

401: Day One

Ash

[Click; rattle]

Ash: Okay. We're rolling. It is Monday, November 30th, 1992. My name is Ash Mobley, I'm the owner of Mobley Building and Renovation, and I'm here documenting the work on the Hawthorne House, a two-story house with basement, of indeterminate age. The house is at 1979 Jackson Circle, relatively south of town, and fairly isolated at the end of a long oak-lined avenue. The house has been empty for fifteen or sixteen years, since the last owner passed away. As far as I understand, there was a disputed will that kept the property tied up until last year, when the current owner bought it and subsequently hired us to renovate it for use as a bed and breakfast.

These notes are mainly for myself to use for making reports back to the owner, who is out of town, but also to document the job, which is a pretty significant one for us. And for me personally, given the history.

I'm standing in the yard right now. There's a big oak tree out front that's got to be seventy-five years old. I'd bet it was planted as part of the original landscaping. It's a shame we can't count the rings. It's a big yard, sloping up to the porch from some stone steps at the road. They hired somebody to mow down the weeds and get the grass under control, but there are still some ragged areas. There are old flower beds around the edges of the yard, but they're overgrown with brush and ivy.

It's cold today. Snow soon, maybe. We've got a generator to run a heater and some power tools, but the quicker we get an electrician in here the better. That's actually why I'm here today, to meet the electrician. He should be here soon.

[She walks onto the porch]

We've got keys for all the doors, as far as I know, and by tomorrow we should have most of the permits. Today we're just getting the lay of the land, so to speak. So let's see what this place looks like.

[She unlocks the front door and opens it. The door complains but scrapes open. She enters.]

Oh. Wow.

[Theme music; credits]

So, let's get the "captain's log" shit out of the way. We're a crew of four: I'm Ash, as I said, and I'm being helped by Anthony Torrance, Jack Carpenter, and Geri Lindquist. I'm technically lead on this project, and every project, but we all of us do everything. Geri's got a little more experience with plumbing, and Tony is a really talented woodworker, but basically we're all jacks of the trade. I've worked with Geri and Tony for a while—Geri's actually been with me since I started the company. This is Jack's first job with us. He's younger, but comes highly recommended. We're bringing in an electrician to redo the wiring, as I said, and we may need one or two other folks, depending on what we find once we get started. But mainly it's the four of us.

This room is the foyer, and it's probably the clearest area. My understanding is there's a lot of old furniture in the rest of the house that'll need removing or saving, depending on condition. There isn't much in here except an old rug and a grandfather clock, which looks in surprisingly good condition, from what I can tell in this murk. The clock, not the rug, that is. The

rug looks 90% mold, and it's, well, it's unpleasantly spongy as I walk on it. Hardwood floors—solid and in good shape, looks like. In here, anyway. Graffiti, some junk around the edges of the room that I can't see clearly.

The house is weird, architecturally. It looks pretty normal from the front, solid and basic in the way that most of the houses in this neighborhood look. If I had to guess, I'd say it was built in the 30s, it's got the basic front porch / two windows up and two down / clapboard siding thing going on. Plus I know a little about some work that was done on it in the 30s. But inside, it's something else altogether. A crazy patchwork of clashing styles and little details that don't make any sense in the whole. Arts and crafts woodwork touches, a Victorian staircase and some 19th-century styled wainscotting. Fake glass door knobs. Somebody renovated the bathroom in the 60s, looks like, and the mint green tiles don't fit at all with the shag carpet in the hallway outside it. And that's just on my first walk-through. Who knows what weird shit we'll find once we dig in?

That's why I said "indeterminate age" earlier. Absent any real records—and there may be some, but we haven't been able to find any yet—it's anybody's guess when this thing was built.

We don't even have a floorplan, so the first thing we'll do is map it out. Pretty basic from what I can see here: staircase to the second floor, doors to either side of the foyer leading into rooms running down either side. I'm guessing the kitchen's ahead of me, past the staircase. There's supposedly a basement—I'll look for that so we can see if there's any foundational issues. We might need masks as well—the air is stale, but I want to make sure it's safe.

I think, now that I see it in person, it might make sense to...

[There is a clatter from upstairs]

The fuck? **[Louder]** Who's there?

[There is a loud knock on the door behind her]

Jesus! **[Takes a minute to catch her breath]** That must be the electrician. Let me talk to him. Be right back.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

Hmm. I think somebody might be fucking with me. The owner said that the house had become a sort of hangout for local teens. I suppose it's cozy for drinking and sex, though I hope they avoid this spongy carpet if they're getting freaky. So, sorry we have to come and reclaim this little booze and boink nest. But I'm not going to be very tolerant of ringing the doorbell and running. Anyway it won't be a big deal once the rest of the crew is here.

I can't really go much further in without the electrician. I have a flashlight, but I don't know what condition the floors are in. Best to wait until there's more light. I'll head back outside and check the back.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle. Ash is now outside. She talks while walking.]

I'll be honest, this place is in even worse shape than I thought. Shutters hanging off, chunks of siding missing. I hope we don't end up regretting this. We need the job, definitely, but I'll admit I wanted to do this mainly because of my Grandpa Bob. He's pretty much the reason I do what I do—taught me everything I know, as they say—and he worked on this place. I had thought he was involved in building it to begin with, but like I said I'm not so sure now. But he definitely worked on it. I've seen pictures, and he talked about it. It was one of the first jobs he had when he started as a builder. I've got a picture of him in front of this house, smiling, with his arm around Grandma Jenny. They had just started dating. Written on the back is "Hawthorne

House, 1937.”

There’s some damage to the gable on the side away from the driveway, looks pretty superficial from down here. But it also looks like maybe there’s more attic space than I realized. Making a note to get up there as well. Busted windows, rotten frames, some missing battens—nothing extreme or unexpected there. What looks like a stained glass window in the V of the gable, again that must be an attic. I can’t wait to get up in there.

Okay, here I am in the backyard. Wow. So whoever they hired to cut the grass only did the front yard, apparently. Luckily it’s cold; I bet this place is snake central during the summer. Right now it’s just tall, dead grass. Some trees at the back, but nothing like the oak out front. There’s a fence running along both sides, so I assume it closes it off at the back as well, thought I can’t quite make out the end of the yard.

An old flower bed or something against the back of the house. Broken hoe, or, wait, no it’s a shovel. Nothing growing here but weeds. I was hoping to find an exterior entrance to the basement, like an old slanted storm shelter, but there’s nothing here. Must be interior only. I don’t even see any windows from down there. There’s some hairline cracks along the stone here. I’m a little worried about the foundation.

[Sound of a car pulling into a gravel drive]

Okay, *that’s* got to be the electrician. Let me go talk to him.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

Okay, I’m back. That was Ray, the electrician, and what he told me wasn’t particularly heartening, but it is what it is, I suppose. He can’t come until Thursday, and even then it looks like some pretty extensive rewiring of parts of the house. So it’s generators and hooklights for

the next couple of days, and for however long it takes him to get the lights working. It sucks because the sun's setting at like five o'clock right now, so we have really limited work days for anything that needs real attention to detail. Plus Ray's going to have to tear out some of the wall in the basement to run new wires. I think we might...

Wait, what the hell is that? Somebody's in the upstairs window, or was. I knew I heard something up there earlier.

[Goes back inside; shouts up the stairs]

Hello?! Who's up there?

[Silence, or almost silence. Quieter:]

I bet it's those kids.

[Louder:]

Look, you're not going to be in trouble! But you need to get out of here. We're going to be working here...

[To herself:]

This is nuts.

[She goes upstairs, talking as she ascends]

Seriously—I know you've been using this as a hangout or whatever, but it's not safe. I promise that you're not in trouble. I'm not calling the cops or anything, but I do need you leave. You don't need to hide or...

[She opens the door to an upstairs room; she yells/screams, and there is the sound of a brief commotion. Then she resumes, breathing heavily]

Holy shit! Okay...okay. Give me a minute. False alarm. It's a...what do you call it? A fucking mannequin. Or, not like a full department store mannequin, it doesn't have arms or legs

or anything, but like a dressmaker's dummy. What the actual hell?

[She hits the dummy]

Stupid thing scared the crap out of me.

This is one of the upstairs bedrooms. Hard to see much—just the light coming through the window, and that's dusty as all hell. An old bed frame with a gross mattress, a dresser with two drawers missing. And for some reason a dressmaker's dummy. A bunch of trash on the floor—some bottles. And then—what is that? It looks like an old campfire? This is definitely one of the hangout spots for the local kiddos. The wallpaper is ripped off on the far wall, and there's some graffiti on the wall, beyond the bed. I can't read it in this murk. I'm sure it's impressive and literary.

A closet over here.

[She opens what she thinks is the closet door]

Oh! No. This isn't a closet at all. These are the attic stairs! Oh, great! I wondered how to get up there.

[She goes up; we hear her steps ascending]

This is really cool—the stairs look like they're in good shape. Beautiful beadboard walls going up. I wonder how big it is? I bet I won't be able to see anything. Okay. Hmm. The steps end here in a metal ladder. I really can't see shit. I've come this far, though.

[She goes up the ladder]

There's a trap door at the top, but it's stuck.

[She struggles with it. No good]

It feels like something's on top of it. Maybe Tony and I together can get it open. It's probably too dark to matter today anyway.

[She heads back down]

We need to get the generators in, and get some lights hung, and definitely some space heaters. It's cold as hell in here. I'm going to head back down. I need to go back to the hotel, call the crew and see when they're getting here.

We're staying at a place called the Navidson Arms, which I thought was a roadside motel when I called, but it's more of a little boutique b&b. We could drive over every day, I guess, but it's an hour each way and I think we'll need the extra time. It'll be worth the expense I think. Jobs have been pretty slim since last year, and I get that, but it's still frustrating. If we do a good job here then maybe I can fix more than an old house. We'll see.

[She's back outside now]

We can absolutely do this. I heard Grandpa Bob talk about this house a bunch over the years. He said it had good bones. It looks like he was right. It feels good to be here, in a house he worked on. It's not quite coming home, but it's close enough for rock and roll.

Look at you, Hawthorne House. You've got good bones. We're gonna make you shine.

[Click; rattle]

[Theme song; credits]

* * *