

410: Strange But Not a Stranger

[In the attic, as before]

Ash: Oh. Ginny. It's you.

Ginny: Hello, Ashley.

Ash: Or *are* you Ginny?

Ginny: What a strange question. Who else would I be?

Ash: I don't know. The man in the black suit? The...I don't know, the House?

Ginny: Or your own brain?

Ash: Or my own brain. I can't trust anything.

Ginny: You can't trust your own eyes? I don't look like a house. Silly Ash.

[She moves further into the room]

Oh my. It's a mess up here. And what's in here?

[She is standing next to Ash now, over the trunks]

Oh Ashley. What have you done? You've killed them, Ash. You've killed them all.

[Theme music; credits]

Ash: I don't remember killing anybody.

Ginny: Is that your hacksaw? Your hammer?

Ash: Of course they're my tools, but—

Ginny: What's that all over them? **[A small laugh]** It's not paint.

Ash: You know it's blood. But that doesn't mean that I—

Ginny: And are those your friends in those trunks? I know it's hard to tell without unpacking them, without *assembling* them, but it pretty clearly Tony and Geri, isn't it?

Ash: How do you know their names?

Ginny: And, I really didn't want to say anything when we were talking earlier, because it seemed rude to point it out, but you're literally *drenched* in their blood, Ash.

Ash: I...I know. I saw. But I don't remember.

Ginny: That won't really matter, given the evidence. With your history, too.

Ash: Grandpa Bob got away with it. When he...when what happened with you happened.

Ginny: You mean when he killed me because I wouldn't give up our baby? After he seduced me with promises he had no intention of keeping? When he butchered me, you mean?

Ash: Look, I'm sorry, I don't guess I really know anything about what Grandpa Bob did.

Ginny: Now you're just lying, Ashley. You watched us in the yard. We played it all again, just for you. You saw the man in the black suit burying me.

Ash: How do I know that was real? How do I know any of this is real?

Ginny: You saw the photographs. Didn't you? The ones hidden in the Oldest's book? Was that not real enough for you? You know damn well what he did because you *saw* me, bleeding and cut open.

Ash: He wasn't the kind of man—

Ginny: I was *seventeen*! And he knew he had another Jenny waiting, he knew he would never really be with the doctor's daughter. He was just bored between odd jobs. Mama's best kitchen knife, too.

[A beat] And now look at *you*, Ashley. Covered in blood. Pieces of your friends stuffed in boxes in the attic. A chip off the old butcher's block, aren't you?

[A long beat. Then]

Ash: Is that what this is? Revenge?

Ginny [softer]: No. Bobby knew what he did, and that was his punishment. Just like you'll live with this.

Ash: Then why? What's the point of all this?

Ginny: This is what happens in the House.

Ash: People turn into murderers?

Ginny: The kids who come here, your Junior Satan Club, they don't kill anybody. They do other things, I suppose. Bobby didn't do anything that wasn't already in his heart, Ashley. The House just...let him be who he really was. Don't be too hard on yourself. I didn't see it either. Until he picked up the knife, I believed the mask too.

Ash: Then why me? I'm not a killer!

Ginny: You should wash your face before you say that. And anyway Matt would disagree, if you could ask him. But I'm sure you know best. **[A beat]** I have to go, Ashley.

Ash: What? You're leaving me here? What happens now?

Ginny: Whatever happens now is what was always going to happen. Good luck, Ashley.

[She moves to the ladder]

Ash: Wait! Can't you at least tell me who he is? The man in the house?

Ginny: You know who he is, Ashley. He's always been here and he'll always be here. If you peel back all the layers in this house, he'll be what's left. He's the Man in the Black Suit.

Ash: He's...the Devil?

Ginny [laughs]: That would be easy, wouldn't it? I like you Ashley. **[Sadly]** You should never have come here.

[We hear her descend the stairs]

Ash: Yeah, thanks for nothing, dead girl. **[She walks to the window]** Still no one out there. No cops returning. But they'll come eventually, right? Tony won't be missed for a while, but how long before Geri's partner reports them missing? God, I can't stay here next to them. I should go down and find something to clean myself up.

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Ash is downstairs. The grandfather clock is audible.]

I can't find anything to clean myself with. There are some rags we were using to wipe down the railing in the foyer, but they're covered in paint thinner.

The sink in the kitchen still works.

[She moves to the kitchen and turns the water on; begins scrubbing]

Damn, it's cold.

[She continues to scrub her hands]

I guess I should be grateful that I can't remember anything. Even so, it's following me. I left the attic so I wouldn't have to see Geri and Tony, but I know Jack is down there, under the stairs. And the old bones in that place that's not a place in the bedroom. And Ginny and her baby in the back garden. And...and who knows how many others.

Ginny is full of shit. I'm no killer. Matt was an accident. The inquest said. And Geri and Tony. Jack. That was the house. The man in the black suit.

How could I have gotten their bodies to the attic? Up that ladder? Even in pieces. And anyway it looks like they were dismembered up there, next to the trunks. When would I even have time?

Unless I lured them up there somehow? But that doesn't explain the blood in Geri's car.

This isn't coming off, no matter how hard I scrub. So no need to get all Lady MacBeth, I suppose.

[She turns the water off and walks back into the living room.]

Still quiet out there.

[A beat].

Shit, there's a cop car again, going by at the top of King Street. They didn't turn down Jackson Circle, but they're moving really slowly. It occurs to me that maybe I shouldn't be standing at the window, caked in gore.

[She backs away from the window, moves into the foyer]

Those stains in here—the big one in the center of the floor, and those footprints leading off toward the living room. Someone was killed here too. Maybe several someones. That bullet hole on wall going up the stairs.

How many? How many bodies, how many ghosts? And I've just given it three more.

[There is a movement upstairs]

Was that him? Walking around upstairs? He's waiting, watching. Not done with me yet, you fucking ghoul?

The bigger question, though, isn't how many. Is it? It's how many *more*. If we had done what we came here for, if we had made the House whole again, or at least habitable again, then what would have happened to the next family to move in? Fresh-faced, happy new home-owners or renters or whatever. Maybe a young couple with kids. Hopeful people, excited about their new place.

How much blood is in a family like that?

[A long beat, and then we hear her rummaging amongst tools and debris]

Here it is. Half a can of paint thinner. And a half dozen rags.

[She begins splashing the foyer with paint thinner.]

I think no matter what happens, we can assume my career is over. And the only friends I had are piled in trunks in the attic.

[More splashing]

Grandpa Bob was wrong. “Listen to the house, Ashley. The house knows what it wants.” I think maybe we’ve both listened too long, Grandpa. I think maybe this time the House doesn’t get what it wants.

[She flicks her lighter. A rag goes up in flames.]

Are you watching me? Do you see this, you son of a bitch? “Peel back the layers of the House,” Ginny said. Let’s toss this rag and see how many knives and shovels can save you. Fuck you and fuck your House.

[She tosses the rag. The foyer goes up like a match.]

[Click; rattle]

[Click; rattle]

[Ash is in the attic. We hear the house burning below her.]

Now the cops are here. They’re all standing outside wondering what to do. Waiting for the firefighters, I suppose. Can they see me from the attic window?

It doesn’t matter. Hawthorne House is burning fast.

[She steps back from the window, sits by the trunks]

I’m just going to sit here, with Geri and Tony, and wait. By the time they get in and work their way all the way to the attic, it’ll be too late.

[A beat.]

Nothing from the Man in the Black Suit. I guess he doesn't have anything to say when he's not in control. Coward.

I'm sorry, Geri. Tony. I wish I had been stronger. I suppose I'll be joining you now. You. Ginny. All the others. But I'll be the last.

[The flames get louder. We hear the cracking and falling of beams.]

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