

INT. NICK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

CLOSE on NICK's eyelid as the eye suddenly opens and the pupil shrinks. PULL OUT to reveal Nick's face, then the bed in which he lays and, finally, the bedroom. Nick is under his comforter.

NICK (V.O.)
There's that internal alarm clock.

The alarm clock suddenly BUZZES. Nick reaches over and turns it off. It's still dark outside. Nick looks out the window.

NICK (V.O.)
It's gonna snow.

INT. NICK'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Nick is showering, washing his longish hair.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S BATHROOM - NIGHT

Nick is combing his wet hair in the steamed mirror.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The quiet stairway is disturbed by Nick's loud FOOTSTEPS as he gallops quickly down the stairs with a satchel over his shoulder.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

Nick reaches the corner of the sidewalk as the sun is just coming up over the street ahead. He gazes up at the streetlight as snowflakes begin to fall. He then looks up toward the sky, blinking. Then he regards watch attached to his satchel.

NICK (V.O.)
Adam'll be late.

The light changes and Nick crosses the street. He continues to walk down many city blocks.

EXT. ARROWHEAD PRESS BUILDING - DAY

Nick approaches the building and stops outside. He turns and looks up and down the block and across the street expectantly. Regarding his watch again, he then blows warm air into his hands, rubbing them together briskly. Looking up, he blinks again into the falling snow.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARROWHEAD PRESS BUILDING - DAY

Nick is still waiting and regarding his watch. He stamps his feet to keep warm.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. ARROWHEAD PRESS BUILDING - DAY

Nick looks at his watch one more time before shaking his head disappointedly. He turns, opening the door to the building behind him.

INT. SUMNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Sketches and drawings are being flipped through in SUMNER's hands.

SUMNER

These are very good.

Nick is expressionless. Sumner looks up and smiles.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

Where's your...uh...your partner?

Nick's eyes meet Sumner's in a half-concerned, half apologetic glance.

EXT. ADAM'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

CLOSE on Nick's finger pushing a doorbell button. Nick stares at the speaker outside the door to the apartment building. Snow is caked on his hair, coat and satchel.

ADAM (V.O.)

(through speaker)

Yeah?

NICK
Adam, it's me.

The buzzer RINGS and Nick pushes the door open.

INT. ADAM'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Nick stands outside the apartment door with 4C hanging on it. ADAM opens the door and is dressed only in jeans, unshaven, and his hair uncombed. Nick appears distressed as he barges into the cramped, messy apartment.

NICK
What the fuck is up with you?

ADAM
What're you talking about?

NICK
You were supposed to meet me at
Arrowhead Press an hour and a half
ago!

ADAM
I thought you were gonna call!

NICK
Oh, man -

Nick TOSSES his satchel on the couch and FLOPS down onto it with a frustrated sigh.

ADAM
I'll get dressed now!

NICK
It's too late.

ADAM
No...I'll call Sumner...tell him we
had trouble getting there on time.

NICK
No, I've already been there, man!

ADAM
What?

NICK
You were supposed to meet me there
at eight! I was waiting for a half
hour! I knew you'd forget!

ADAM
You went without me?

NICK
Listen, I had to cancel on this guy
twice already and make excuses for
your sorry ass!

ADAM
That wasn't my fault!

NICK
I was not gonna lose my chance at
getting my stuff published because
you're too fuckin' lazy to get your
ass outta bed on time!

ADAM
He took your stuff?

Nick is silent as he pets a cat that jumps up on the couch.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Did you tell him that my writing
and your drawings are a joint
project?

NICK
Yup.

ADAM
So, what's up?

NICK
He told me that since you didn't
seem very reliable, he had other
writers who needed illustrations.

ADAM
So, what'd you tell him?

NICK
I told him "okay."

ADAM
So, I'm out?

NICK
You fucked yourself, Adam. I tried
to -

ADAM
You tried to what? Help me?

NICK
I tried to -

ADAM
You tried real hard, Nick! Thanks
so much for your fucking charity!

NICK
Hey, you made the choice, Adam! I
was there for you and you bailed on
me three times! You can blame me
all you want.

Nick stands and grabs his satchel, hoisting it over his
shoulder.

NICK (CONT'D)
The only one who fucked you over
was you!

Nick turns to leave.

ADAM
Fuck you, Nick!

Nick walks out the door, flipping off Adam as he leaves.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Fuck you, you fucking cocksucker!

INT. BROADWAY DINER - DAY

CLOSE on Nick's hand STIRRING a cup of coffee with a spoon.
Nick is staring into the coffee, his coat still on and
covered with melting snow.

NICK
What a fucking moron.

STACI
You ready to order, hon?

Nick looks up at the waitress, STACI. She smiles and sits
down in the other seat of the booth.

NICK
Adam didn't show again.

STACI
Aw, no. So, what'd you tell the
guy this time?

NICK
I told him the truth. That Adam's
a lazy son-of-a-bitch.

STACI
I'm sorry, Nick.

NICK
He gave me a contract, Stace.

STACI
What? You went yourself?

NICK
Yeah.

STACI
That's great!
(shouting to man behind
counter)
Hey, Steve!

STEVE looks over at them from behind the kitchen window.

STACI (CONT'D)
Nick sold his pictures!

STEVE
(uninterested)
That's really great.

Staci waves him off with a resigned look.

STACI
So, what are you getting...like a
book of your drawings or something?

NICK
No, they want me to illustrate
other writers' books.

STACI
What're they paying you?

For the first time, Nick smiles.

NICK
About two grand a drawing.

STACI
Two grand a - Are you kidding me?
(yelling toward Steve)
Yo, Steve!

The large man in a dirty white apron doesn't look up from his work.

STEVE

What?

STACI

You can kiss this dishwasher
goodbye! He's gonna be rich!

STEVE

Yeah, right! And the mayor's gonna
get rid of all bums in the subway!

STACI

You'll see, Steve. Nick's gonna
buy your sorry ass out and you'll
be working for him!

STEVE

Then I guess I'll be getting paid
to sit around like you're doing
right now, huh?

STACI

I got no customers, Steve.

STEVE

Then get your ass in the back and
start some sidework. Fill the
friggan' salt and peppers! I don't
pay you to flirt with Nick!

STACI

Yeah, yeah. Whadaya wanna eat,
sweetie?

NICK

Chicken sandwich and fries.

STACI

Always the same thing.

NICK

And you always ask me what I want.

They exchange smiles.

STACI

I'll be back in a few.

She walks away past Steve behind the counter.

STACI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
You know how much he's getting for
his pictures?

STEVE (O.S.)
I don't care, Staci.

STACI (O.S.)
You're such an asshole, Steve. I
swear.

Nick continues to stare out the window.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick is swinging a badminton racket as if he's playing while
talking on a cordless.

NICK
You coming over tonight? Yeah,
I'll get a couple movies.

Nick pauses as he looks out the window of his third floor
apartment.

NICK (CONT'D)
I dunno. Maybe a couple comedies.
All right, see you in a little
while. 'Bye.

Nick hangs up the phone and puts on his coat.

INT. BROGNA'S VIDEO STORE - DAY

Nick is standing next to the comedy rack, picking up empty
DVD cases and flipping them over to read the backs, replacing
them with apparent disinterest.

NICK
(to man behind counter)
Hey, Tony.

The owner, TONY, looks over toward Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)
Comedy.

TONY
Very Bad Things.

NICK
Oh, yeah?

Nick looks back at the rack and finds the movie. He begins reading it.

CUT TO:

INT. BROGNA'S VIDEO STORE - DAY

Nick is at the counter with a few DVD boxes.

TONY
Very Bad Things...
(as he digs out the DVD)
Something About Mary.

He waves the case in the air.

TONY (CONT'D)
Great movie. Cameron Diaz is so
fucking hot.

Nick pulls out his wallet.

NICK
They nail that asshole that robbed
you last week?

TONY
(as he rings up charges)
Yeah. They followed the trail of
blood.

Tony begins laughing as Nick smiles and hands the man his cash.

TONY (CONT'D)
Two caps in the ass.
(imitating pointing a gun)
Bang! Bang! That fucker's
backside is gonna be sore for a
while. And then he goes off to
prison.

NICK
Where his ass'll get sore all over
again.

Tony begins laughing hysterically before going into a coughing fit.

NICK (CONT'D)
Sorry, man. Hey, I sold some of my
drawings.

TONY

Yeah, I know.
 (hands Nick his change)
 Adam came in and told me some
 bullshit story.

NICK

Oh, yeah?

TONY

Yeah, I told him he was full of
 shit and he fuckin' flips out on
 me. I told him to hit the streets
 before I slapped him around. He
 practically shit himself.

Nick hands the bag to Nick.

TONY (CONT'D)

That is one fucked-in-the-head
 idiot friend you got there.

NICK

He's not that bad. Just lazy.

TONY

Lazy or not, that boy needs to get
 his clock cleaned...you know what
 I'm sayin'?

NICK

Yeah.
 (raising the bag in
 farewell)
 I'll see you, Tony.

TONY

Yo, have a good one, buddy. And
 congrats!

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

A handwritten note is attached to Nick's apartment door and
 he reads it in a low voice to himself.

NICK

Nicky, sorry I went off this
 morning. You're my friend and I
 shouldn't have treated you that
 way. You're right. I am lazy.
 And I'm an asshole.

(a beat as he chuckles)

You got that right.

(MORE)

NICK (CONT'D)
(continues reading aloud)
You made that deal because of your
shrewdery and that's great for you.
Call me, man. Adam.

Nick stuffs the note into his pocket and shakes his head as he reaches for his keys.

NICK (CONT'D)
Shrewdery.

Opening the door, he enters his apartment and closes the door behind him.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Staci and Nick are sitting on his couch and watching a movie.

NICK
You want some popcorn?

STACI
Nuke it, baby.

He laughs as he rises and goes into the kitchen.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Nick puts the popcorn into the microwave oven and PUSHES the buttons.

NICK
You want some more soda?

STACI (O.S.)
No.

The popcorn begins to POP and the smell wafts into the air.

STACI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
That smells so good.

NICK
I am an amazing cooker.

The microwave BEEPS.

STACI (O.S.)
Is that one of Adam's words?

Nick laughs as he removes the bag.

NICK
No...my seven-year-old cousin.

STACI (O.S.)
What's the difference?

He laughs as he walks back into the living room.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick enters the darkened living room to find Staci completely naked on the couch, staring at him, as she slingshots her panties at him. Comically tossing the bag of popcorn over his shoulder, he approaches her.

NICK
Guess we won't be needing that.

She laughs as he removes his shirt and then kneels down by her, reaching over her and grabbing the remote.

NICK (CONT'D)
Or this.

Turning off the television, he throws down the remote and begins to kiss her.

STACI
You smell like popcorn.

NICK
You smell like chicken and fries.

She chuckles.

INT. NICK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The phone RINGS and Nick wakes up in bed with Staci by his side. He picks up the phone.

NICK
Hello.

ADAM (V.O.)
(through phone)
Yo, bro. Did I wake you?

NICK
 (squinting at clock)
 You're kidding, right? It's four
 in the fucking morning, asshole.

ADAM (V.O.)
 Sorry, man. You get my note?

Staci rolls over and gets up on one elbow.

STACI
 Is that Adam?

ADAM (V.O.)
 Is that Staci?

NICK
 Listen, I'll talk to you tomorrow,
 Adam.

STACI
 Adam, you asshole!

ADAM (V.O.)
 Suck me, Staci!

NICK
 Good night, Adam.

He hangs up the phone.

STACI
 He is such a -

NICK
 Shh. Go to sleep, Stace.

He turns over and puts his arm around her, kissing her
 shoulder.

STACI
 Dickhead.

INT. SUMNER'S OFFICE - DAY

Nick is dressed neatly in a sports coat and sitting across
 from Sumner's desk where his illustrations are spread out
 over the surface. Sumner is nursing a whiskey on ice and
 Nick has a bottled water.

SUMNER

What we have in mind is for you to illustrate Jared Covey's book at each chapter heading. But we also want you to render the cover art for the jacket as well.

Nick is staring at Sumner intently as he sits in the large chair across from the publisher's desk. Upon the desk sits a glass-enclosed metal symbol of a distorted pentacle. The center of the star is adorned with more symbols inside the misshapen inner pentagon.

NICK

(indicating the paper weight)
What's that?

SUMNER

(looking up from art)
Oh, that was a gift from a writer friend of mine way back. August Derleth. He was a publisher as well and we used to hike together on occasion when he would visit New York. It's a metal lapel clasp.

Sumner picks up the paper weight.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

I had it enclosed in laminate to preserve it. Use it as a paper weight.

Nick just nods, but feels that the symbol is somehow familiar.

NICK

Does it represent anything?

Sumner glances at the object in his hand for a moment and shrugs.

SUMNER

Something about the occult, I believe. Gus was a fan of the genre and since we both published Gothic horror, I assume that he thought it would be an appropriate gift.

Replacing the paper weight on the desktop, Sumner looks back down upon his artwork.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

Now, we understand that you only work with pencil, but we'd like you to branch out for the cover artwork into oils or pastels. Something to really catch the reader's eye on the shelf.

Sumner touches one of the illustrations in front of him.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

This one here. This is the sort of thing we're looking for.

Nick looks down and sees the drawing of the weathered window frame with a melted candle on its edge, a long stream of softened wax making its way downward off its borders. The window panes are frosted and an eerie face can be seen outside the glass.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

You don't talk much.

NICK

Yeah, well, I do all my talking through my work, Mr. Sumner.

SUMNER

Is this all do-able? The colors and all?

NICK

Oh, yeah, yeah. I've worked in color before. It's just that my best work tends to be...

SUMNER

Black and white.

NICK

Yeah.

Sumner smiles back and slides a thick manuscript across the table toward Nick.

SUMNER

This is a galley of Covey's latest work for you to read. We've set a deadline of six months for the completion of your art for the entire manuscript.

Nick leans forward to look at the top page and reads aloud.

NICK
The Night of Chills.

SUMNER
Have you read Covey's other book?

Nick shakes his head.

SUMNER (CONT'D)
Well, I haven't either, but the
bookstores can't keep them on the
shelves.

NICK
The...uh...title...

SUMNER
I expect you to contact us at
intervals to let us know how your
work is going. And I trust that
you will not be passing this galley
around to your family and
acquaintances and please...do not
make copies.

Nick nods.

SUMNER (CONT'D)
If something happens to this where
you can't read it, just bring it
back and we'll replace it. Okay?

Nick leans forward and begins to gather his illustrations.

NICK
No problem, Mr. Sumner.

After picking up his portfolio, he stacks it on the bound manuscript and stows it in his satchel. Shaking hands with the publisher, Nick once again notices the strange paper weight before finally making his way out of the office.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Staci is sitting on the couch and reading the manuscript.

STACI
This sucks.

She continues to flip through the galley pages and reading snippets of the book. Nick is sitting across from her with his head in his hands.

STACI (CONT'D)
Oh, my God, this is trash, Nick.

NICK
I know, I know.

STACI
Well, I guess it could be worse.
You could be illustrating Adam's
book.

NICK
Oh, Stace, this Covey guy is much
worse than Adam.

Nick rises and walks over to the window as Staci continues to read.

NICK (CONT'D)
What do I do? I can't illustrate a
shitty book like this.

STACI
Well, c'mon. You were gonna do
Adam's book and you said his was
pretty bad.

NICK
Yeah, but Adam's my friend. I
don't even know this Covey guy.
And even if I did, his writing's so
bad, I don't think I could make an
exception.

STACI
So, what're you gonna do? Throw
away twenty or thirty thousand just
because you don't like this guy's
writing style?

Nick paces and shakes his head.

STACI (CONT'D)
Has this guy written anything else?

NICK
Yeah. Some other novel with the
same lead character. A horror
novel called Spine Tingler.

STACI
Oh, my God.

NICK

I know. I almost slipped at the publishers and told Sumner that I thought the title of this one was like a third-grader's essay.

Staci laughs and places the manuscript on the table.

STACI

Well, you should check out his other book, too. Just in case that one's not a turkey.

NICK

Well, he's a bestselling author. (a beat) I guess more people will be seeing my artwork.

STACI

Exactly.

NICK

I'll check out that other book today.

STACI

Okay, so...what if he turns out to be a really bad writer all around?

Nick looks down at the manuscript. He raises his hands, palms up, like the arms of a scale.

NICK

Let's see, thirty grand...people not spitting at me in the street?

Staci laughs again.

NICK (CONT'D)

No clue.

STACI

My God...an artist with a conscience.

She shakes her head and stands to give him a hug.

INT. BROADWAY DINER - NIGHT

Nick hangs his coat up on a hook and dons a rubber apron as he readies himself for work. Staci approaches and kisses him.

STACI

You check out that author today?

Nick nods as he reaches into the pocket of his coat and draws out a paperback.

STACI (CONT'D)

Well?

NICK

Sucks.

STACI

Oh, poor baby.

He stows the book in his coat and makes his way to the dish area and begins organizing his space. Staci continues to watch him as he SLAMS a few dish racks together.

NICK

A quandary.

(a beat as he looks at
Staci)

Or as Adam would say, a
"squandary."

The both begin laughing.

STACI

You're taking the job, aren't you?

NICK

Yeah.

STACI

Good. Then I guess I'll be extra
nice to you.

Nick looks up in surprise as she giggles, but then shrieks and jumps away as he SPRAYS her with the retractable water hose.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALKS - DAY

Nick and Adam are walking down the street, bundled up in warm coats. Their breath is visible and there is CRUNCHY snow on the ground.

ADAM

Have you started on that guy's
artwork yet?

NICK
No.

ADAM
You better get moving.

NICK
I'm drawing a blank.

ADAM
I guess I'm not such a bad writer,
after all.

NICK
What?

ADAM
Well, you never drew a blank on my
work.

NICK
Yeah, but your writing is
different. His is much more...

ADAM
Simplistic?

NICK
No.

ADAM
Thrifty?

Nick shakes his head.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Then what?

NICK
You ran out of adjectives already?

ADAM
You're a dick.

NICK
Abstract!

ADAM
Abstract?

NICK
Yeah, you know?

ADAM

No, I don't. What the hell does that mean? Abstract.

NICK

I dunno. He creates more surrealistic scenes and...well ...C'mon, you're the writer!

They stop at Nick's apartment building door. He pulls out his keys.

ADAM

Surrealistic?

Nick pauses as he looks at his friend with an incredulous face.

NICK

Dude, you have *got* to brush up on your vocabulary!

ADAM

What're you talking about? My vocabulary -

NICK

Blows, Adam. It blows.

Nick presses the key into the lock and gazes at his friend.

NICK (CONT'D)

Shrewdery?

ADAM

What? That's not a word?

Nick shakes his head and opens the door, leading Adam into the building.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The pages of Covey's manuscript are being turned slowly.

ADAM

This is really good, Nick. I don't know what you're talking about. I really like his technique.

Nick is putting the couch bed back together and straightening the cover.

NICK
You like it, huh?

ADAM
Yeah.

NICK
So, what is it about his
"technique" that you like?

ADAM
Well...
(a beat as he flips more
pages)
His use of adjectives.

Nick blinks as he pauses in his chores.

NICK
Every book has adjectives, Adam.
Even yours.

ADAM
That's not what I mean, asshole.
It's the way he uses them. There's
something in his choice of - hold
on.

Adam begins paging back in the galley.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Okay, okay. Listen to this.
(reading words)
Aaron moved fleetingly across the
splintered floor, the basement
portal beckoning him like a siren
calls a sailor.

Nick looks up and stares at a non-plussed Adam.

NICK
Splintered?

ADAM
Fleetingly!

Nick begins laughing.

NICK
That's not an adjective, man! Holy
shit. It's an adverb!

Adam looks down at the page and squints at the words.

ADAM

Adverb?

NICK

Anyway, the story sucks and I'm illustrating it because it's thirty grand.

ADAM

Holy shit! Thirty grand? What the hell're you gonna buy with that?

NICK

(a beat as he replaces pillows)
New friends.

Adam laughs and chucks a chair pillow at Nick.

INT. BROADWAY DINER - DAY

Nick and Adam are sitting in a booth at the diner and Staci approaches the table.

STACI

Have you boys kissed and made up?

Neither acknowledges her question. She sits down next to Adam, pushing him roughly over in the booth seat.

STACI (CONT'D)

Well, you're here together. I Guess that's something.

An uncomfortable silence ensues.

STACI (CONT'D)

All right, fine. I'll be the one to ask since the two of you are chicken shits.

Adam looks out the window timidly before looking down at the salt and pepper caddy.

STACI (CONT'D)

Are we still on for tonight?

There's no answer. Nick clears his throat and picks up a menu.

STACI (CONT'D)

Oh, okay. So, now you're customers?

She stands quickly and pulls out her order pad and a pen.

STACI (CONT'D)
What can I get you morons?

NICK
Chicken sand -

STACI
(snarky)
Sandwich and fries. Got it.
(to Adam)
You?

ADAM
A hot waitress.

Staci leans over and TIPS the soda glass into Adam's lap. He jumps up, but BANGS his knees on the booth table.

ADAM (CONT'D)
You bitch!

Steve looks up from behind the counter.

STEVE
Hey, watch your mouth, Adam!

Staci moves to the counter and grabs a towel. She walks back over and throws it in Adam's face.

STACI
There...you big puss.

She reaches for the glass and retrieves another soda for Adam, putting it down in front of him.

STACI (CONT'D)
So, are we still on for our
Wednesdays...or not?

Adam shoots a disgusted look at Nick as he dabs the towel at his crotch.

ADAM
(nodding toward Nick)
If he is.

Staci looks over at Nick.

NICK
Sure.

STACI
 Okay, then I'll go put in your
 order.

ADAM
 Hey, what about mine?

STACI
 Fried shrimp in a basket...extra
 side of cocktail.

She raises a hand like a gun, closes an eye and clicks her
 tongue before walking back to the kitchen.

ADAM
 I'm so gonna make her cry tonight.

Nick laughs and shakes his head.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick is opening up the couch bed and throwing down pillows
 and blankets. The heat is HISSING out of the radiator as he
 POPS a DVD into the player and walks into the kitchen.

As he grabs a bottled water from the fridge, there's a KNOCK
 at the door. He turns and re-enters the living room and
 walks to the door, opening it.

There's no one there. He peeks out into the hallway and
 looks both ways.

Closing the door, he waits. Nothing. Walking back toward
 the couch bed, a KNOCK occurs again. Turning, he goes back
 toward the door and looks through the peep hole.

It's Adam. He opens the door.

NICK
 Hey.

ADAM
 Hey.

Adam removes his coat and brushes snow from his hair.

NICK
 How come you're always early for
 this, but when it comes to selling
 your writing...

ADAM
 Fuck you. Stace here yet?

NICK
No, she's a double today. She's
gonna be late. Hey, did you knock
earlier?

ADAM
Huh?

NICK
Earlier. Like two minutes ago.
Did you knock?

Nick picks up the badminton racket and begins swinging it.

ADAM
No.

Nick unscrews his water and takes a swig.

ADAM (CONT'D)
You start your work on the book
yet?

NICK
What are you? My agent?

ADAM
Tick-tock, dickhead.

Nick takes another long swig. Nick puts down the racket.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Hey, where's that book?

Pointing over toward the end table by the window, Nick lowers
the water from his mouth.

NICK
Don't ruin the pages, man.
Otherwise I'll have to go down to
Arrowhead and get another copy.

ADAM
(picking up the galley)
Ruin the pages? Now I'm a five
year old.
(a beat)
Got any crayons?

Nick flips him off as he sits on the edge of the couch bed.

ADAM (CONT'D)
This scene with the ghost at the
train station. You could draw
that.

Nick doesn't answer, but takes another swig of water,
finishing the bottle and CRUNCHING it.

ADAM (CONT'D)
What about the gargoyle on the
roof? Or that creature -

NICK
Adam.

Adam looks up at Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)
I can't just draw something because
you blurt it out. I have to be
inspired. And I'm sorry to say
that you're *far* from being my muse.

ADAM
Just trying to help, fuckwad.
Christ, you are crabby tonight.

Nick lays back onto the open couch bed and looks at the
ceiling. A KNOCK comes at the door.

NICK
Come in!

Nothing. Nick sits up slowly. Looking at Adam, he lowers
his voice.

NICK (CONT'D)
(whispering)
See what I mean?

ADAM
What? Somebody from the building's
messing with you.

Another KNOCK.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Stace, come in!

Nothing.

Adam rises, irritated and looks at the door.

Another KNOCK.

He races to the door and throws it open.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING (HALL) - NIGHT

Adam walks out into the corridor, looking both ways. There is no one in the hallway. Standing for a moment, he walks to the end of the hall and looks up the stairwell.

Nick enters the hall as well. Adam looks at him and shrugs.

NICK
What the fuck?

They go back into the apartment.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick and Adam enter and close the door behind them.

ADAM
Fucking kids in the building, dude.
You stiffed 'em last Halloween.
Remember?

NICK
It's not kids, stupid.

ADAM
Oh, so it's the old lady next door?

Adam mimics an old person on a walker.

ADAM (CONT'D)
On her walker?

There's suddenly a KNOCK at the door and both Nick and Adam lunge for the door, opening it.

A surprised Staci is standing there with a bag full of snacks.

STACI
A little anxious, boys?

They make way for her as she enters.

ADAM
Some kids are knocking and ducking.

Staci places her purse on the table and hands the bag of snacks to Nick.

STACI

Knocking and ducking? Is that what they teach you down on the playground?

Nick laughs and takes the snacks to the kitchen. Staci sits on the end of the sofa bed and kicks off her shoes. She begins to unbutton her blouse. Adam sees and walks over to the blinds and goes to lower them.

STACI (CONT'D)

Leave 'em up.

Adam pauses and looks back toward her.

ADAM

Yeah?

Staci nods and takes off her blouse, laying it over the couch arm. Adam removes his T-shirt and undoes his belt. Nick enters the living room with three glasses of red wine. He gives one to Staci and another to Adam, raising the glass. They CLINK the glasses and drink.

Nick walks around the couch and pushes the play button on the DVD player. The video starts depicting a woman who is watching a man who's swimming in a pool. She is barely dressed and caressing her breasts and crotch.

Staci stands and removes her pants and socks, then her bra and panties. Before long, Nick and Adam are undressed as well and they lay down on the couch bed, Staci in the center between the boys as they watch the porn flick.

Staci reaches down with each hand to Adam's and Nick's mid-section and begins to pump her arms as they begin to massage her and kiss her shoulders.

NICK

(whispers)

Adam says he's gonna make you cry tonight.

ADAM

(looking up from kissing her breasts)

Fuck you, Nick.

STACI

Make *me* cry.

(chuckling)

Adam, you're such a bully.

She yanks hard on his groin and Adam bellows in pain.

ADAM

Bitch!

STACI

Is that a tear in your eye?

Adam laughs as he turns her over on her stomach and mounts her from behind.

STACI (CONT'D)

(moaning softly)

Oh, Adam...you have missed me.

Nick comes around to her front and Staci goes down on him.

EXT. CENTRAL PARK - DAY

Nick is sketching on a pad as he sits on a bench. He refers briefly to the galley before continuing. His pencil moves briskly in his shivering hand that's protected from the cold only by some fingerless gloves.

Suddenly, he pauses to breathe warm air into his cupped hands. Gingerly rubbing them together, he resumes his sketching.

A gust of cold air lifts his sketch pad paper and he stops. Closing the pad in frustration, he looks at the cover page of the manuscript.

NICK

(sarcastically)

The Night of Chills.

(chuckling)

Fuckin' Chills. God, I hate this book.

Leaning back on the bench and straightening and crossing his legs, Nick looks down at his worn sneakers and sighs.

Within the literal blink of his eye, night crosses into the skies overhead as the sunlight is blotted from the sky. From the paved pathway, weird, dark forms begin moving toward him by leaping into the trees or down onto the rocks and snow. In shock, Nick breathes in a sharp pull of air as he comes quickly to his feet.

Stumbling backward over a mound of dirty snow, he tumbles into the frozen grass behind the bench. Suddenly, the Central Park scene is normal again. Nick is sitting on the grass and looking around him wildly, bewildered and scared.

The sketch pad is on the ground, bent and dirty. His pencil is still sitting on the bench next to the manuscript. Breathing easily again, he rises from the ground, half-chuckling and shaking his head while running his fingers through his long hair. Looking around to see if anyone is watching, he is relieved to note that the various CROWDS appear not to notice him.

NICK (CONT'D)
Fuckin' Chills.

Leaning toward the ground, he recovers his sketch pad and brushes it off, blowing off stray dirt. He retrieves his pencil and the galley before making his way along the paved path.

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - DAY

Nick is walking along some buildings and storefronts when he spots an advertisement for the upcoming Covey novel, "The Night of Chills."

There is a placard with a black and white photo of the author; a mild-mannered Clark Kent type with 1955 black spectacles and a pipe in one hand.

Nick scoffs at the photo. The caption reads: "Jared Covey, bestselling author of 'Spine Tingler,' brings you the next installment in his Leonard Hemingdale series! Available this Spring from Arrowhead Press."

Nick walks on toward home.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick in on the cordless.

NICK
Yeah, Steve. I'm sorry, but I'm feeling under the weather. I won't be in tonight. No, no. I just gotta get some extra sleep. I'll be fine tomorrow. Yeah, thanks. See you tomorrow.

Pressing the End Call button, he sits down on his couch and looks at the large manuscript sitting in front of him. Opening it up to the title page, he stares at it.

NICK (CONT'D)
What the hell do I have to do to get inspired?

Grasping a hold of his teacup, he sips it and then grabs the galley, leaning back comfortably. Opening to a bookmark, he begins reading.

SHORT TIME LAPSE

Nick is still reading when he suddenly sits forward, gazing at the words in renewed interest.

NICK (CONT'D)

What?

His finger scans the page and he goes back up to the top again.

NICK (CONT'D)

(reading aloud quietly)

The symbol rested atop the altar,
resembling a pentagram with symbols
therein scribed. Hemingdale had
seen this thing before and it
filled him with much dread.

Rising quickly, he goes to the door where his coat is hanging and reaches in the pocket. Drawing out the paperback there, he sits down again and opens the book, skimming the pages.

NICK (CONT'D)

C'mon, c'mon! Where are you?

Continuing to flick through the pages, he reaches for his empty cup of tea. Frustrated, he goes back to skimming the paperback.

FADE OUT:

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick is sleeping on his couch with the paperback in his lap and the soft HISSING of the radiator in the background. On the seat next to him is the manuscript.

Rousing slowly, he stretches and yawns, KNOCKING the novel onto the floor from his lap. Stretching to pick it up, he opens it to a page and gazes at it momentarily. Reading intently, he turns to the next page, continuing to follow the words with his eyes.

NICK

Holy shit.

Quickly putting the book down and retrieving his sketchpad, he picks up a pencil and begins moving the implement in frenzied motions.

NICK (CONT'D)
(beginning to form a small
smile)
This is it.

As he continues to draw quickly, a KNOCK comes on the door once again. Gazing at the clock on the wall, he arches an eyebrow in confusion. Another KNOCK comes. Nick looks down at his drawing.

FROM NICK'S POV

A disturbing sketch of a man picking up a pentacle symbol from a charnel altar, bones and talismans littering it. Behind the man, an ominous shadow is looming tall and sinister.

RESUME

NICK (CONT'D)
Who is it?

There is no answer.

NICK (CONT'D)
Hello?

A KNOCK occurs again.

Nick places his pencil down on the sketchpad with a now quivering hand. Putting the sketchpad on the coffee table, he gets to his feet and slowly makes his way to the door.

Another KNOCK. Reaching the door, he flicks off the overhead light and looks beneath the door. The hallway light casts no shadows.

NICK (CONT'D)
Who is it?

Nothing. Then, another KNOCK which startles him. Looking one more time, he sees no shadow under the door.

Another KNOCK.

Nick throws the door open!

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING (HALL) - NIGHT

It is completely dark in the hall. Nick is confused as he peeks out into the hall and looks to his left and then to his right. As he looks to his right, he sees a deeper shadow looming a short distance away from his door. A deep MOAN occurs as the shadow rushes toward him.

Shrieking in fear, he SLAMS the door and LOCKS it, quickly putting his back up against it. Suddenly, a SLAMMING vibration rocks the wall and door as something from the other side is throwing itself against it with much force.

The SLAMMING continues and Nick can feel the door beginning to give way. Quickly, he spies the window that leads to the fire escape and he darts across the living room toward the window.

A loud SMASHING sound happens behind him and he grasps the lock on the top of the window, fumbling to unlock it. Then, in frenzied motions, he pulls the window open.

A bright, blinding light strikes his eyes and he flinches back, moaning in agony. Turning suddenly in fear, he realizes that it is now morning. Looking frantically around his living room, the sunlight is streaming in through the windows. The front door is smashed and broken on its hinges.

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The landlord, CANYON, is standing with Nick. A REPAIRMAN is nearby, replacing the front door.

CANYON

What time did it happen?

NICK

I don't know. Maybe eight or nine last night. It was dark and I didn't look at the clock.

CANYON

Why didn't you call the police?

NICK

I told you, Mr. Canyon. I must've passed out or something. Look, I took sleeping pills last night to help me sleep and in the middle of the night somebody smashed in the door.

CANYON
Sure it was sleeping pills?

Nick gives the landlord an incredulous look.

NICK
It was sleeping pills.

CANYON
Well, look...I'm gonna be installing cameras on all the floors this week. You're the second tenant who had this happen this month.

NICK
Okay, thanks.

Canyon goes to leave and turns back to Nick.

CANYON
Next time, call the police, will ya'? And by the way...Mrs. Martin next door says you're girlfriend is making too much noise with the sex.

Nick opens his mouth to answer, but is silent.

CANYON (CONT'D)
I'm all for a good fuck, Nick, but put a muzzle on her or something.

The repairman chuckles.

NICK
Sorry.

The landlord departs and gives final instructions to the carpenter before leaving. Nick sweeps up stray pieces of splintered wood and takes it to the kitchen. When he returns, the repairman is testing the door.

REPAIRMAN
All right, buddy, you're all set there.

NICK
Thanks a lot.

REPAIRMAN
Yeah. Take it easy.

He picks up his toolbox and the old, shattered door and leaves. Nick closes the door and LOCKS it. Leaning against it, he looks up at the ceiling and sighs loudly.

The phone RINGS, startling him. He answers it.

NICK

Yeah?

STACI

Are you all right?

NICK

Huh?

STACI

You called out last night. Are you okay?

NICK

Oh, yeah, yeah. I wasn't feeling well and called out to get some sleep, that's all.

STACI

You want me to come over?

NICK

Okay, yeah. I'm just gonna eat breakfast. You won't believe what happened to me last night.

STACI

All right, I'll be over in a little bit.

NICK

'Kay.

Hanging up the phone, he paces into the kitchen.

INT. NICK'S KITCHEN - DAY

Nick reaches into the cabinet and pulls out a box of cereal. Retrieving a bowl, he puts it on the counter and opens the box. He pours the cereal into the bowl, but as he does, is revulsed as the cereal is crawling with roaches. The insects scatter in all directions.

Horrified, he tosses the box on the floor and opens a cabinet to grab roach spray. But when he pulls out the can and aims it, there are no insects.

Just cereal scattered all over the counter and floor. He stares in disbelief. Kicking the box with the toe of his sneaker, there's no movement.

NICK
What the...

He looks around the side of the counter and is frustrated that there are no roaches. Picking up the box gingerly, he tosses it into the trash bucket.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick is sitting on his couch and sketching as he continues to turn the sketchpad in his lap. There's a KNOCK on the door. Stopping his drawing, he suddenly looks up at the door.

Another KNOCK.

NICK
Hello?

STACI (O.S.)
It's me.

NICK
Oh. Hold on.

Nick UNLOCKS the door and lets Staci enter. She kisses him and Nick puts a hand on her shoulder as she begins to remove her coat.

NICK (CONT'D)
No, hold on. Let's go to the
McDonald's or something.

STACI
Okay.

They leave the apartment and LOCK the door behind them.

STACI (O.S.) (CONT'D)
This a new door?

Their voices fade as CAMERA finds Nick's sketchpad on the coffee table.

The sketch depicts a dead dog in a gutter puddle that appears to be partially skinned. A reflection of the moon in the lifeless eyes of the dog are haunting.

INT. PIZZA PARLOR - DAY

Nick and Staci are sitting at a small round table and eating pizza slices on paper plates. She is sprinkling an exorbitant amount of red pepper flakes on her slices.

NICK
That's crazy.

STACI
(in a hissing whisper)
It's spic-cey!

He laughs and takes a sip of his bottled water.

STACI (CONT'D)
So, tell me about your strange night.

NICK
Oh, yeah, so...I'm reading the manuscript last night, right? And I read this part about a symbol on an altar and it totally reminds me of this thing I saw in Sumner's office -

STACI
Who's Sumner?

NICK
The publisher.

STACI
What symbol?

NICK
That's what I'm getting to.

STACI
Sorry.

NICK
Anyway, so I see this thing on Webster's desk and I asked him what it was. He tells me this story about where he got it, blah, blah, blah, and whatever. So, I'm reading the book last night and the lead character, Hemingdale, finds this fake floor leading down into the basement of this woman's house and -

STACI
Hold on. Who's Hemingdale?

NICK
The lead character in the book.

STACI
Okay, I'm lost.

NICK
Seriously?

She nods and sips her soda through a straw.

NICK (CONT'D)
All right, listen. In the book,
the detective finds a secret room
beneath a house. The house belongs
to a woman who has disappeared.
He's investigating her
disappearance. He goes down into
this room below her house and finds
an altar. Like a witch's altar.

STACI
(indicating his second
slice)
Are you gonna eat that?

Nick is annoyed. He shakes his head and pushes the plate
toward her.

NICK
In the description of the altar,
there's a part about a pentagram
symbol and it totally reminded me
of the one on the publisher's desk.

STACI
And that means...

NICK
(blinking)
I don't know. I'm just making an
observation, okay?

STACI
Testy.

NICK
No, I just don't like all the
interruptions.

Staci raises both hands and makes a face.

STACI

Sorry.

NICK

So...I read in the description that the character is afraid of the symbol and that he's seen it before, right? Well, I already read the beginning of the book and it doesn't mention it. So, I remembered the first book and started reading that. Well, there it was and it had to do with some kind of ancient evil presence and suddenly...

Nick's words cut off and he looks off into the distance.

STACI

Am I allowed to cut in here?

Nick looks back at her.

NICK

Suddenly, I was inspired.

STACI

By the book?

Nick nods and takes a swig of water.

NICK

Yeah. It hit me all at once. All of a sudden, I was sketching like crazy. I'm telling you, Stace, it was weird.

STACI

So, that's good then, right?

NICK

Hold on. After I'm almost done with the sketch, there's a knock on the door.

STACI

Those kids again?

NICK

No...no.

(sighing loudly)

No, Adam just made that shit up. There were no kids.

STACI
So what then?

NICK
I couldn't get an answer and there was no shadow under the door. But the knocking kept coming and I finally opened it.

Nick goes silent.

STACI
And?

NICK
There was something in the hall.

STACI
What?

NICK
Like in my picture.

STACI
Your picture?

Nick pauses and reaches for his satchel. UNZIPPING it, he starts to search for the sketchpad.

NICK
Aw, crap. I left it at home.

He quickly pulls a pen from his pocket.

NICK (CONT'D)
Gimme that napkin.

Staci hands him the napkin and he unfolds it and begins to sketch.

After a minute or two, he turns the napkin toward her.

STACI
That. You saw *that* in your hallway last night?

Nick continues to stare at her.

STACI (CONT'D)
So, it didn't say anything or do anything?

NICK
It broke down my door.

She looks up and her eyes widen slightly.

STACI
So, it was a new door?

NICK
Yeah. I actually tried to get away
from it on the fire escape, but
when I opened the window...

STACI
What?

NICK
It was daytime.

Staci's eyes narrow.

STACI
I don't get it.

NICK
It was daytime. The sun was up and
the door was broken.

Staci reaches for the napkin and wipes her mouth with it.

NICK (CONT'D)
You don't believe me.

STACI
No, I do. I do. Um, you're not
going to work tonight and I'm
staying over.

She rises from the table and Nick gets up as well.

NICK
Let me just grab some money from
the ATM.

Nick goes to the ATM and inserts his card. He requests an
account balance and sees a \$10,464.89 balance.

Returning to Staci, he's smiling.

NICK (CONT'D)
Uh, this dinner's on me.

He shows her a balance statement slip.

NICK (CONT'D)
Arrowhead gave me my advance.

STACI
Shit. (smirking) Let's get a whole
pizza to go.

CAMERA lingers on the crumpled napkin with lipstick as it
begins to smolder slightly.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - NIGHT

Staci and Nick are walking along the darkened, icy pavement.
Nick has his satchel over one shoulder and a full pizza box
in the other. Staci is on her cellphone.

STACI
Well, that's too bad, Steve! He's
got a hundred and four temperature
and I'm not letting him out of the
house! No, I'm not his wife, but
he's damn sure not your slave!
Fine! 'Bye!

She shuts off the phone and begins chuckling.

STACI (CONT'D)
He's so pissed.

NICK
How the hell do you get away with
that shit?

STACI
He's my mom's boyfriend. I can't
get fired. You, on the other
hand...

He eyes her and laughs loudly.

NICK
This was your idea!

They laugh together and continue walking when Nick looks to
his left toward the street and suddenly sees a huge animal
laying dead in the gutter next to the curb. Water surrounds
it and it looks like a dog that's been partially skinned.

Nick jumps back and pushes Staci toward the building to their
left, shouting and terrified. In his frenzied state, he
DROPS the pizza box on the pavement.

STACI
(shouting)
What's the matter?

He points toward the street, but stares at the building. Staci looks and then releases herself from his grip. She walks toward the scene.

STACI (CONT'D)
Jesus Christ.

NICK
What is it?

Nick is still facing the brick building.

STACI
I think it's a dog. It looks like
it's been skinned or something.

Nick approaches her quickly and grabs her arm, pulling her along the sidewalk.

STACI (CONT'D)
Hold on! Let me get the pizza!

NICK
Forget the pizza!

STACI
Jesus, Nick! What the hell's wrong
with you?

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Nick is rolling a bottled water over his forehead, his eyes closed. Staci is sitting on the couch, staring at the sketchpad in her lap.

STACI
That's exactly what was in the
street. You're saying that you
drew this today?

NICK
Yes. Right after the roaches in
the cereal thing.

STACI
And you don't have roaches.

NICK

Right. I haven't had roaches in,
like, a year or more.

Nick puts down the water bottle and approaches the couch.

NICK (CONT'D)

But that's not the point, Stace.
The roaches weren't ever there.
You get what I'm saying. It's like
...they were, but they weren't. I
don't know how to explain.

Staci looks suddenly concerned.

STACI

Maybe you should get to bed. Take
some of those sleeping pills you
said you had and I'll stay with you
tonight to make sure you get some
sleep.

Nick nods and puts his hand to his temple.

NICK

What a fuckin' day.

STACI

Go ahead. Get in bed. I'm going
to read this book and then I'm
going to read the manuscript. I'll
let you know if there's anything in
there that looks weird, okay?

NICK

Thanks, sweetie.

He kisses her on the head and moves into the kitchen on his way to the bedroom. Staci opens the pizza box and the cheese is stuck to the top of the lid. Scraping it off, she begins eating a slice and opens up the paperback in one hand.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Nick shambles into the room and finds Staci asleep on the couch, a small blanket over her and the paperback next to her.

Sitting down on the other end of the couch, he picks up the novel and realizes that all the pages have been dog-eared. In the margins of the pages are notes scrawled by Staci.

He begins reading the pages indicated and his mouth begins to open.

Staci stirs moments later and stretches.

NICK
Staci! This can't be possible.

Staci sits upright slowly, but then suddenly snaps to life.

STACI
Oh, my God! You're awake! I wanted to show you last night, but I knew you needed the sleep!

NICK
This is about us!

STACI
I know!

NICK
How is this possible?

STACI
I don't know, I don't know! Oh, my God, look at page one thirteen!

Nick stops and turns the pages. He starts reading and his mouth drops open again.

NICK
This is the three of us having sex with the blinds up!

Nick stops reading and stares at Staci.

NICK (CONT'D)
Do you think this is Adam?

STACI
What?

NICK
Is this Adam? I mean, look! He loves this writer's work. He said it himself.

STACI
Oh, my God...

NICK
Call him up. Tell him to come over.

Staci quickly grabs her phone and dials.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

There is a KNOCK on the door and Staci jumps up to get it. Adam enters and is carrying a bottle of wine in a brown paper bag. Nick is sitting on the warm radiator.

ADAM
Okay, so what are celebrating?

STACI
Sit down. I'll get the glasses.

Nick sits in a chair by the window, staring at Adam without emotion.

ADAM
So, what's the news, Nicky?

Staci comes back from the kitchen and puts the glasses down on the coffee table. Adam opens the bottle and pours it.

ADAM (CONT'D)
Okay, so, what's the occasion?

Nick raises his glass and Staci follows. Adam raises his glass as well with a smirk on his face.

ADAM (CONT'D)
What are we drinking to?

NICK
To your new book.

ADAM
What?

STACI
(to Nick)
And the success of his first book as well.

Adam's smirk fades as he lowers the glass.

ADAM
I'm not following.

NICK
We know, Adam.

Adam is still not following.

NICK (CONT'D)

That was pretty clever how you had Sumner on board with this, but man, you really had me fooled.

ADAM

What the hell are you two talking about?

Staci sidles up next to Adam and puts an arm around his shoulder, pulling him in close and kissing his neck.

STACI

Who knew you even had a pen name.

Adam shrugs her arm off his shoulder and puts the glass of wine down on the table.

ADAM

Seriously. What the hell are you talking about?

NICK

Oh, man, Adam. C'mon! Jared Covey? The books?

ADAM

Covey? The author you're illustrating?

Nick smirks. Adam looks at Staci who smiles and cocks her head in a cute way, fluttering her eyelashes.

ADAM (CONT'D)

You think those books are mine? Are you guys insane?

NICK

Really, Adam. Okay, then, innocent bystander...explain page one thirteen.

ADAM

What's one thirteen?

Staci picks up the paperback and hands it to Adam.

STACI

Page one thirteen.

Adam takes the novel and opens it.

ADAM
What's all this...
(indicating notes in
margins)
...stuff?

NICK
Just read one thirteen. Second
paragraph down.

Adam looks down and begins to read. As he reads, his mouth
drops open slightly.

ADAM
What the fuck?

NICK
(sarcastically)
Oh. You didn't write that?

ADAM
You think this was me? You're
kidding, right? I can't even
pronounce this...what is this?
Greek?

Staci leans over and looks.

STACI
Menage a trois?

ADAM
Oh.

NICK
You're really going to deny this
stuff is yours?

ADAM
Nicky, I swear on Ghost's grave
that this was not me!

STACI
Ghost's grave?

NICK
His dead ferret.

ADAM
This is not me. I swear, guys.
It's not.

They all fall silent.

ADAM (CONT'D)
But...if this isn't you guys, who
the hell really wrote this?

STACI
What's the copyright date in that
book?

ADAM
(opening front pages)
Two thousand fourteen.

NICK
Fourteen.

ADAM
When did we start -

STACI
Not *that* long ago.

ADAM
So, what the fuck...

Again, they fall silent. Nick rises and begins to pace slowly.

NICK
I need to talk to Sumner.

The other two gaze up at Nick.

NICK (CONT'D)
We need to find out who really
wrote this.

ADAM
Hold up, hold up. This could be a
coincidence, right?

STACI
Adam, that whole book is filled
with us doing things together.
Down to us going up to the
Renaissance Faire in Tuxedo Park.

ADAM
Seriously?

STACI
And all your jerkin' off to those
Jenny Joyce flicks.

ADAM
That's in here?

Staci nods and smirks.

STACI
Even that contraption in your
closet with the female voice and
movable parts with the -

ADAM
Okay, okay, okay!

NICK
Let's go.

They get their coats as Nick stows the books and his
sketchpad into his satchel.

INT. ARROWHEAD PRESS BUILDING (LOBBY) - DAY

Nick, Adam and Staci enter and approach the front desk of the
publishing house.

As Nick gets closer to the desk, the man behind it recognizes
him.

RECEPTIONIST
Good morning!

NICK
Hey, is there any chance I could
speak with Mr. Sumner.

RECEPTIONIST
Oh, no, I'm sorry. Mr. Sumner's
out for the weekend. He won't be
back in the office until Wednesday.

NICK
Oh, wow. That's six days.

RECEPTIONIST
He takes off once a month to his
home up north and does a little
hiking or sightseeing.

NICK
Up north?

RECEPTIONIST
Yeah, up to Connecticut. He lives
right outside of Lyme on the coast.

NICK

Oh.

RECEPTIONIST

Is it important? Because I can buzz him.

NICK

It's kind of important. But I really don't wanna bother him on his time off. Oh, hey! What about the author, uh, Jared Covey? I'm working on illustrations for his book and I'm supposed to make a deadline and I've got so many questions about the work.

RECEPTIONIST

(hesitant)

Well, we don't normally talk about Covey because of an agreement between the author and Arrowhead, but since you are working on the book, we can probably make an exception.

The receptionist begins writing down information on a Post-It note and hands it to Nick.

RECEPTIONIST (CONT'D)

There you go. Please, please, please, don't let that get out to anyone.

Nick looks at the paper.

NICK

Oh! Okay, then. Thanks so much.

Nick turns and walks away from the desk. When they are near the exit, Staci tries to look at the paper.

NICK (CONT'D)

Jared Covey is Danielle Waerloga. He's a she. And she lives in Providence.

STACI

Rhode Island?

Nick nods as they depart the lobby.

INT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY

Adam and Staci are waiting as Nick approaches them and hands off the tickets.

NICK

Okay, so let's get some snacks before we go. We've got a four-hour trip.

ADAM

Four hours?

NICK

Yeah, we got the train to New Haven Union Station and then the bus to Providence. C'mon. The train leaves in, like, twenty minutes. There's a dining concourse over there.

They walk off toward the concessions.

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Establishing. Nick, Adam and Staci are in their seats as the scenes pass by outside the windows.

INT. BUS - DAY

Establishing. Nick and Staci sit side by side. Adam is sitting next to a woman who is wearing what appears to be a garbage bag over her clothing and is carrying two umbrellas and a large, filled purse between her feet on the floor. Adam is just staring out the window.

EXT. PROVIDENCE SIDEWALKS - DAY

The three are walking along the old architectural sites of Providence. Nick is holding the yellow Post-It in his hand and asking locals about the address. A man points them in the right direction.

NICK

Thank you, sir.

They walk toward CAMERA.

ADAM

I am so hungry right now.

NICK
All right, hold on.

They all halt in front of the CAMERA. Nick is looking left and right.

STACI
(pointing past CAMERA)
There's a Starbucks!

NICK
Oh, I hate Starbucks.

STACI
Too bad. Outvoted.

They move past CAMERA.

EXT. PROVIDENCE SIDEWALKS - DAY

The trio is walking up a slight inclining sidewalk toward an old Brownstone.

NICK
No, really. What the hell is a
"venti." It's stupid.
(stopping and looking up)
Here we are.

They approach the building.

EXT. BROWNSTONE - DAY

The three walk up the few steps and approach the door. Nick RINGS the bell.

After a moment, the intercom comes to life.

WAERLOGA
(through intercom)
Yes?

NICK
Hello, Ms. Waerloga, my name's Nick
Tillinghast. I'm the artist who's
been assigned to illustrate your
book.
(a beat over silence)
Ms. Waerloga?

WAERLOGA

I'm sorry, why are you here at my home?

NICK

Could - could we come in?

WAERLOGA

We?

NICK

Um, my friends are with me. We don't have a car and we just took a four-hour train and bus ride from New York City -

WAERLOGA

How did you get my name and address?

NICK

The, um, the publisher gave...gave me the address...and your - your name. If - if this is a bad time -

WAERLOGA

This is an extremely rude thing to do and it's extremely unprofessional for Arrowhead to be giving out my personal information.

Nick is quiet.

WAERLOGA (CONT'D)

May I at least ask why you're here?

NICK

I am so sorry, Ms. Waerloga. I was reading your galley and had some questions about the work. Who would take a four-hour ride if this wasn't important?

WAERLOGA

And why didn't you just call me?

NICK

These - these are really good questions. Honestly, I didn't think of it and I was so impressed with your book that I just took off?

WAERLOGA
With your friends?

NICK
Yes.

WAERLOGA
How many are you?

NICK
Um, three. Three. But they're
really big fans.

Adam and Staci give him a look of incredulity.

WAERLOGA
I'm ringing you in.

The buzzer on the door SOUNDS. Nick grabs the door and pulls it open. They enter.

INT. BROWNSTONE (FOYER) - DAY

The trio enters the room and sees that the house is dark by virtue of heavy drapes. It is garishly decorated. There are macabre remains of animals and humans in bizarre glass enclosures around them, as well as strange crystals, glasses, ancient pottery and artwork in the forms of paintings and statuary.

They look around in mute amazement at the menagerie when they see a very young, attractive woman appear at the top of the wide staircase before them. As they stare, she descends slowly down the center, graceful and perfectly arrayed in a Hollywood-esque red carpet gown. Her hair is swept up by an ornate and stylish antique hair comb and her hands are clasped in front of her disarmingly.

WAERLOGA
I have not entertained guests in
more than a decade, so forgive the
morbid amount of dust on the
furniture and artifacts.

NICK
No worries. We're not gonna take
up much of your time.

She reaches the bottom and stops, still as a statue.

WAERLOGA
Will you be requiring a drink or
are you hungry.

NICK

Oh, no, no.

Nick then hesitates as he chances a look at his companions who are shaking their heads.

NICK (CONT'D)

No, thank you. We're - we're good.

WAERLOGA

Call me Cynthia.

NICK

(enamored)

Okay.

She waves a hand to her left.

WAERLOGA

This way.

She leads them into the next room through a very high arch.

INT. PARLOR - DAY

A period fireplace sits empty, surrounded by three Victorian Chaise lounges and a very wonderfully carved table. In the center of the table is an ornate crystal decanter and glasses upon an engraved silver platter.

WAERLOGA

Please sit.

She walks to the huge window and pulls the drapes, one at a time by hand, and attaches them at the ties to either side. There are wooden blinds behind them. She twists a rod, opening the blinds and flooding the room with bright sunlight. The three had just adjusted their eyes to the darkness and now squint painfully. She, however, seems unaffected by the dramatic change in light.

The author takes a moment to look around herself, smiling quaintly.

WAERLOGA (CONT'D)

I haven't seen this room in natural light for quite some time.

Nick looks up and now can see that the writer is even younger and more lovely than initially perceived.

NICK

Thank you so much for inviting us
in, Ms. Waer - Cynthia.

She looks at him and smiles with charm. She walks to the
Chaise opposite them and sits like a 1930's movie star
conducting a sit-down interview.

WAERLOGA

Please, Nicholas...introduce me to
your friends.

NICK

Oh, so sorry. These - these are my
best friends, Adam and Staci.

The two wave silently.

NICK (CONT'D)

Um, Adam is actually an author as
well.

She directs her gaze toward Adam who is struck by her beauty
as well.

WAERLOGA

What do you write? Have I read
your work?

ADAM

No, I'm, uh, I'm not published.
But I love your book.

WAERLOGA

The galley?

ADAM

I was saying to Nick how much I
love your style.

She continues to smile in his direction until he gets nervous
and looks around the room. She looks briefly at Staci who
keeps a steady eye trained back on the author.

WAERLOGA

(looking back at Nick)

Now...tell me why you're really
here.

NICK

Oh...okay. Well, I'm - I'm curious
about your stories. Your detective
is doing an investigation into
three people -

WAERLOGA
You're talking about my first book.

NICK
Yes.

WAERLOGA
But you're not illustrating my first book.

NICK
No.

WAERLOGA
Go on.

NICK
Well, the characters in the first book...Jon, Eric and Loretta are...

WAERLOGA
Are...

NICK
Well, when I'm reading it, they - they seem like they're...

She continues to stare.

STACI
They're us.

The writer glances over to Staci.

NICK
(relieved)
Yes. They're us.

She now focuses on all three.

WAERLOGA
Is that all then?

Nick looks at his friends uncertainly.

NICK
Well, no. We were wondering how you knew certain things about us.

WAERLOGA
Many fan letters that I receive often ask me the same question.

Silence and blank stares.

WAERLOGA (CONT'D)

There are no new stories. Only new authors.

The three are still quiet.

NICK

Well, there are...situations that exactly match things that we've been doing. Lately.

That uncomfortable stare persists.

NICK (CONT'D)

I guess I'm just curious about how you came up with your stories.

WAERLOGA

Dreams, Nicholas.

NICK

Dreams?

(she nods)

As in, like, you're sleeping and there are...

WAERLOGA

One hundred percent of my stories are given to me through my dreams.

ADAM

Really? All your stories.

She nods again.

STACI

In your first book, the detective discovers the bodies of Eric and Loretta in the woods, cut up in pieces and hung from the trees.

The author watches her.

STACI (CONT'D)

Sounds more like a nightmare.

WAERLOGA

Brutal.

ADAM

Hold on, hold on. Eric is me, right?

Staci nods while keeping a steady gaze on the author.

STACI
And I'm Loretta.

WAERLOGA
Are we finished?

NICK
Well, no...I mean...

WAERLOGA
I'm not really sure I understand what this visit has to do with your illustrations. Aside from the fact that you're asking me questions surrounding a book that was published five years ago, that which you're not even illustrating, I might add...

NICK
Well, the galley continues with the story of Jon and his artistic flair.

WAERLOGA
And you're Jon.

NICK
Well...yes.

The author suddenly rises from her seat, elegantly posing with her hands clasped politely in front of her.

WAERLOGA
Thank you for your visit.

The three stand in confusion.

NICK
Can you at least tell me what happens to Jon.

WAERLOGA
You have the manuscript.

NICK
Yes. But what about the killer? Who is this guy who's chasing them? And does this detective know who it is?

WAERLOGA
I write the stories. My readers enjoy them.

(MORE)

WAERLOGA (CONT'D)

You work for my publisher. And your friends are not really my concern. Now, thank you for your visit.

She motions for them to leave. They move toward the arch.

NICK

Do you always dream about murder?

WAERLOGA

Only when I leave this house.

The trio halts.

WAERLOGA (CONT'D)

I know it's unusual, but I never dream about any graphic violence except when I visit this specific park in Connecticut.

NICK

Hold it, hold it. Which park?

WAERLOGA

Why? Are you in need of bad dreams as well?

NICK

How do you know it's the park?

WAERLOGA

Back in nineteen eighty-seven, I first visited the park while researching a college project. That's when the dreams began.

STACI

You mean the nightmares.

NICK

What park?

WAERLOGA

The Devil's Hopyard.

ADAM

I know that place!

The others look suddenly at Adam.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Well, I haven't been there, but I've heard of it.

WAERLOGA

It's quite famous...and quite remote. And it's lovely in the autumn.

NICK

Why do you think that place is giving you these nightmares?

WAERLOGA

Because that's what they tell me.

STACI

They? Who's they?

WAERLOGA

The dreams.

Off the trio's stare, we:

CUT TO:

EXT. PROVIDENCE SIDEWALKS - DAY

The three are walking along the city sidewalks.

STACI

What a fucking freak.

NICK

I don't understand why she was so nonchalant about everything.

ADAM

Well, duh. The woman never leaves her house. Then one day, three city strangers show up out of nowhere to accuse her of spying on them and then writing it down into a novel.

NICK

That's not what we did! We never even mentioned spying!

ADAM

Did you have to? C'mon, Nick, what else were we implying other than spying?

Silence. They continue walking.

STACI
I still say she was a freak.

ADAM
But gorgeous, huh?

Nick smiles.

STACI
(huffy as she indicates
herself)
Hello! Girl who gives you
unbelievable blowjobs!

NICK
Oh, Staci! No, you're gorgeous,
too.

ADAM
How old do you think she is?

Staci balks.

NICK
Let's get a hotel and stay in town
tonight.

STACI
Why?

NICK
Maybe we can go back to Cynthia and
be more up front about why we're
concerned.

ADAM
I don't think that's a good idea.

Nick gives him a funny look.

ADAM (CONT'D)
I think she'd be more inclined to
call the cops than talk with us
again. Just saying.

NICK
We should at least try.

STACI
All right, okay. But I get my own
room. And you're buyin'.

NICK
But I figured...

STACI
You figured what?

ADAM
He figured sex.

STACI
Well, maybe Adam can use his great
writer's imagination and come up
with a scenario that you can
illustrate. Then the both of you
can fuck yourselves.

She smirks at them.

ADAM
If I'm writing my own story, I'm so
gonna nail that writer chick.

NICK
(staring at Staci
indignantly)
I got seconds.

STACI
Maybe combined, you can make her
cum.
(to Adam as she fakes
crying)
Or cry.

She laughs as they walk on down the sidewalk.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Nick and Adam are watching television and there's a soft
KNOCK on the door. Nick gets up and opens it. It's Staci in
her bra and panties, carrying a bottle of champagne.

NICK
Whadda you want?

Staci then frowns.

STACI
I dunno. Thought maybe I could
enjoy some champagne with my studly
boy toys.

NICK
(pointing to bottle)
Did I pay for that, too?

STACI

Yup.

NICK

I paid eighty-nine bucks for your room and you're not even gonna use it?

STACI

I'll pay you back...dick.

Adam laughs.

NICK

(eyes narrowing)

What did you just say?

STACI

Oh, I'm sorry. Did I hurt your widdle feewings?

Nick turns and rushes to his shoulder bag and begins digging in it. Pulling out the paperback novel, he opens it and begins searching frantically. He stops and begins reading. After a moment, he looks up.

NICK

They're in a hotel!

ADAM

Who is?

Staci's face turns serious as she closes the door and sits down on the bed. Adam sits up in the bed.

NICK

(reading)

The three stood, staring at each other. "I'll pay you back...dick."

STACI

I just said...

ADAM

Holy shit!

NICK

Jon read from the pages of the book of incantations, slowly realizing that everything in their lives had been pre-ordained; played out in the pages of this book as if it had already happened.

Nick halts and looks out into the distance.

STACI
How is this possible?

Adam takes the book from Nick's trembling hand.

NICK
We need to go to the Devil's
Hopyard.

Staci looks at him. Adam points gleefully to the book.

ADAM
(mimicking Nick)
We need to go to the Devil's
Hopyard.
(a beat)
It's right here, in black and
white!

A shocked Nick leans down and reads to himself. He stands up straight and paces.

NICK
Before we go anywhere, we need to
read that whole book. Like out
loud to each other.

ADAM
Shotgun! I call shotgun!

The others look at him again.

ADAM (CONT'D)
I'm reading first.

STACI
I got seconds.

Nick looks at Staci who smiles teasingly.

INT. RENTAL CAR - DAY

The day is rainy and the three friends are eating food on the go. Nick is driving, Staci is in the front and Adam's in the back.

NICK
Give me another one of those egg
sandwiches. GPS says it's only
like an hour away.

STACI

So, what happens next is we go to the park and go read the placard.

ADAM

Which is?

NICK

Jesus, I told you, Adam. It's like a sign that tells us about the park.

ADAM

Why are they reading it?

NICK

I don't know. Maybe they're curious about the history of the park or something.

STACI

You mean we're curious about the park.

They all chuckle.

NICK

So, after that, they hear the chanting, right?

STACI

No, no. First, they go look at the weird stones in the stream, then they...

(flips pages as she reads)

...then they hear the chanting.

ADAM

Which is the creepy dude in the robes.

STACI

Yes.

NICK

And he's doing some sort of ritual.

STACI

Right. So, we interrupt him and he already knows...

NICK

What?

STACI
He already knows Jon. You.

NICK
Wait, what? He knows me?

STACI
Yeah. He pulls a gun and then orders Loretta and Eric to sit on the ground. Then he orders Jon to...

She stops reading.

STACI (CONT'D)
I could swear that...

NICK
What's the matter?

STACI
Um, that night at your place...when I read this whole book...

NICK
Yeah?

STACI
Well, I could swear that the creepy dude shot Loretta and Eric.

NICK
Well, what does it say.

Staci hesitates.

ADAM
(taking book from her and reading)
It says...it says that you take a rock and bash our heads in.

Quiet.

NICK
It doesn't say that. That makes no sense.

STACI
But that's what it says.

ADAM

(reading)

Jon looked around for the largest piece of stone, which was readily at hand, and proceeded to smash in the heads of both of his friends. Coldly and without flinching.

Nick pulls the car over to the side of the road. The occupants are quiet.

NICK

You guys know that I would never hurt you.

Turning to face them, he sees they are staring into the distance.

NICK (CONT'D)

Right?

STACI

It doesn't make any sense.

ADAM

Hey! This wasn't in the book!

Nick and Staci are puzzled.

ADAM (CONT'D)

(spreading arms a little)

This...this! This whole scene right now!

STACI

(eyes opening)

You're right.

NICK

Let me see that.

Taking the paperback from Staci, he flips back a few pages. Holding the book up and showing it to his friends, he's ominously quiet.

STACI

No...way.

Adam snatches the novel.

ADAM

They're in the car and debating Jon killing them!

Everyone is quiet.

ADAM (CONT'D)
But we just read this last night!
It wasn't there!

STACI
He's right, Nick. It wasn't there.

Silence.

NICK
I'm officially creeped out. Is it
possible that this book is...re-
writing itself as we go along?

Nick looks desperately at the others.

STACI
Maybe we skipped this part. We
were all drinking champagne last
night. We were taking turns
reading. Maybe we just skipped it!

More silence.

NICK
Maybe we should just go home.

ADAM
Aren't you curious though? I mean,
just a little bit?

STACI
Adam, he's bashing our heads in
with a rock!

ADAM
Maybe it's - what was that word you
used, Nick? You know, when you
described her writing?

NICK
Abstract?

ADAM
Yeah! Maybe it's just abstract.

STACI
Bashing someone's skull in with a
big rock is not abstract, you ass!

ADAM
No?

NICK
Look, let's just go home.

ADAM
(quickly)
Vote!

NICK
Vote? Really?

ADAM
All for going to the park?

He raises his hand. Staci stares out her window. Then, she slowly raises her hand.

ADAM (CONT'D)
It's official.

NICK
You're willing to do this, despite the fact that I'm apparently going to murder you guys?

ADAM
You're not a killer. Least of all, your best friends.

STACI
Remember when she said that all her fans apparently see themselves in her books?

ADAM
Yeah, yeah! She did, didn't she? Wow. Can you imagine if I could write something that ends up happening? How fast would I be banging Jennifer Lawrence?

STACI
Oh, my God. Could you be any more of a pervert *and* mental midget?

NICK
If you think this book is mirroring our lives, why would you still wanna go to the Devil's Hopyard?

Adam looks at Staci who shrugs.

ADAM
This is the most exciting thing I've ever done in my life.

STACI
(frowning)
You're not gonna hurt us, Nick.

NICK
Of course I'm not. It's just a
book.

He puts the car in gear and rejoins the road.

EXT. DEVIL'S HOPYARD - DAY

The skies have grayed over and it looks like rain when the car pulls into the empty parking lot. They get out and stretch before looking around.

ADAM
Nobody's here.

NICK
It's the middle of winter, Adam.

ADAM
I know that. I'm only saying that
the creepy dude's car isn't here
either.

STACI
Is that in the book?

ADAM
No. All I'm saying is that if the
creepy dude's here, he didn't
drive.

NICK
Right.

They look at the empty ranger's booth.

NICK (CONT'D)
Where's that placard?

ADAM
Wouldn't that be funny if it wasn't
even -

STACI
(pointing)
Over there.

ADAM
Never mind.

They walk across the lot and there's the SOUND of water flowing nearby. They begin reading the placard.

STACI

(reading)

The most widely-circulated legend tells of the many times Satan has been seen, sitting on a huge boulder at the top of Chapman's Falls, playing his violin while the evil witches of Haddam stirred a hell broth for a charm of powerful trouble in the cauldron-like potholes formed in the rocks below.

She and the others laugh.

STACI (CONT'D)

(continuing)

Another story reports that a lone traveler, while walking through the Hopyard one night, saw some weird shapeless forms leaping from ledges and trees near the falls.

Staci pauses as Nick puts his hand on her wrist and squeezes it. She looks at his face and sees that he's fearful.

NICK

(whispering)

That's what I saw in Central Park.

They stare at him for a moment longer and Staci looks down at her wrist where he's squeezing very tightly.

STACI

Nick, it hurts.

Nick looks down and releases her wrist.

ADAM

(reading)

Later, these phantoms accosted the terrified man, who then beat a hasty retreat to the nearest tavern, where he related his experience to anyone who would listen.

They are quiet for a moment.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Now what?

STACI

(taking the book out)

It says, "The three moved past the sign and walked down to the stream bed to look upon the famous hoof prints of the Devil himself."

NICK

The stream's that way.

The three walk down the snowy, rocky path and as they near the creek, notice that water is trickling under the ice layer that's formed over the top. The rocks are tremendous and Staci is the first to see the "hoof prints" in the stones. The marks are large and shaped like cylinders going down into the rock, oddly natural and perfect.

ADAM

Ever seen anything like that?

STACI

Holes in rocks? Ooo. My gosh. It's sooo interesting.

ADAM

Bitch.

NICK

Shhh!

They quiet down.

ADAM

What?

NICK

I'm listening for the chanting, you idiot.

They quiet down again and listen intently. There is nothing.

ADAM

Hmm.

NICK

Do you hear anything?

Staci shakes her head.

ADAM

Nope. Nothing.

STACI

Kind of disappointing.

Suddenly Nick begins laughing.

STACI (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

NICK
You and Adam. You guys are
disappointed because I'm not
crushing your heads with a rock.

They start laughing and then start walking back up the hill.

ADAM
I love this fresh air.

NICK
Much better than Central Park.

ADAM
Oh, my God, I hate the air there.

Staci picks up a snowball and throws it at Nick.

NICK
(laughing and with funny
accent)
I kill you!

He stoops and scoops up some snow, but then pauses. Standing straight, he shushes the others who are laughing and fighting with snow. They stop and listen. In the distance can be heard the clear sound of a MAN'S CHANTING.

ADAM
Are you kidding me?

STACI
All right, Nick. Now we can leave.

NICK
The book says that this guys knows
me.

STACI
So.

NICK
You guys go back to the car.

ADAM
Why? What are you doing?

NICK
I'm gonna -

STACI
Oh, no, you're not!

ADAM
What?

STACI
He's gonna go see who that creepy
dude is!

NICK
Okay, look. The book says that we
all go. Then I apparently go
berserk and kill everybody. What
happens if I go by myself? In
other words, we change the outcome.

ADAM
Oh! I see what you mean.

STACI
I'm scared, Nick.

The other two look at her.

NICK
Really?
(she nods)
So, let's just go then.

ADAM
No! You gotta go! You gotta!
Dude, you gotta find out who's
crazy enough to come all the way
out here in the middle of the
fuckin' winter to chant around some
stones!

Nick looks from Adam to Staci.

NICK
He's right, Stace. I gotta know
who this is.

STACI
Fine. I'll be in the car.

She leaves and Adam follows.

ADAM
Hey, Nick! Remember that he has a
gun.

NICK
I'll be careful.

Nick walks toward the woods and disappears as Adam turns to follow Staci toward the parking lot.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Nick continues to walk through the snow as the CHANTING grows stronger. The trees are dense, but then he spots something. A man is sitting on the icy ground. His arms are raised and he appears to be wearing dark priest's robes. The snow beneath Nick's shoes suddenly CRUNCHES loudly and the CHANTING stops.

The man turns to face him, but his face is in shadow beneath the drooping hood. Nick is frozen in place, terrified but curious.

The man pulls back his hood and reveals his face. It's Sumner, the publisher! Nick is in shock.

SUMNER
You figured out the book, I see.

NICK
How? How's this -

SUMNER
Possible?

Nick steps closer.

NICK
Am I under hypnotism?

SUMNER
Hardly. After all, who would have the ability to hypnotize you?

NICK
The book...

Nick moves closer and can now see that Sumner is sitting within a circle of small stones. Inside are arcane symbols made from sticks, twigs and random natural items.

NICK (CONT'D)
The chanting. What are you doing out here?

SUMNER
I'm doing exactly what you
instructed. What you commanded.

Nick's mouth opens slowly and he's shaking his head.

NICK
The book says...says that you have
a gun.

SUMNER
This one.

He raises a pistol that's apparently been in plain sight.

NICK
I'm confused.

SUMNER
Well, of course. You've seen
things beyond the veil. Perhaps
too much.

NICK
I've - I've gotta go.

SUMNER
Yes, of course. Your work awaits.

Nick turns to leave in utter confusion. His mouth is dry and his chest is heaving.

SUMNER (CONT'D)
Nick.
(Nick turns)
Leave the rock.

Nick pauses and then looks down at his hand which is clutching a large, blood-soaked stone. His mouth opens in horror and he DROPS it to the ground, backing away from it.

NICK
What is - what is - what...

SUMNER
I'll do the rest. It's time you
got to your illustrations, don't
you think?

Nick turns to Sumner, terrified.

NICK
The rest?

SUMNER

(as he waves a hand)

The sacrifice. They have to be prepared for the arrival.

Nick follows his gesture and to his utter horror, the bodies of Adam and Staci are sprawled out on the ground, face down, terribly twisted, both of their heads smashed and bloody. The scream never escapes Nick's lips as the tears begin streaming down his cheeks.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

Get a hold of yourself, my boy.
You've had a very long, strenuous day. Go home and rest!

Nick gapes at Sumner in disbelief, then down to his blood-stained hands, glistening in the half-light.

NICK

It wasn't me. It wasn't me.

SUMNER

Go! Before they arrive!

Nick locks his gaze on Sumner.

NICK

Who? Before who arrives?

SUMNER

I'm protected.
(indicates the circle)
You are not. In moments, they will not care if you're a Tillinghast or not! Go!

Nick is in complete shock and he turns and begins to run. His sobs and breaths become synonymous as he reaches the edge of the woods.

EXT. DEVIL'S HOPYARD - NIGHT

The night has arrived and Nick suddenly hears a CHITTERING behind him. Looking back, he is terrified to see the leaping, formless shapes moving from tree to rock quickly in his direction.

Nick takes off toward the parking lot in the distance. The NOISES behind him become louder. Then, to his right and left ahead, he sees more of them as they emerge from the darkened woods.

INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

Reaching the car, he jumps inside and digs for his car key in panic. Fitting it into the ignition slot, the car suddenly ROCKS with a jolt as the creatures begin to leap onto the hood, side and roof of the vehicle.

Shrieking in fear, Nick turns the key and STARTS the engine. JAMMING his foot onto the accelerator, the car pulls out backward from the space, knocking some of the creatures from the car. The car steers out toward the entrance to the park and, as soon as the car reaches that imaginary line, the formless shapes leap from the moving vehicle as Nick watches them disappear into the woods in his rearview mirrors.

Staring ahead, his headlights blazing, he begins weeping hysterically.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BROWNSTONE - NIGHT

Nick is covered in a light snow as he approaches the front door to the Waerloga residence. He pushes the doorbell several times and waits, frequently looking up at the building for lights.

WAERLOGA
(annoyed through intercom)
Yes!

NICK
Cynthia! It's me! Nick the
illustrator! I need to see you!

WAERLOGA
(sighing loudly)
Come back tomorrow.

NICK
No! No! I need to talk to you
now!

No answer.

NICK (CONT'D)
Cynthia! Cynthia, please!
(leaning in close in
desperate whisper)
My friends are dead.

Nothing. Nick looks up at the building. Then, the buzzer SOUNDS on the front door and he opens it fleetly.

INT. BROWNSTONE (FOYER) - NIGHT

Nick stumbles forward, snow falling from his hair and shoulders onto the expensive-looking Oriental carpet. The house is dark. A light suddenly springs up on the stairwell. At the top, Nick can see Waerloga standing in her nightclothes and robe, a pair of slippers on her feet. Her hair is still perfect.

NICK

Cynthia, I need you help! Sumner was up at the park and -

WAERLOGA

David Sumner? My publisher?

NICK

Yes, yes! I think he killed Adam and Staci! I think - I think he put me in some sort of trance and -

WAERLOGA

Your friends are at the hotel, Nicholas. And you're babbling like a raving lunatic.

Nick hesitates and his mouth closes.

WAERLOGA (CONT'D)

Have you been drinking?

NICK

What?

WAERLOGA

Are you drunk?

NICK

No, you stupid bitch! I just told you! Sumner killed my friends!

The writer is simmering and her glare is frightful.

WAERLOGA

Get out.

NICK

Aren't you listening? I just said that Sumner killed my friends!

WAERLOGA

Your friends just called from the hotel. Now, get out.

NICK
Why are you lying?

She doesn't answer. Nick takes a step forward and she pulls a revolver from her robe pocket.

WAERLOGA
If you don't leave, I will shoot
you where you stand.

Nick's mouth is open in shock. He backs up toward the front door.

NICK
You're in on this, aren't you?
Aren't you?

WAERLOGA
Out!

Nick turns and leaves the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HOTEL HALL - NIGHT

Fishing out the card key to the room, Nick slides it and opens the door. Flicking on the light in the dark room, he is completely at a loss of words to see Staci riding Adam, her moaning soft and pleased. She stops and smiles at him.

STACI
You want seconds?

Nick is quiet as he walks in and stares at the rest of the room.

STACI (CONT'D)
Sweetie, are you okay?

ADAM
Are you mad? Dude, she started it.
I was more than happy watching porn
and she comes over and starts
rubbing her tits all over my face.
I'm sorry -

NICK
Have you guys been here all night?

An uncomfortable moment ensues.

STACI

Nick, I only came over looking for you. Adam was jerking off and said you went up to visit the writer. He said he wanted some, so I -

ADAM

What the fuck are you talking about? You climbed on me and said you wanted it!

STACI

Well, so what! You were already hard! Why waste it!

NICK

I told you I was goin' to see the writer?

The two look at Nick.

ADAM

Well, yeah. You said you'd be back later.

NICK

I didn't say anything about the Devil's Hopyard?

ADAM

Oh, hey, I've heard of that place!

Nick darts a glance at them.

STACI

Did you see her? Was she hot?

Staci then climbs off Adam and bends to pick up her panties.

NICK

I'm going back tonight.

ADAM

To the writer?

NICK

(distantly)
No. To the city.

STACI

I don't understand. We just got here and you're ready to go back?

NICK

I'm gonna take the rental car home.
You guys can take the train or - or
the bus if you wanna stay. I'm
leaving.

ADAM

You got a rental?

Nick looks over at Adam curiously with a drained look.

NICK

I'm glad you guys are okay.

Nick grabs his shoulder bag and looks for the book. Finding it, he opens it and begins reading.

STACI

Is the story changing again?

NICK

(not looking up)
Yeah.

STACI

What's it say now?

Nick looks slowly up from the novel in his hands, but doesn't make eye contact.

NICK

It says that we're all gonna die.

Off the others' looks of fear and confusion, we:

CUT TO:

INT. RENTAL CAR - NIGHT

Nick is driving, Staci is in the front seat and Adam is in the back with the novel. The interior light is on.

ADAM

(reading)
There was a certain desperation in
his tone as Jon explained to
Loretta and Eric that his
illustrations were opening doorways
into other worlds.

NICK

We need to burn those drawings!

STACI

That's tens of thousands of dollars, Nick!

NICK

Don't you get it? Those pictures are why these things are happening! They open up portals to other dimensions!

ADAM

The book says that you're not going to burn the pictures, Nick! It's right here, man!

NICK

I don't give a shit what that fucking book says! I'm burning those goddam pictures and then I'm burning that book, too!

Adam is flipping back pages and finds the passage he's looking for.

ADAM

It's here! This exact conversation! "I don't give a shit what that fucking book says! I'm -

STACI

Quit reading, Adam!

NICK

She's right, Adam. It doesn't matter what it says. If we keep basing our decisions on what the book is saying, we're going to keep getting into deeper trouble. Gimme the book!

Adam passes the book hesitantly to Nick. Rolling down the window, he tosses it from the car.

ADAM

No!

NICK

There!
(rolling the window up)
Now we don't have that distraction.

STACI

So, what happens when you burn the drawings?

NICK
 Hopefully, this whole crazy
 nightmare ends.

STACI
 And what if it doesn't?

Nick looks at Staci sincerely and doesn't answer.

EXT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

The car pulls up to the curb next to a fire hydrant...the only empty parking space available.

Nick, Adam and Staci jump from the vehicle and start toward the building, but then hesitate. They are looking up at the third floor window of Nick's living room where a light is on.

ADAM
 Did we leave that light on?

NICK
 C'mon.

They quickly make their way into the building.

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING (HALL) - NIGHT

The trio move into the hall and approach the first floor set of stairs when a GROWL is heard along the hall to their front. They halt and watch as a large, partially skinned dog steps into the light of the lamp.

ADAM
 (terrified)
 Holy...

Nick slowly drops his satchel to the floor, squatting and pulling out his portfolio. Opening it, Nick glances down to his drawing of the dog. Looking at the dog, it GROWLS more insistently and crouches before it springs.

It leaps and Nick tears his drawing in half in one motion. The dog and the drawing simultaneously BURST into a sudden and furious fire and a moment later are gone!

ADAM (CONT'D)
 Shit!

NICK
 Let's go!

They take to the stairs and race upward.

CUT TO:

INT. NICK'S APARTMENT BUILDING (HALL)

On the third floor, the three emerge from the stairwell and walk with purpose down the hall to Nick's apartment.

Upon reaching the door, Nick pulls out his key and gets ready to insert it into the lock when he notices that the door is already open. Nick gazes up at the other two with a concerned look.

NICK
(reaching his hand out and
whispering)
The book.

Adam suddenly bristles.

ADAM
(whispering harshly)
The one you threw out the window?

Nick's eyes shut in consternation as he realizes that it would have come in handy about now.

He peers at the door and pushes lightly on it with his hand. The new door swings open silently and Nick peeks inside. There is a man sitting on the couch and Nick then opens the door even wider to reveal that a woman is also sitting on the couch.

Sumner and Waerloga.

Nick's mouth opens slightly and he walks into the room.

SUMNER
Ah, you're finally here.

NICK
What are you doing in my -

As Nick steps into the room, he sees that Staci and Adam are sitting on the floor of the apartment. He swings his head about, but they are not with him.

NICK (CONT'D)
I don't - this is not happening.

SUMNER
Close the door, Nick.

Nick turns and closes the door obediently.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

As you've commanded, I have taken the liberty of removing the tongues of the sacrifices so that they cannot scream.

Nick's horrified gaze turns to the faces of his friends, whose mouths are tied with bloody gags. Their eyes are thoroughly reddened from the agonizing torture they must have endured.

SUMNER (CONT'D)

The illustrations, Nick.

Sumner holds out a hand and Nick slowly walks toward him.

NICK

What is happening?

SUMNER

Your grandfather's work is finally realized.

NICK

My grandfather?

SUMNER

Crawford Tillinghast. The greatest scientist to have ever lived.

WAERLOGA

My father was your grandfather's best friend, Nicholas. We're practically related.

NICK

This isn't real.

SUMNER

It's all very real, Nick. You have surpassed your grandfather's talents in ways that not even he could have imagined.

Nick looks down on his friends with sympathy.

NICK

Why did you have to involve them?

SUMNER

Those were your explicit instructions.

(MORE)

SUMNER (CONT'D)

I merely carried them out. Cut out their tongues and prepare them for the sacrifice to the Old Ones.

WAERLOGA

You've seen them, Nicholas. You've seen them. And now, we will see them as well.

NICK

They'll kill you.

SUMNER

Not as long as you're here. Your illustrations are providing the pathway from their world into this one. They know that without you, they cannot move from beyond the veil.

WAERLOGA

(to Sumner)

The time is near.

SUMNER

Yes. Are you ready to become the leader of the new world?

NICK

This is not happening.

Waerloga rises and grasps Nick's hand, leading him to Adam and Staci. Nick now realizes that their hands have been tied behind them as they kneel on the floor. Beside them is a large pentagram circle with lit candles at the points and crystals around its perimeter.

Walking Nick into the center of the circle, she gently removes the satchel from his hand and draws the portfolio from the bag. Sumner joins them within the circle.

Waerloga hands the portfolio to Nick and he looks at her face as she smiles sweetly.

SUMNER

Place the illustrations inside the five points of the pentacle, Nick.

Nick looks at the publisher and then down around him at the large circle. The corners of each of the star's points are triangular boxes. Raising the portfolio in his hands, he opens it and looks at the first drawing of a frosted window pane and a melted candle. Taking it gently, he leans down and places it in one of the triangular boxes.

Suddenly, the windows OPEN dramatically as icy cold wind and snow begins to blow into the room. The candles on the floor around the circle remain lit. Looking at the next picture, Nick sees the illustration that he remembered having just destroyed in the hallway downstairs: the partially skinned dog. Yet there it was, pristine and perfect. Grasping it, he places it in the next slot.

A GROWLING is heard as the dog lumbers into the door of the apartment, leering at them within the circle of protection.

Again, he looks into the portfolio and sees the picture of the man grasping a symbol from an altar, a large sinister shadow standing behind him. His trembling hand takes the picture and places it within the next slot.

Behind the circle, a shadow rises up to the ceiling. Waerloga begins laughing maniacally as a grin spreads across Sumner's face. Adam and Staci looks sadly up toward Nick.

Nick is powerless to stop. He reaches down for the next illustration, a series of dimensional shifts that reveal things from beyond that defy description. Nick is beginning to bow down as a tremendously pounding HUMMING is heard within the room. His friends are bowing their heads and closing their eyes. Sumner and Waerloga are raising their arms and hands in ecstasy. Placing the illustration into the next slot, the room appears to turn insubstantial. Nick can now see through the walls, floors and ceilings, but there are mysterious and hideous things that move just outside the borders of the veil.

Sumner is now grasping his head and Waerloga's hair is turning white before his eyes.

The last illustration, a circle of protection that exactly mimics that in which he stands, is drawn from the portfolio. Dropping the empty portfolio onto the floor, he grips the picture and stares at it. The drawing shows a lone figure in the center that is crouched and holding his head in demonstrable terror as creatures swirl in the air around the outer ring.

Gazing at the maniacal Sumner and the hysterical Waerloga, he looks at his friends who have resigned themselves to death and he leans over to place the final illustration.

The HUMMING becomes overwhelming and Sumner suddenly runs from the protection of the circle. Nick watches as he clutches his ears as the creatures all around them immediately and without mercy RIP his entire body and head to pieces.

Waerloga sees the devastation and reaches past the outer ring to touch a creature that waits on the other side. It is leering at her with tremendous teeth, six feet in length. It's dozens of eyes squint as she reaches outward toward it. Her body jerks forward as her arm is TORN from its shoulder socket and blood spurts from the opening.

Shrieking in blissful ignorance of the pain, she steps over the line and is DEVoured whole by the creature.

The HUMMING is now at its most powerful and the doors are wide open. Creatures are ambling, swimming, floating and crawling through into our world. Below him, the illustrations have turned from ink and pencil drawings into a series of golden, glowing lines. The circle is bright and blinds Nick to the sight of his friends being DEVoured as well.

Nick closes his eyes tightly and screams.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Nick looks up at Staci who is reading the paperback.

STACI

(reading aloud)

The world was not ours anymore. It was theirs. The Old Ones. The Elder Gods. Jon had succeeded in bringing about the eventuality of the mass extinction of the human race. And this was just his beginning.

Staci smiles as she closes the book. Adam is already sleeping in the bed. Nick pours a glass of champagne for himself and Staci and hands her the glass. He raises his glass.

NICK

Here's to kissing thirty thousand dollars goodbye.

STACI

You sure about this?

NICK

Absolutely.

Nick and Staci drink and he then rises and walks over to his satchel.

Pulling out his portfolio, he opens it and looks down at the illustration of the frosted window pane. Holding out a hand toward Staci, she rises and moves toward him, taking his hand.

They both regard Adam and smile sweetly toward him.

STACI
He looks like a baby.

NICK
Yeah.

They turn and walk hand in hand across the floor and stop.

NICK (CONT'D)
(looking into her eyes)
Are you ready?

STACI
Oh, yeah.

Nick draws the first illustration from the portfolio and they gaze at it.

SLOW ZOOM OUT to reveal that they are standing within a circle of protection, lit candles at the five points of the pentacle.

Nick is placing the first of the illustrations down on the floor. Nick looks over to his left and smiles.

Waerloga and Sumner are on their knees on the floor, their hands clasped behind their backs and bloody gags on their mouths.

NICK
(to Staci)
Maybe we should wake Adam. He'll probably wanna see this.

Staci gazes over toward Adam sleeping on the bed.

STACI
Nah. Let him sleep.

SLOW ZOOM OUT to reveal that Adam is sleeping within his own personal circle of protection.

The other two begin to laugh as Nick draws out the next illustration. Looking down upon Sumner and Waerloga, Nick smiles sweetly.

NICK
Oh, the things you're about to see.

THE END