

**Dark Retreat**

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Act 1

FADE IN ON:

1 EXTERIOR: DRIVING THROUGH THE WOODS-LATE AFTERNOON.

Our first images are from the back seat of an SUV as it is traveling through a dark shadowy redwood forest, hugging the curves. As credits roll, we see green, rugged mountainous country passing by. It could be Northern California or the Oregon coastal range. Wherever it is, we're definitely in the backwoods.

The car slows at a signpost and the couple in the front seat turn to each other and smile faintly. He shrugs and we see she has been deep in thought. They continue uphill through a lush stand of redwoods, continuing up a private driveway.

When we come around the corner and see the mansion, it's a breathtaking sight. The car comes to a halt at the edge of the expansive driveway and they stare at the old house as the vehicle idles.

ANGELIE  
(simultaneously)

Wow!

STUART  
(dubious)

Uhh...

ANGELIE  
It's even better than it looked on the website.

STUART  
This can't be it, Angelie. We probably made a wrong turn.

ANGELIE  
It's gorgeous. Let's go check in!

She reaches for the door handle to exit the vehicle. He leaves the motor running.

STUART  
Wait a minute... This isn't really what I had in mind. I was thinking cozy room, a bottle of champagne, fireplace... Not the Winchester Mystery House. This place is freaky.

ANGELIE  
No, it's lovely!

STUART  
There's no one around. Nobody's here. This can't be it.

They exchange a look. His face has doubt. She's smiling widely and gives him a suggestive wink.

ANGELIE  
C'mon... Park the car, Stuart.

STUART  
(resigned)

Fine.

He puts the car in park and pulls out the key.

She opens the door before he kills the engine, nearly jumping out. Her step is light and we see the life he sees in her: the sparkle. We follow behind them as they walk toward the old mansion.

She stops short taking it in, especially noticing the top balcony. The cavernous house reflects her barren state. Beautiful and neglected, expansive yet empty: she and the house bond instantly.

He walks up behind her and puts his hand on her shoulder. She responds with a twitch.

Cold? STUART

No, not really. ANGELIE

You're shivering. STUART

No I'm not. ANGELIE

You just did. STUART

ANGELIE just stares at the house, entranced.

They begin walking closer and there's a palpable dark feeling as they walk under the shadow-filled awning. He raps at the door. No answer. After a few more attempts, he shakes his head and gives her a suggestive look that they should leave.

She turns the handle of the front door which sticks at first and then opens suddenly. There is a faint glow from a lamp inside. They call out a few times as they walk through the foyer. The dialogue volume between them is subdued now, like background noise.

I knew we shouldn't have left the city for this place without even getting a confirmation. STUART

The website said it was self-registration. I charged it on the card and then they emailed the directions. That was it. They said it was *Self-Registration*. ANGELIE

That doesn't mean it's supposed to be deserted. There's not even a sign this is an inn. STUART

ANGELIE

(pointing to wall)

I'm sure this is it. I recognize that painting. It was on the website.

STUART

I don't want a haunted weekend with Agatha Christie watching us from the wall.

ANGELIE

(rolling her eyes)

You're the one that wanted us to go somewhere new for our anniversary.

Let's look around.

They slowly walk up the grand staircase and eventually find a bedroom with the door open, a light on, and a gift basket on the table.

STUART

Hmm. Single beds. Actually they look more like Boy Scout cots!

ANGELIE

A gift basket... This must be our room.

STUART

(staring down at the bed)

Why don't we get another room. We can't fit together on one of these...

ANGELIE

Just bring up the bags Stuart.

They look at each other as he begins walking down the stairs- it's a loaded glance. ANGELIE breaks the stare first. She looks preoccupied as she begins exploring the upstairs. The scene closes as STUART walks back to their car and we see ANGELIE at the top window looking down.

FADE IN ON:

2 INTERIOR: NIGHT-TIME BY THE FIRESIDE IN THE LIVING ROOM

STUART is crouching at the fireplace, putting a log on the fire. It's a modest fire, the minimum of what a fire should be.

He walks over to where she sits on the overstuffed chair. There's more than enough room for one, but not quite room enough for two and she doesn't move over to make room. He walks around behind her to put his arms on her shoulders. She is not interested and gently removes them.

ANGELIE is writing in her journal in the dim light

ANGELIE

I can hardly read what I'm writing because you won't build us a roaring fire.

STUART

I don't want to use up all the wood.

ANGELIE

Please ...Stuart.

STUART

(sarcastic, witty)

My feet are as wings to serve my bride.

STUART walks back over to the fire and adds a tiny piece of wood. He returns to her chair and extends his hand for her to rise.

STUART

Slow dance in front of the blazing fire?

ANGELIE scoffs.

STUART leans in to kiss her and she turns her head so that his lips land on her cheek instead. She pulls back from him and looks around, not making eye contact. She straightens and sits up.

ANGELIE

(craning her neck to the kitchen)

Maybe you should go find us something to eat. Food was included in the bill we paid.

STUART

(incredulous)

Wait. I'm trying to kiss you and you're talking about food.

ANGELIE

I was just having a little moment.

STUART

(quietly)

I'd like to have a little moment with you.

ANGELIE

Well, let's get to that later.

STUART

Are you feeling ok?

ANGELIE

Sure.

STUART

I mean, do you feel OK about trying again?

ANGELIE

That's why we're here, isn't it?

STUART

It's our 2 year anniversary.

And it's... It's been a month since...

ANGELIE

What?

STUART

Since the miscarriage. And I just didn't know if... maybe you'd want to try again.

ANGELIE takes a slow drink from her glass of wine, then sets it down and stares at the fire. She is feeling very empty.

3 INTERIOR: NIGHT-TIME IN THE BEDROOM

They are in bed, awkwardly squeezed onto a single-size bed. Presumably they have just been intimate. STUART looks intently into her eyes. Her blank look returns little.

STUART  
(cheerfully)

Wanna take a shower?

ANGELIE  
(vacantly)

Mmmm... Smoke.

STUART

Well that figures...

STUART gets up, picks his travel bag off the floor and places it on the foot of the bed next to her feet. He picks up the clothes that litter the floor and folds his. He piles hers on the bed.

The valise reveals two neatly stacked, crisply pressed categories of clothing: tops and bottoms. He selects the evening's wear from one side and tomorrow's change of clothes from the other side and lays them out in preparation.

STUART walks out the hallway past a dark corridor on his way to the shower room. He turns his head to look briefly without slowing step.

ANGELIE looks relieved. He has finally left her alone for a moment of peace. She reaches into her bag and feels around, pulling a rolled up black silk robe out of the dark confines. She puts it on and scratches her scalp vigorously with both hands, roughing up her hair a little, then smoothing it again carefully.

She reaches into her purse and we see two medication bottles. She takes one of each. Then she extracts a pack of cigarettes. She roots around a moment longer. No lighter.

ANGELIE

Shit.

She shoves her feet into the slippers and walks into the bathroom. She passes the dark hallway without giving it a glance.

STUART is in the shower, taking his time, typical of someone fastidious

about hygiene. Typical spooky shower scene. Steam rising, man in the shower humming and scrubbing away.

ANGELIE

I'm going downstairs for a match.

She's already gone. Exploring.

STUART bites his mouth in a pucker and rolls his eyes up.

ANGELIE walks back down the hall. She starts down the servant's staircase. Her hand hovers over the light switch, but she does not turn the light on. Instead, she feels her way down into the weak darkness.

She proceeds into the kitchen and begins to root through the drawers for a match. There is a picture of an old woman on the wall behind her watching over her. She slows down and pulls upright slowly. Now she feels watched. She turns her head suddenly toward the darkened room on the far side of French doors. She sees nothing, then she sees the matches on top of the refrigerator. She laughs.

ANGELIE flashes a genuine smile at the picture and laughs. It's a warm moment between her and the spirits.

As ANGELIE lifts the cigarette away from her lips and exhales deeply satisfied, we see deep scars on her wrist.

## Act 2

4 INTERIOR: MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, OUT OF BED AND WALKING

ANGELIE gets out of bed, wide awake. She walks through the house slowly, looking lost but seeming to belong.

The HOUSE shines as a character now as we see visions of the place as she walks. Secret passageways, hidden rooms and unsettling paintings on the wall guide the audience through this strange world.

ANGELIE finds herself at the top balcony and looks out from the window. She sees a car approach from the road and then slowly drive to the side of the house...

5 EXTERIOR: DREAM STATE

STUART is sleeping and we begin to see flashes of his dream state. There is a hazy introduction to the caretaker of the property. They are standing by a lake, a deeply eerie place of reflective, translucent green water and big redwood trees.

STUART

I love my wife. I want things to work out. But she's crazy! I'm afraid she'll try to kill herself again.

CARETAKER

You're either living the life you want, or you're not.  
You're either working things out... or not.

STUART

Well, what am I supposed to do?

CARETAKER

Why do you think you're *here*?

In the next dream segment, STUART approaches the house. She's looking down from the top window.

Then he's on the opposite side of the front door from ANGELIE and they are looking at each other through the glass. His gaze is pleading. Her gaze is detached, serene and ominous. Her comfort in being inside the house looking out at him is obvious from the look. His discomfort at the situation is evident. He tries to open the door but it won't budge. He keeps trying. She remains frozen throughout the exchange, staring at him though the glass.

SPECIAL EFFECT: She starts to slide backward without walking, continuing to stare straight ahead. We see a shadow pass behind her.

6 INTERIOR/EXTERIOR: MORNING JOG

STUART wakes up anxiously and looks around the room to find his wife in the other bed. He slowly gets up and quietly dresses to go jogging, trying not to wake her. Gives her an affectionate glance.

STUART walks slowly down the stairs and in the lobby and we see someone else has been there in the night. A basket of pastries has been placed by the door and the coffee machine is running. They are not alone.

He jogs down the front steps to check on his car. (He loves that thing.) He examines it, maybe even wipes off a little smudge.

He continues up the gravel road that heads into the forest. He passes a barn with a truck parked in front. Maybe he'll see someone else finally. He walks closer and peers in.

STUART

Hello?

The CARETAKER has his back turned to him, doing something.

STUART

(cont.)

Hi... Yeah, my wife and I are the ones staying in the house?

CARETAKER

(ignoring this)

Comfortable here?

STUART

(odd, bemused laugh)

Uhhh...

CARETAKER

When people come to this place, they meet themselves.

STUART

(bewilderment)

What?

CARETAKER

Having trouble with the lady?

STUART

Trouble?

CARETAKER

Pretty girl, nice car. Doesn't mean a beautiful life.  
...Right?

There's some things you gotta work at.

STUART

Work at?

CARETAKER

I came here from the city thirty years ago. Don't wanna go  
back. A lot of selfish people out there in the rat race...

I tell you something: This place changes a person.

STUART looks at the caretaker speechlessly. He raises his hand in mock salute and jogs away. We follow behind STUART as he runs down the forested trail to the reservoir. He stops at the edge. It is the creepy lake in his dream.

He is distracted. As he walks along the lake, he slips near the edge. STUART dusts himself off and runs back to the house. As he approaches the house we now see she is looking down ominously from behind the top balcony window just like in his vision. The wind is blowing through the trees and crows can be heard in the trees.

7 INTERIOR: EARLY AFTERNOON IN THE HOUSE

STUART goes up the first flight of stairs and is confused and disoriented in trying to find the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of stairs. He finally does and we find her in the top room. She is detached from him and gives the impression now that this is *her* place. She loves it here in the top room.

Maybe we have some ambient jazz playing on the boom box and ANGELIE is standing by the window, looking like she had been doing something and had quickly stopped when she heard him approaching.

STUART

How are you?

ANGELIE

Mm.

STUART

I met the caretaker. Strange guy. Real weirdo. Kept talking about how when people come here, they change.

ANGELIE

(with sour look)

So there *is* someone else here...

STUART

(interrupting)

Did you talk to him last night? ...He asked if we were having trouble.

ANGELIE

(slight sneer)

I need to go back to my room. Why don't you read a book or something.

She brushes past him without making eye contact and walks in the direction of their room. He stares after her.

8 INTERIOR: LATE AFTERNOON IN DOWNSTAIRS SITTING ROOM

STUART is reading a book in the front room. CARETAKER comes in to check on things.

CARETAKER

How's everyone doing?

STUART

She's upstairs sleeping.

CARETAKER

(after pause)

Mind if I ask what you're reading?

STUART

Some self-help book I found on the shelf.

STUART waves the book in his hand airily.

CARETAKER

I wrote that, you know.

STUART

Hmm?

CARETAKER

Pretty thick reading, huh?

STUART

You wrote this? I read this in college...

CARETAKER

(smiling knowingly)

Selling all those books allowed me to buy this house.

STUART

Oh, you own this place? I thought you were the groundskeeper or something. I'm sorry.

CARETAKER

I was altruistic when I wrote these books. Truth is, people don't want your help. They're addicted to their pain. And in the end, they'll either choose to help themselves ...or they won't.

STUART

So that's what you were saying this morning: the "stuff you gotta work at." Oh and you said something about my wife.

CARETAKER

Things like that are not uncommon here.

STUART

So what am I supposed to do? Just wait around and hope that she survives this? She's so impossible to get through to.

CARETAKER

Well what do you really want in life? What's *really* important to you?

STUART

(long pause)

Actually, my wife. I love her.

CARETAKER

She's hiding right now. But she'll tell you why if you ask her in the right way.

CARETAKER hoists the big bag in his hand and smiles.

I'm leaving this in the kitchen for you guys. Help yourselves when you're ready.

9 INTERIOR: NIGHT IN THE HOUSE

STUART goes up to check on her in the bedroom but she's gone. He walks around the house looking for her. At the top of the stairs, calls her. Not hearing anything, he stares down the stairs, disturbed and preoccupied.

He isn't expecting her to be watching but as the camera pans, we see her staring at him coldly from a room down the hall. It's a wicked sight. She has her hand on a vase or object which she's placing onto the mantle by the doorway.

In their gaze, once again: A million words.

STUART

What have you been doing all this time?

ANGELIE

(remote and detached)

Not much.

She's been tending house, moving things around to suit her. STUART walks into the room as she is repositioning a vase (or similar).

STUART

What are you *doing with that*?

ANGELIE

(vacantly)

I like it here.

STUART

I've been thinking. Remember the night I proposed to you... What I said?

ANGELIE

It doesn't matter much now.

STUART

(with resolve)

Well, I said that I want to spend my life with you.

ANGELIE

(after a pause)

That was until you got to know me.

STUART

Just because you haven't had a child, it doesn't mean we can't work something out.

ANGELIE looks at him a little surprised. He is being direct on a subject they've both avoided. But even being direct doesn't clear the air. It could be too late for her now.

STUART

I want things to be ok again. Like they were when we got married.

ANGELIE

(staring at the vase)

I didn't even know you then.

STUART

Let's just leave this place. Right now. Let's go home. I'm worried about you. Like you'll try and *do* something again... This whole weekend you've just been hiding.

ANGELIE

What's wrong with wanting to be alone? You can't stand that I want to be alone. That I like to be alone. You don't understand anything I want.

STUART

What about what I want? I don't get anything from you. You won't even touch me.

ANGELIE

What do you expect from me? After what I've been through?!  
It's only been a month. I still need more time.

STUART

(angered suddenly)

You don't need time. What have you been *doing* for a month  
anyway? You don't *do* anything!

ANGELIE

What are you trying to say?! OK. I can't keep a job. I  
can't finish my book. I can't create anything.

STUART

You can't even create our child!

ANGELIE rushes out of the room and quickly becomes swallowed up by the  
house as he sits frozen with what he said. The audience should infer  
she is at the end of her rope and she is going to jump.

### Act 3

10 INTERIOR: NIGHT IN THE HOUSE

STUART gets up to find her.

Everything is leading to the ultimate confrontation. Will she choose  
to die? How? Why? Will she come home with him?

Shots of the house, the empty rooms, the paintings, dark corridors, all  
dance across the screen. In this visual fury, we see a hazy image of  
her at the balcony again on the edge of falling. (in his mind ...or hers)

STUART runs up to the balcony but no one is there. He has no idea  
where she is.

STUART

(desperate yelling out to house)

Why did you want to come here?

Did you have some romantic notion of ending it all here?

STUART continues searching through the house. (He does something nice  
for her here, some kind of quiet help for her.)

STUART

I'm taking you away from here right now. Let's go home,  
c'mon!!

11 INTERIOR: NIGHT IN THE HOUSE

We finally see ANGELIE again. She is having a smoke at the back door.  
She is shaken up drastically and as the cigarette comes up to her  
mouth. Her hand is trembling.

The CARETAKER suddenly appears from around the side of the house, as if by magic, startling us at first but then putting us at ease with his calm soothing demeanor.

CARETAKER

How's it going?

ANGELIE

Ray?

The CARETAKER slows his pace consciously as he approaches her.

ANGELIE looks at him suspiciously. She takes another drag on her cig.

*(cont.)*