between two worlds, between past, present, future, and shit... Things are kinda messed up for us...

Cal indicates something outside of the car window.

CAL (cont'd)

See? A skyscraper's ov'r there.

NICK

There's nothing there!

CAL

It'll be built in 1971. But I can sorta see somethin' already.

(a beat)

Al Pacino's gonna live there.

NICK

Who?

CAL

Big movie star.

NICK

Never heard of him.

CAL

'Cause he's not been born yet.

(a beat)

Anyhoo, ya're the first person ev'r to see me. Ya're special, missy!

NICK

And, you've been in my apartment
for all this time?

CAL

Uh-huh. Owned it. Lived there.
(morose face)
Died there.

NICK

How... How did you die?

CAL

(bitterly)
Backstabbers. Them actually stabbed
me in the back, bastardi!

NICK

Were you some kinda... mobster?

CAL

Come on! Just 'cause I'm Italiano I
gotta be mafioso!

NICK

Sorry, I didn't mean it like that.
(a beat)
So, what did you do?

CAL

(selecting words)
Well... Let's say I... distributed
fluids in times of dry weather...

NICK

(with a smirk)
Bootlegger during Prohibition.

CAL

OK... Yeah. I dealt hooch. But I
nev'r killed nobody! I got killed!

EXT. A STREET - CONTINUOUS

Nick's car drives by.

NICK (V.O.)

So... What's your "unfinished
business"? Still have some unsold
bathtub-gin stashed away?

CAL (V.O.)
 Don't ya gimme the judgey look! I
 seen it, ya and booze! Ya mustav'
 been a blessing to my business back
 in the days!

EXT. HARLEM SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Cal walk down the street.

NICK
 Interesting that you can see the
 future... I should take you to the
 racetracks!

CAL
 Ah, Ah... Nah, just random visions
 here, no control at all. If I'd
 figured out a way to get moneyed,
 I'd be haunting the Waldorf-Astoria
 now.

NICK
 Come on, tell me if I'll ever be a
 Homicide Detective!

CAL
 I ain't no fortune-teller!

NICK
 Is there any one useful thing you
 can--

Nick freezes as she suddenly sees--

A WEIRD YOUNG WOMAN WITH AN ALIENATED EXPRESSION

She traverses a tree and disappears into a street drain.

NICK (cont'd)
 Jeepers! I just saw a ghost!

CAL
 Ya don't say!

NICK
 Look, I'm new to this stuff!

CAL
 Better get used to it.

NICK
 They look like people...

CAL
Hey, we are people!

NICK
Oh, you know what I mean! They're not... you're not... you know... vaporous or luminescent, or--

CAL
What? Ya expect us to hang 'round in white bedsheets? Draggin' chains, goin' all moanin' and groanin'--

Cal makes a resentful parody of a ghost.

CAL (cont'd)
"Ooohh.... Ooooh... Boo!"

NICK
Aw! I mean they look solid like... living people. Until they pull some... some ghost stunt. How do I tell them from... "regular" people?

CAL
(laconically)
Just wait till they pull some ghost stunt.

A DANDY-LOOKING MAN walks past Cal. Cal, as a prank, touches his back. The man shudders and sneezes.

Cal giggles. And Nick realizes something--

NICK
That's why it's always so darn chilly in my apartment ! You're costing me a fortune in fuel!

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - LATER

Nick lies on the couch, eyes closed, massaging her forehead, a half-empty glass of whiskey in her hand.

CAL
So, ya're gonna take care of the cellar dame or not?

NICK
(wearily)
I don't know... Gosh, my head's killing me!

(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)

(a beat)

Give ghosts closure? I'm a detective, not some... exorcist, or a heck of a ghost sitter!

CAL

Oh, ya'll be a gumshoe all right. Ya see, ghosts ain't chatty--

Nick opens her eyes and darts an ironic glance at Cal.

NICK

In my experience, they just won't shut up!

CAL

I mean, ya can't just ask them, "Hey, why ya still around?" They ain't answerin'. They're kinda in their own bubble. They got no clue. Like guys with no memory. Or sleepwalkers. Never got to talk to no ghost myself. And when they talk... gibberish most of it.

NICK

So? What am I supposed to do?

CAL

It takes a shamus like ya to discover what's their specific unfinished business. Ya can see what's goin' on with a clear mind, them not. Do yar detective stuff, find the issue, come up with a fix, and BAM! They cross over, out of yar hair.

NICK

Good to know. Think I'll start with you, then...

The PHONE RINGS.

Nick gets up from the couch, grumbling, and picks up.

NICK (cont'd)

Sharpstein here.

INT. BAR DOWNSTAIRS - NIGHT, MOMENTS LATER

Nick walks to the bar and nods "hello" to the bartender.

NICK

You phoned. Someone's here to see me? Sharpstein.

SOMEONE approaches Nick from one side.

FRIENDLY VOICE (O.C.)

You haven't changed a bit!

Nick turns to see who's talking. Her face lights up.

C.U. OF A WELL-BUILT MID-THIRTY BLONDE MAN, MICK

NICK

Mick! This is a surprise! What are you doing here?! No longer with the Frisco Force?

MICK

Still there, but I'm in town and thought I'd pay a visit to my old classmate.

INT. BAR DOWNSTAIRS - MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Mick are in a booth, enjoying drinks, especially Nick who is a round or two ahead...

MICK

Private Detective?! Bold move!

NICK

(giggles, flattered)
Oh, well... I do my best. But you!
A Narc!

MICK

Well, I'm doing kinda fine...

Mick looks at her intently, a melancholic light in his eyes.

MICK (cont'd)

I miss you. You know?

NICK

(sighing)
Me too, Mick!

MICK

I wish we had stayed together.
"Nick and Mick", we were some hot couple!

NICK

Yes... But you can't be a couple if
you're 3,000 miles apart.

Nick looks down at her drink.

NICK (cont'd)

Life stinks. And apparently the
afterlife's not any better...

MICK

What?

NICK

(eyes on her drink)
Never mind. Rough day...

Mick caresses Nick's nose bridge. She raises her brooding
eyes.

MICK

(naughty smirk)
Hey... Remember when we used to
hide inside the Coney Island Tunnel
of Love?

Nick bursts into laughter, her eyes bright again.

NICK

Oh, yeah! Remember those two aged
sweethearts that spotted us? The
guy kept yelling: "Get a room, you
punks!" and yet almost fell off the
boat to get a better peep at my
rack!

Mick's laughter turns into a sweet smile, then into a sigh.

MICK

I've tried. Hard. But I can't get
you out of my mind, you know?

Nick and Mick get closer, their eyes fixed on each other.

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

The door flings open WITH A BANG, and Nick and Mick walk in
impetuously, hugging and kissing.

Cal reads a 1931 newspaper on the couch and is startled by
the noisy entrance.

Mick lays an ice bucket with a bottle of wine down on the desk. Nick sits on the desktop, and some serious making out follows.

CAL
 (parentally)
 Take it easy, bambina!

Nick uncouples from Mick's lips.

NICK
 Scram!

MICK
 (frowning)
 What did I do?

NICK
 Nothing. Nothing! I was talking
 to... Never mind. Come here!

They resume kissing, with mounting passion.

Cal tries not to watch, but occasionally he can't help peeking above his newspaper.

As their kissing and fondling gets more intense, Nick starts to act oddly. She has a series of light jolts, as if she were getting electric shocks.

Cal now watches with a truly concerned face.

CAL
 Ommerda... not that!

Now Nick has strong seizures, like an epileptic episode.

Alarmed, Cal jumps up from the couch.

Mick too is seriously worried.

MICK
 Nick? What's up! Talk to me!
 Nicolette!

Suddenly--

NICK OPENS HER EYES

They are completely red and wicked-looking.

A CREEPY, DEEP VOICE erupts from her mouth.

NICK
I'm not Nicolette, you fuckwit!

Nick grabs Mick's throat and lifts him up.

Cal approaches Nick, feigning calmness.

CAL
Oh, Nick? Buddy? Ya there? Let the
dude go, will ya?

Mick is chocking, while Nick LAUGHS SATANICALLY.

CAL (cont'd)
Hey! Ya let him down now, this
second, or I'll... I'll...

Cal looks around and reaches for the first thing he sees, the bucket of ice. At the first attempt, his hands traverse the bucket.

Cal, grumbling, focuses his strength and with a considerable effort gets hold of the bucket.

He dumps the entire contents onto Nick's head.

The cold shower snaps Nick out of it, and she drops Mick to the floor.

Scared to death, Mick springs up and flees the apartment, repeatedly making the Sign of the Cross.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Cal lies on the couch, exhausted. He is now transparent.

Nick sits on the floor, all drenched, panting with a bewildered expression.

CAL
(panting)
This object-grabbin' stuff's very
hard on ghosts, don't ya make me do
it again, d'accordo?

Nick, still in shock, looks around and at herself.

NICK
What was... that!?

CAL

Un minuto... I gotta recover...

Nick, fighting the dizzy feeling, slowly gets up.

NICK

Cal, what happened to me?!

Cal is gradually reacquiring his solid state.

CAL

Ya know... This gift ya have comes with some... drawbacks. Sorry, forgot to tell ya.

NICK

You forgot?! I almost killed Mick!

CAL

Calm down, bambina! Or it'll happen again!

(plainly)

Ya got possessed.

NICK

I was possessed!

CAL

Sometimes guys with the gift can be used like gateways by... other guys...

NICK

You mean like a... portal from the underworld?

CAL

Kinda. If ya lose control, souls, demons, devils, and all kinda shit can use ya as a... "portal", like ya say.

NICK

That's horrible! What should I do?!

CAL

(simplistically)

Don't lose control of yarself.

Nick paces around the room, panicking.

NICK

This is bad! Oh, this is very bad!
I get totally pissed-off all the
time!

CAL

It's not that. It's 'bout... ya
know... not havin' yar mind clear--

NICK

I need a drink...

CAL

Nah ya don't!

NICK

I'm not taking sobriety tips from a
bootlegger!

CAL

I mean ya gotta stay sharp and
lucid! This demon-poppin' can
happen when you're weak, or doped,
or...

(with a meaningful
glance)

...plastered, or when ya...

(clears his throat)

...make whoopee. Stay clear of all
of that and ya'll be fine.

NICK

(outraged)

So you're saying I can't enjoy a
good drink or have sex, otherwise I
may summon up some dude from hell?!

CAL

Yup. In a nutshell.

NICK

Hell no! I'm not gonna be a
teetotaling nun!

CAL

(shrugging)

What can I say? That's the...
"side effect" of the gift.

NICK

Some gift!

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S HOUSE - DAY

Miss Rutherford shows Nick (and Cal) in. Cal looks around, with a particular interest.

MISS RUTHERFORD
Lovely to see you, my child! I am
afraid Aunt Agatha became
exceedingly agitated after your
departure...

NICK
You can see her?!

MISS RUTHERFORD
No, I cannot. But she has set forth
her opinions quite
straightforwardly, in the cellar.

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

All the stuff has been gathered into two piles at the sides
of the room.

The word "WRONG" is etched all over the free long wall.

The chest is still visible in the hole in the floor.

Nick, alone, looks around, a bit nervous. She takes a deep
breath and puts on a smile of feigned courtesy.

NICK
Oh, Miss Agatha? Hello. How do you
do? Would you be so kind as to tell
me what it is that is "wrong"?

AUNT AGATHA pops out from the chest.

AUNT AGATHA
(yelling, enraged)
Wrong!!!

Having said so, she disappears back into the chest.

NICK
(less courteous)
Well, yes. I got that. Something is
wrong.
(harshly)
What?

In response, the chest is launched out of the hole and
starts bouncing violently up and down on the floor.

NICK (cont'd)
(a bit scared)

Cal?

Nick looks around for him, groaning in frustration.

NICK (cont'd)

Cal?

(yelling)

Cal?! Where the heck are you?

MISS RUTHERFORD (O.S.)

Are you addressing me?

NICK

(loud)

No, Ma'am. It's just... an exclamation I shout out when I'm nervous, you know?

(as if cursing)

Cal!

Cal finally traverses the door and walks down the stairs.

CAL

(unhurriedly)

Ya called me?

NICK

(whispers, testily)

A lot! For future reference, how many times are needed to summon you? Any magic number? Should I immolate a rooster?

CAL

No need to get all cattish, missy! Was just takin' a look 'round, think I did a little break-and-enter gig here in 1889--

NICK

I don't give a hoot! Focus! You're supposed to be my assistant--

CAL

Yar associate.

NICK

Whatever! How do I communicate with this Agatha ghost?

CAL
Ya don't. Ya've to figure out
yarself what's--

Cal notices only at this point all the "WRONG" etchings.

CAL (cont'd)
...wrong.
(a beat)
Minchia! Dame's a real loony!

The chest still jumps up and down, and Nick watches it with irritation.

NICK
You know, Agatha? What I know is
there's definitely something wrong
with you!

In response, the chest is hurled at Nick, hitting her hard on the forehead.

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S LIVING ROOM - LATER, AFTERNOON

P.O.V. BLURRED IMAGES IN AND OUT FROM BLACK. GRADUALLY THE IMAGE GETS IN FOCUS

Miss Rutherford and Cal look into the camera.

CAL
 (with curiosity
 more than worry)
 Ya dead?

BACK TO SCENE:

Lying on the couch, Nick gradually comes to. She has an ice-bag on her forehead.

NICK
 (groaning)
 What the... Who hit me?

Confused, she looks around and sees Miss Rutherford and Cal.

MISS RUTHERFORD
 Are you well, my child? I extend my sincerest apologies. Aunt Agatha has been inexcusably ill-mannered!

NICK
 How long have I been out?

CAL
 Um... Ten minutes tops?

MISS RUTHERFORD
 Two entire hours!

Nick sits up straight, feeling a bit dizzy. She removes the ice bag and a conspicuous bump can be seen on her forehead.

MISS RUTHERFORD (cont'd)
 Perhaps you should be hospitalized?

NICK
 No, I've seen worse...

Nick realizes she is on the couch.

NICK (cont'd)
 How did I get here?

MISS RUTHERFORD

Oh, my neighbors were so courteous
as to transport you all the way up
the stairs.

CAL

Took two of them. Better watch yar
weigh, missy...

Nick glowers at Cal, her mouth opening to quip back.

MISS RUTHERFORD

Would you fancy a cup of tea?

NICK

Thanks, but no thanks. All I want
is to fix this Aunt Agatha problem.
Tell me more about her.

MISS RUTHERFORD

Well, let's see... She was born in
Bangor, Wales, in 1848--

NICK

(impatiently)

The gist, maybe? About her death?

MISS RUTHERFORD

She succumbed to a massive liver
failure...

Cal glances at Nick, making the bottle-drinking gesture and
then mouthing "like ya."

NICK

(ignoring Cal)

When did she die?

MISS RUTHERFORD

Three months ago.

CAL

Ask her 'bout unfinished
businesses!

NICK

Any unfinished business?

MISS RUTHERFORD

What would that business possibly
be?

NICK

Any matter... left uncompleted, or unresolved at her death?

MISS RUTHERFORD

None to my knowledge. She had been ailing for quite some time. In the end, she merely spent her time in bed. Reading, or knitting. Or complaining, and giving commands. She was... a tad despotic and petulant.

NICK

I had sensed that...

(a beat)

Uh... And she left you her jewels? Those in that chest?

MISS RUTHERFORD

Yes. Those were her sole as well as her most treasured possessions.

NICK

And there's a Will, right?

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD LIBRARY - DUSK, LATER

Nick sits at a desk, studying Aunt Agatha's "Last Will and Testament".

Cal examines some silver candlesticks with an expert's eye.

NICK

Ha! The ruby ring!

Miss Rutherford looks at her with a clueless expression.

NICK (cont'd)

She wanted to be buried wearing her ruby ring!

MISS RUTHERFORD

No, no, no. I am afraid that is rather incorrect. To my recollection, she demanded to be interred with her emerald ring...

Nick shows the specific page to Miss Rutherford.

NICK

That's not what's written here.
See. Ruby ring. And I remember I
saw one in that chest.

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S CELLAR - MOMENTS LATER

The chest is lying on the floor, stationary.

Nick tip-toes up to it, shielding her head with her forearm.
Cal observes from a distance.

Nick cautiously opens it.

DETAIL: THE RUBY RING IS THERE

Nick takes the ring and stands up, then slowly backs away.

NICK

(whispering)
She raised hell for the wrong
ring?!

CAL

Fixations don't die.

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S MAIN HALL - MOMENTS LATER

Nick holds the ruby ring, showing it to Miss Rutherford.

MISS RUTHERFORD

(embarrassed)
This is a bit of an inconvenience.
(a beat)
I am afraid we shall have to make
an exchange then, shan't we?

Nick and Cal look at each other, fearing the worst.

EXT. MAUSOLEUM - NIGHT, LATER

It's already dark outside. Miss Rutherford, carrying a
candle in a copper holder, escorts Nick (and Cal) to the
family mausoleum in the backyard. Nick carries a toolbox and
a flashlight.

INT. MAUSOLEUM - CONTINUOUS

With a SINISTER SQUEAK, the entrance gate opens. Nick, Cal, and Miss Rutherford enter. It's a hexagonal space, with burial plots on three sides.

Cal seems to be more uncomfortable in this lugubrious place than the two women.

CAL

I ain't dig this spot. Not a bit.

NICK

(whispering)

You're supposed to be in spots like this!

Miss Rutherford directs her candle to one of the plots.

MISS RUTHERFORD

Aunt Agatha's place of rest.

Nick sweats and toils on the bolts.

Then she removes the heavy marble cover of the tomb. The coffin can now be seen in the recess of the wall.

Nick unscrews the lid of the coffin.

With some disgust and hesitation, she takes the lid off: the view is repulsive and the stench overwhelming.

Cal, gagging, rushes out of the mausoleum.

Nick gathers her strength and leans over to inspect the corpse.

DETAIL: THE DECOMPOSING LEFT HAND WEARS AN EMERALD RING

Nick rises and gives Miss Rutherford a hesitant grin, followed by a meaningful imploring look.

MISS RUTHERFORD (cont'd)

(shaking her head)

I am afraid you will have to do the honors, my child.

NICK

(muttering)

Neat! So now I'm an undertaker...

CAL

(at a distance)

Grave robber, I'd say...

Nick, fighting the repulsion, tries to remove the emerald ring.

It is stuck between the skin and bone of the rotting finger.

NICK
(swallowing)
I think we're gonna need... some
soap.

MONTAGE, SAME LOCALE, SAME TIME

Many efforts are laboriously made to remove the ring:

-- with the help of a generous amount of soap.

-- and butter.

-- and cooking oil.

-- and floor wax.

-- until the emerald ring eventually slips off, with Nick being projected backward onto the floor as a result of her final big tug.

END OF MONTAGE.

BACK TO SCENE:

Cal peeks at the outcome with a grimace of disgust.

CAL
Finger come off too?

Nick rises and frowns at him, showing the finger-free ring.

Panting, she forcibly puts the ruby ring on the finger.

Nothing happens.

Nick looks around as if expecting some explicit sign of success.

She turns and grins at Miss Rutherford in embarrassment.

NICK
Excuse me, just one moment...

Nick paces toward the gate where Cal is.

ANOTHER ANGLE - CONTINUOUS

NICK
(whispering)
Well, that's it?!

CAL
What? Ya expected fireworks and music? Come on, let's get outta here. Now.

MISS RUTHERFORD (O.C.)
Er... I beg your pardon, my child. Would you mind restoring the tomb to how you found it, please?

Nick wearily nods and walks back inside, to take care of it.

INT. NICK'S BEDROOM - LATER, NIGHT

Nick is in bed sleepless, her head bandaged, an issue of "Black Mask" detective-stories magazine in her hands.

She sits up, grabs the water pitcher on her nightstand and pours water into the glass.

The water-stream rises in the air as if solidified and composes the word "WRONG."

Nick is startled and drops the pitcher on the floor.

The NOISE OF SHATTERING GLASS summons Cal, who runs in traversing the wall.

CAL
(alarmed)
What's the racket?!

NICK
Aunt Agatha! She was here! There's still something... wrong!

Then, Nick quickly covers her nightgown with the sheets.

NICK (cont'd)
Hey! Next time knock before... walking through the walls!

EXT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S DOOR - DAY

Miss Rutherford opens the front door.

MISS RUTHERFORD

Oh, brilliant! I was in the process of telephoning you. I am afraid Aunt Agatha has not yet left us.

NICK

Yes, I know. Aunt Agatha--

CAL

(giggling)

Haunt Agatha...

NICK

(ignoring Cal)

Aunt Agatha paid me a little visit last night. We must have forgotten something...

INT. UPPER-FLOOR BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nick and Miss Rutherford examine the chest of drawers. Cal lies lazily on the bed.

Nick opens the drawers, finding old garments, letters, and other trinkets. Under some old corsets, she retrieves--

DETAIL: A GLASS EYE

With a scolding look, Nick shows it to Miss Rutherford.

MISS RUTHERFORD

Oh, yes, Aunt Agatha's old prosthetic. She lost her eye--

NICK

(brusquely)

Yeah, yeah. Why wasn't she buried with this?

MISS RUTHERFORD

(embarrassed)

I suspect this... intimate matter was overlooked.

NICK

(mumbling, annoyed)

Here we go. Rooting up the tomb again...

CAL

See? Glass eye. She made ya break the glass water pitcher... Clear message! Clear as glass and water.

NICK
Crappy as sewage water!

MISS RUTHERFORD
 I beg your pardon?!

NICK
 Nothing. I was just--

Suddenly Nick freezes, her excited face betrays a revelation.

NICK (cont'd)
 Water. Water! Glass and water!

MISS RUTHERFORD
 (concerned)
 Are you well, my child? Is it your head injury?

NICK
 (not listening)
 The bathroom! We gotta go! Now!

CAL
 When ya gotta go, ya gotta go.

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Nick is inspecting the faucet and sink, while Cal and Miss Rutherford look on to understand what is happening.

Nick rubs her finger around the faucet-mouth.

DETAIL: A FAINT BLUE/GREENISH RESIDUE

NICK
 Miss Rutherford, did Aunt Agatha get sick all of a sudden, bedridden, not able to stand up?

MISS RUTHERFORD
 Well, yes...

NICK
 And crankier and fickler?

MISS RUTHERFORD
 Well, if possible, yes...

NICK
 Plumbing issues began after her death, right?

MISS RUTHERFORD

Well, now that you have brought it
to my attention... Indeed!

NICK

I'll be back soon.

INT. PUBLIC LIBRARY - LATER

Nick reads some medical journals with expectation.

Cal, visibly bored, walks around.

Occasionally, he kills some time by moving his hand through
the table lamps, making them flicker and thus annoying the
OTHER READERS.

INT. MISS RUTHERFORD'S MAIN HALL - LATER, AFTERNOON

Back in the house, Nick gives Miss Rutherford's eyes a close
examination. Cal looks impatient.

NICK

Thanks. Can I now ask you to extend
your arms sideways, like wings?

CAL

What now? Ya're a doctor?

Miss Rutherford does so, and her arms start to tremble. Nick
watches with satisfaction.

NICK

That's enough, thank you.

Miss Rutherford lowers her arms, a puzzled look on her face.

MISS RUTHERFORD

What is the meaning of this?

NICK

You have Wilson's disease. Your
Aunt Agatha had it too. It can be
hereditary.

MISS RUTHERFORD

Good Lord! Is it... grave?

NICK

It can be. It killed your aunt. Her
liver gave up. You're younger so
(MORE)

NICK (cont'd)
it's just tremors for now. But, in
time, it can be--

CAL
Can be grave grave.

MISS RUTHERFORD
But how... How have you managed to
come to this conclusion?

CAL
Yeah. How the hell?

NICK
The water. Wilson's disease causes
a poisonous accumulation of copper
in the body. Your plumbing, you
told me, was renovated recently,
and it's probably copper pipes.

CAL
Now ya're a plumber too?!

Nick approaches the furrow in the carpet. She kneels and
tears it open, removing the floorboards beneath.

DETAIL: A COPPER PIPE IS REVEALED

NICK
Bingo! Look! If there is some
oxidation, copper is released into
the water, which is bad. And bad in
a very quick way with Wilson
Disease people.
(a beat)
Uh... Let's see...

Nick cautiously touches the pipe with a finger--
She gets a mild electrocution.

NICK (cont'd)
(recoiling)
Jeepers!

MISS RUTHERFORD
Are you hurt?

Nick gets up, a satisfied expression on her face.

NICK
Not really, I expected the nip.
Some leakage from the electric
wiring, on this pipe.

CAL
And electrician?!

NICK
It causes the copper pipe to
contaminate the water. It's called
Galvanic corrosion.

CAL
And a show-off.

NICK
Have this pipe and the wiring
fixed. And also see a doctor.
You'll see you'll get better soon.

MISS RUTHERFORD
Astounding! So Aunt Agatha was
attempting to... alert me to this?

NICK
Yes. The furrow in the carpet, the
water issues... She was trying to
save your life.

MISS RUTHERFORD
(getting moved)
Oh, dearest Aunt Agatha! We have so
unfairly treated her... We
misjudged the poor thing! It was
not about the jewels or the eye, or
other such trifles. Her primal
concern was to protect me!

Nick raises the glass eye, with an expression of relief.

NICK
Yep. This spares us another trip to
the tomb--

WHAM! Aunt Agatha pops out of the floor right in front of
Nick.

AUNT AGATHA
(shouting furiously)
Wrong!

Then, just as suddenly, she vanishes back into the floor.

NICK
(grunting)
Or not.

Miss Rutherford has, of course, not seen or heard anything.

INT. MAUSOLEUM - DUSK

The tomb has been re-opened. Nick grumbles as she once again removes the coffin cover.

Panting and wiping the sweat off her forehead, she observes the withered face of the corpse, this time more with tedium than disgust.

Holding the glass eye, Nick smiles at Miss Rutherford.

NICK

Would you like to switch places
this time?

MISS RUTHERFORD

Not really.

Nick, shivering with repulsion, touches the left eyelid, struggling to slide the slimy piece of skin open.

After a while, Miss Rutherford taps Nick on the shoulder.

MISS RUTHERFORD (cont'd)

I am sorry. It has just occurred to
me that it was the other socket.

NICK

(muttering)
Of course it was...

Nick changes socket and finally puts the glass eye in place.

Suddenly, a VIOLENT WIND STARTS BLOWING, stirring up all the cobwebs and dust inside the mausoleum.

The corpse becomes luminescent and restored to a lifelike solidity and color.

Aunt Agatha opens her eyes and turns her head.

AUNT AGATHA

(to Nick, harshly)
About time!

Then, a split opens midair in the mausoleum, a crack emitting a blinding white light.

A similar stream of white light flows out of the corpse and is sucked into the crack, which immediately closes, sealed off, and vanishes.

The wind stops, the luminescence dies away and the corpse reverts to its deathly state.

SILENCE. Nick and Miss Rutherford are petrified and covered in dust and cobwebs, their hair all ridiculously ruffled.

NICK

(grinning timidly)

Well... It looks like Aunt Agatha has finally crossed over this time, doesn't it?

MISS RUTHERFORD

(stunned)

Holy. Shite.

EXT. STREET - LATER, EVENING

Nick and Cal walk back to the office. She shakes off the last residues of dust and cobwebs from her clothes and hair.

CAL

Ya knocked my socks off. Ya're good, gumshoe! The real deal.

NICK

Meh. Was hoping for something a little more... challenging.

She sniffs her hands, with a disgusted reaction.

NICK (cont'd)

And less putrid.

Cal looks at her with a mysterious glint in his eye.

CAL

(ominous)

Oh, I can tell ya, ya'll be challenged. There'll be days ya're gonna miss Aunt Agatha. The Singin' Hanged Man, to pick one. That's gonna be one friggin' hairy pickle!

Nick looks at him with an inquisitive and worried look.

INT./EXT. VARIOUS LOCALES - DAY/NIGHT

MONTAGE, ACCOMPANIED BY "BUGLE CALL RAG":

-- A PAINTER amends the SIGN ON THE DOOR. It now reads: "NICK SHARPSTEIN. DETECTIVE FOR ALL THINGS PARANORMAL."

-- TWO WORKMEN replace the sign on the street with a new one.

-- adverts in the Yellow Pages promote the updated specialism: "NICK SHARPSTEIN. DETECTIVE FOR ALL THINGS PARANORMAL"

-- leaflets are distributed: "NICK SHARPSTEIN. DETECTIVE FOR ALL THINGS PARANORMAL. GOT GHOSTS? WE GOT SOLUTIONS."

-- Nick's telephone rings repeatedly.

-- CLIENTS with terrorized faces show up in her office.

-- Nick inspects dark rooms with a flashlight, a frightened Cal at her side.

-- Nick studies a blueprint of a house while in the background A GHOST keeps using the chandelier as a swing.

END OF MONTAGE. MUSIC CONTINUES AS A SOUND BRIDGE TO--

INT. NICK'S BEDROOM - AFTERNOON

Nick is on her bed, listening to a 78rpm of "BUGLE CALL RAG."

CAL (O.S.)

Nick! A guy's here to see ya!

INT. NICK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Nick walks in and finds Capt. Holloway waiting for her.

NICK

(surprised)

Captain?

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

Sharpstein.

(looking around)

Nice place you have here. Though, it lacks a feminine touch...

NICK

(surly)

What do you want?

Capt. Holloway walks around the office, slowly and menacingly, like a shark.

Merrivale, curled up on the couch, STARTS GROWLING at him.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

This paranormal ploy of yours...
Let me tell you something. And mark
my words. I'm not gonna let this
slide. It's a pathetic con, and I'm
onto you, Miss Sharpstein.

Nick stands up to him, firmly locking her eyes on him.

NICK

I'm legit. People have particular
problems that nobody can fix.
Except me.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

Bullshit! Ghosts are not a thing!

CAL

Hey! Ya are not a thing, prick!

Capt. Holloway points a menacing finger at Nick.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY

You're a fraud! I smell it!
Something shady's going on here,
and I'm gonna expose you!

He heads to the door, but stops to cast another threatening
glance at Nick.

CAPT. HOLLOWAY (cont'd)

You better stop this, Sharpstein.
Right now!

Merrivale suddenly rises and HISSES MENACINGLY at him.

Capt. Holloway is startled. He immediately conceals it and
exits, slamming the door.

CAL

Now I see what this cat's for.
Jackass-detector!

NICK

Uh-huh. Sir Merrivale is very
perceptive.

CAL

"Sir" Merrivale?!

NICK

Or, Merrivale, for short.

CAL
For short?! That's no cat's name!

NICK
And what's a cat's name?

CAL
I dunno.
(looks at Merrivale)
Fatso?

Merrivale, in contempt, HISSES at Cal.

NICK
(laughing)
You were right! He is a jackass-
detector!

UPBEAT JAZZ MUSIC sneaks in, acting as a SOUND BRIDGE to--

INT. CLUB HOT-CHA MAIN FLOOR - AFTERNOON, LATER

It's before business hours at the Club Hot-Cha and the place is empty. Chuck and Nick are engaged in a private WILD JAM SESSION.

Cal sits at a table, quite bored, and glances distractedly.

Nick (à la Gene Krupa) HITS THE DRUMS more and more energetically, enraptured by the infectious rhythm.

She plays as if in a trance. She begins to have little jolts.

Then more frequent epileptic-like convulsions.

Cal now stares at her, increasingly alarmed.

CAL
Ommerda... Not again!

And--

NICK'S EYES TURN RED

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF PILOT