

Matthew 4:16

The night is good at ridding one of certainties. Even close up, these curves and edges blended together so convincingly into the shape of a slender figure. She raised her torch. A pale beam impacted the side of the clock, showing a dusty wooden frame against a cobweb-infested tabletop. There was no-one here. No shadows were about to move.

“Where’d you go?”

Rose took a breath, bit her cheek and turned around, looking down the stairs into the hall beyond. She couldn’t really see the doorways leading off from either side, but she knew Will was behind one. Each step presented her with creaks and miniscule dust plumes, some glimpsed as her torch roamed for a sign of strawberry-blond hair. He didn’t speak up again, so all Rose had to hear were her footsteps echoing around her across the two floors she transitioned between.

Fortunately Will was in the second room she glanced in. It was a kitchen, cosy and well-equipped, the design and colour scheme theoretically lending itself to a quaint suburban atmosphere. Today the room stood as a monument of loss, a shell.

Rose placed her torch on the counter. “Just looking around.”

“I thought you wanted to see the crime scene.”

“I...” she started, but what he said was true.

“Feels weird that it’s so intact.”

“No-one’s moved in; why change anything?”

When the police originally came they had dealt with the bodies, yet the remaining layout of the room was left as it had been by the occupants, albeit with some mild decay. Maybe that meant there were also remnant clues of what had transpired here, ones this pair in their adolescent curiosity might have been able to find.

“Is it everything you wanted?”

“We’ll have to-”

Crack. The stomach-flipping sound made by the bird’s neck as it smacked into the window was a jolt so unexpected, especially at this ungodly hour, that the pair were thrust into silence, unwittingly priming themselves for what followed. The next second the scene was awash in a stark pale light bursting in, so it seemed, through every last window. There was no hum of generators or electrical tinge, just uniform brightness invading every reachable nook and cranny. Instinctively the pair threw up their hands, and even then they screwed up their faces in shock. When after a few seconds the light had remained constant they risked taking a better look.

Rose’s voice wavered as she asked the room in general, “What is that? How...”

Will by contrast was already leaping to conclusions, the colour draining from his face, “Do they know we’re here?”

“Who exactly are ‘they’ supposed to be?”

“I dunno, but whatever this is it’s lighting us up with it!”

“Nobody’s going to care we’re here,” Rose interjected before he could hiss more suppositions, herself going on to press her forehead into the illuminated glass; this was surreal, incomprehensible.

Squinting to negate some of the shine, Rose identified the outlines of houses across the road, streetlamps that were from her perspective now superfluous, the fence separating this lawn from the neighbours’. With intent focus she kept her nerves at most aflutter.

“Let’s at least get away from the window.”

Accepting that she wasn’t going to make out anything more, Rose stepped away, not taking Will’s proffered arm but still walking beside him as he strode back into the hall.

In the slither of a gap between the worktop and the wall something stirred. It was awake, and long, and covered in hair, and was only the first. Up to a dozen legs squeezed themselves out into the open, itching, crawling, jittering over the floor and the wall. Each independent hair, those that would feel like countless tiny feathers on your skin, autonomously stroked the ground, feeling for the invitations towards prey presented in the disturbances in the dust.

Out in the wide hallway that inexplicable light continued to permeate the space, now through the clouded pane in the front door, the pair’s shadows the only two slithers of darkness nearby, two black fingers against the lit floor. Rose glanced up the staircase towards the landing. A flung-out hand brought Will to a halt.

“How is this any better?”

Words failed her. Stood before the grandfather clock above was a figure, a bulbous thing with a distended belly at the centre of four spindly limbs, its inky skin visibly viscous even from this distance, while two beady eyes glinted back from the middle of an enlarged head. It smiled, then raised one leg, then, with minimal coordination, began charging down the steps.

“Move!”

Half pushing, half pulling, Rose drove Will towards the room opposite. From subtle exploration they had escalated to adrenaline-fuelled mania. All that mattered was getting to the door, getting through that door; it felt forever away even if only really but a few more steps. The closer they got the more certain it seemed that they would indeed get beyond that barrier, and it was thus that her fervent mind allowed Rose to spare a glance over her shoulder. It was technically true that she saw that the figure was trailing behind it the end of a severed chain. What she focused on though was the mass of legs obscuring an abdomen hurtling out the kitchen, ploughing the stumbling entity into the ground with a rumbling screech. Will slammed the door behind her.

They found themselves in a study, with a desk and computer placed before the window, filing cabinets stood against greying surfaces. They each took one such cabinet to block any view of them from the door, instinctively squeezing into the corners made between furniture and wall. Their heads pressed hard into the metal, yet it was the monstrous sound of mastication from the hall that scratched at the insides of their skulls. Seconds passed. Maybe minutes. On the plus side the study remained isolated, but that didn’t stop them being able to see something else out on the lawn: yet more hairy legs towering down from maybe two more bodies, making their methodical ways around

the house, with two further inky figures stumbling ahead on leashes. They perhaps were not surrounded, but there were more.

After the creatures outside were out of sight for another minute Rose moved again. The need to hide had been paramount, yet now they could not, in her mind, risk being sitting ducks. This was not the time to get trapped in questions of the universe. It was this she thus saw on peeking around the door: a predator crouched over its prey, the smaller body eviscerated to expose meat and bones within. Will's tensing fingers at her shoulder told her he too saw the morbid display. His whisper of *'Look'* told her he'd also seen the now somehow-open front door through which threads of yellow were drifting. The latter detail wasn't the priority though; they had an exit.

"Don't..."

Too late. Will made a dash for it, and in that moment it seemed he would make it, the creature not rising from its carcass. When he met the yellow however it was just as they were converging into one beam, the crossing of which took him off the floor, not blowing him backwards but drawing him out, out of the house and up in the air, his yell of surprise lost as his ascent brought the back of his head and neck sharply into contact with the top of the doorframe before he soared ragdoll-like up into the heavens. The small splatter of blood hadn't even had a chance to drip when the many-legged thing also lurched in the path of the beam, lifting off the floor with its limbs curled beneath its hairy body, twisting in an unearthly ballet to fit similarly through the door.

As silently as it had appeared the light vanished, plunging the house into its natural state. The emptiness matched Rose's core. Her jaw ached from how her anguish held it. Her eyes were raw. Her ears were deaf to the buzz in the clouds. At the base of the stairs lay the shadow of those disproportionate opened remains, no longer capable of moving.

Fourteen

It was the painted figure of Time as he is commonly represented, save that, in lieu of a scythe, he held what, at a casual glance, I supposed to be the pictured image of a huge pendulum
– ‘The Pit and the Pendulum’, Edgar Alan Poe

Thud.

Headache. Stiff joints. Continuous exhaustion? All there. The smooth hard floor against what’s exposed of my skin tells me I’m still here. I open my eyes.

The monitor high up on the far wall still reads the same: ‘14 DAYS’. Surely the counter should have gone up by now. It’s said that since I got here, and without any windows or semblance of another timepiece I’ve no way of knowing how long ago that was.

Nothing has changed. What could anyone possibly achieve while being detained without distraction? But if not for achievement, could it be some form of penance? For the life of me I cannot fathom what it is that I could be accused of. I’ve done nothing...nothing that they would know about.

Yet here I am, faced with four white walls to match the ceiling and floor. There isn’t even a door, no visible means by which anything could be brought into this room, this Tank as I call it. Pushing through my joints’ complaints, I stagger to my feet, proceeding towards one perfectly-bare wall. It’s not overly audible when nearer the centre (save for those intermittent heavy thuds), but here it is possible to detect the sounds of mechanisms at work beyond the barrier, perhaps gears and cogs churning away, who knew what for, all around me. Then there’s the buzzing. Open your ears against the wall and you’re welcomed by a mimicking of an insect swarm. Strain your ears and you may convince yourself that the buzzing is actually words, all fringing comprehension.

Thud.

When I turn back around it’s to see the room, this time, has in fact changed. If it doesn’t make me sound retrospectively a liar, there have been changes to the contents of the Tank since my arrival, primarily in the form of food, a simple plate carrying simple carbs, simple protein, simple veg and simple water. The first time I did, in my fervour, immediately set to scouring the floor to where the hatch could be. By the time I conceded that the floor was still seamless I had lost my desire for the meal. Since that occasion, whenever the plate appears or disappears, I’ve been less excited about any prospects of escape I might be being taunted with; that’s why I don’t consider it a notable change. Now I see the plate only as a response to the background hunger I mostly ignore. I...I cannot actually think as to how many plates I’ve received...not that that’s really the greatest matter at present. This time was different, it made my heart stop. I am, at this present moment, utterly stupefied. There stands beside the plate an easel, complete with canvas, brushes and paints. It sticks out so garishly from the barrenness of the Tank, even if it’s bland itself. I...I could laugh! God! What in the world? Would they have me paint? Paint what? If I storm over, sweep up that brush, what should I think? What possible thought...What would you want me to think? Could you tell? Are you in my head, waiting to see what I think?

Oh, there’s another thought. For reference, the ceiling is moderately out of reach if I jump. What if my plates are dropped directly downwards? It doesn’t really make sense that they would remain neat and silent, but what does make sense here? But I shouldn’t get ahead of myself. Feeling

lighter than I have in a long time (something which if literal would certainly help), I take the easel and, with the canvas horizontal, thrust the spread feet through it, forming a kind of locking base. I cannot guarantee that it's sturdy, and applying any of the few other objects at my disposal around the frame's buried feet could only do so much for anchorage, but this is an opportunity I cannot put aside. Not wishing to waste any time beyond what I spent bouncing upon the balls of my feet, I take my first step onto the makeshift ladder, praying the wood not break. Oh there are creaks, many horrifying creaks, however I have not yet fallen. I'm not sure I can grip the easel any tighter, I'm definitely not concerning myself with splinters; all I need to do is extend myself to my normal height upon my support. There. The easel had shifted along with the canvas, although it wasn't to any devastating degree. When I push off, that might be the moment of breakage, so I have to make this count. Just one big push. Focus on the spot above where these items had appeared.

When my fingers hit the ceiling it's to find a panel shift, allowing my digits to find unexpected purchase in some hidden opening. The relief I feel at not dropping delays the realisation of my accomplishment. I've found the breach. I've found it! This square of white material, this hatch through which everything must descend, quite how...No, that doesn't matter. Not anymore. My arm is aching; I don't know how long the grip of the square and the rest of the ceiling will assist me in staying in place. If I can get my other hand up too...Yet if I am anything I'm susceptible to distraction. I can hear it again, the buzzing, and with this break in the skin of the room it's clearer than before, the electrical crackling even more pronounced. If I make the gap wider, lift the square further by arching my fingers, perchance the words will be unveiled...

Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

The pain of having one's fingers severed by a slamming latch almost distracts on from the actual fact those digits are no longer yours.

Thud.

The disorientation that might be associated with rousing from unconsciousness hits me with an even greater force than usual. I'm on my back. My throbbing back. It's easier to move my extremities first. In one heave I get my hand up to my face. There are my fingers...The line is faint but there it is, a jagged scar somehow already healed a little way along from each knuckle...How?

I could examine my hand with marvel and discontent maybe the rest of my life, but there's yet more changes to note. All the items from before are gone. In their places the floor is now littered with envelopes, all numbered, their sequence random, '1' closest to me. Sitting up in yet more dizzy curiosity, I open it.

NoNoNoNoNoNoNo!

There is no way they know about this! I got through the entirety of 2036 without anyone finding out. They can't...All these, there'll be more I bet. God! What, is this a trail for me to follow as if a lamb led towards slaughter? Dot the dots around the room? Well what's the worst that they've got? Which has the highest number? I dare them to have found so much.

It's a picture. I'm not entirely sure what of. The unexpected disconnect throws me, a fraction of the anger getting lost in that moment. Then I see it. The face. The faces. This is unfair. That's not how it worked!

Thud.

I can't...What's that? That's...something else...Beyond the persisting grinding and thuds are blossoming more whining sounds...Sirens. Warnings. Now outcries. Dismissing the frustration I had clutched in my hand, I bring myself up to the blank barrier, alternating between pressing my ear and my mouth as I too add to the growing chorus. What on Earth is going on? Now more than ever I have to know what's outside. Those overlapping beats, they must be footfalls, people running down some corridor.

The only thing that could turn me away is the sharp hiss behind me. A glance over my shoulder turns into a gawping double-take. From between the wall and the floor at the opposite end is billowing in a purple gas, swirling towards me at...well, any rate would be alarming. My voice better not be hoarse. I yell, yell at the top of my lungs while both fists batter the wall. I have to, I don't know what is happening but I cannot confidently accept this. *Help!*

The clamouring of footfalls changes, someone has slowed, I can just about hear their panting. Might...

"On behalf of *Inc.*, we apologise. They've returned to the site, sooner than we thought. We have to accelerate. You don't have long."

"What?"

"...Sorry."

Thud.

I cannot know if it's due to my panic or the gas already licking the corners of my mouth, but a scratching at the inside of my skull, so brutal and desperate, is overtaking my senses. I see the clock. It occurs to me that out the corner of my eye I'd already registered that it'd changed, that it read, contrary to my expectations, '13 DAYS'. Now however the clock's changing again, the numbers fading as the computer behind it settles on what to display. The gas smells of tar as it seeps into and floods my system, meanwhile the scratching is deafening, and together this, I cannot postpone, renders me now too hollow to persist. I crumple backwards, leaving me just able to witness the monitor suddenly affirm '0 DAYS'.

Long Arm Of The Law

That there would be a quaint family unit of mother, father and two darling children all arranged smiling around the hearth in this the year 2012 could, by some, be considered a miracle, yet here they are, the four Prices living this arguably-idyllic image. Mr Price reclines in an armchair, meanwhile his wife is stood with her arms folded over its back, two sky-blue eyes and upturned lips cast down towards their progeny kneeling before them. Mia and Michael, seven and eight, are both enraptured by a singular toy red fire engine, rolling it backwards and forwards on its squeaky wheels in a display of fair sharing; it was Michael's birthday, meaning spirits inside were high, especially in this the aftermath of his presents being opened. Of this celebratory fascination you are grateful; it distracts them from your silhouette at the window.

Watching this family spend their evening thusly, it might under normal circumstances have made you think of how you met them, two weeks ago to the day. You alone had been dispatched to respond to the call that the Price family thought they had a wild animal locked in their basement. When you'd arrived it was to find them similarly together, albeit in a tenser mood, at which point Mr Price had explained that they had become alert to the momentary sound of splashing and movement from below. They had locked the door immediately, but of course it'd been too risky for them to have subsequently gone down to check themselves. After five minutes in the basement yourself however you returned empty-handed. All you remember of that now though is the route you took around the house and an overwhelming clouding of your mind through which you can just about see each of their bright faces. Can you feel it? The niggling at the inside of your skull that's been building over this fortnight? The hesitation in your breath as your body yearns for you to hold back no longer?

A sharp sound from elsewhere inside the house rips you back into the present. The oven bell. Undoubtedly the Prices will have heard the lone extended trill as well, indeed Mr Price is already standing. In swift reflex you drop beneath the sill just in case his movement brought you into his view. The shrubs you bury yourself within are fortunately still yet without obstructing seasonal decorations, even if they are nonetheless prickly of their own accord; Halloween is still four days away.

Probably what makes you most dislike this place is the unconventional layout; one has to go through, in your opinion, an unnecessary route in order to get to where you want, a route that, as things stand, would take you right into their path. You can't sneak past them (not that sneaking is your only option). With Mr Price having gone, though, perhaps this is a sign of a chance. Your fingers drum the side of your trusted baton on your belt. Maybe the others too are soon to relocate to the dining room, thus freeing your way of the majority of complications. On the other hand, maybe he will return, and you'll have just wasted your one opportunity. Do you really think you can last until another?

Alright. Casting your mind back to that first visit, you recall that, as you additionally did a sweep of the outside to check for any signs of entry, you spied a spare key for the back door they unoriginally kept under a rock, that covering having been slightly displaced that day. Still ensuring that your motions through the shrubs aren't overly audible, you semi-scurry over towards that door down by the next corner of the house. Their garden backs onto the edge of the local woods, so the many shadows of trees are lazily clawing up the side of the building, but their shade does nothing to hinder your finding of that crucial rock.

Fortunately the door connecting the utility to the dining room is shut, so there isn't a risk of Mr Price spotting you straight away as you enter. You're pretty sure the heavy clunk of the handle didn't carry far. You find yourself therefore swaying ever so slightly between a gently-rumbling washing machine and a dog bed that wouldn't be used again. Casting what's left of your mind back, you remember that beyond that door to the right is the hallway, and to turn a right again would have you at the cupboard they use for storage. You imagine that if you put your ear to it, you'll hear that no-one else is out there, meaning you could swing around into the cupboard and claim the keys you'll need from their hook.

There's more stacked items in the way than you expected, however; in reaching for them you inadvertently send a tennis ball tumbling onto the floor, rolling into the hallway. Instinctively you slither into the space in the corner, out of the immediate view from the doorway.

Pitter-patter, pitter-patter, curious footsteps getting closer, slowing now on approaching the ball. You bite your tongue. You think you can hear the ball being picked up, there's a pause that could be it being examined. Mia steps up to the threshold. She'll spot you. Tick tock. What'll they do when they find you? Act.

The plastic bags the family stashed back here are a rough fit for her mouth, but the tactic worked provisionally for silencing her soprano squeal. The sensation of a mixture of young and blossoming teeth rubbing against your pushing fingers is almost enough to distract you from your fervour. What else? Beneath where the coats are hung there's a skipping rope (presumably hers) that could be made into a quick leash that could go around her neck. She's so light, you can just scoop her up into the loop and suspend her from a hook. She's so full of beans, thrashing away through the tears. As a final measure, before you leave the living piñata, you put another bag generally over her head. Crisis averted.

Unfortunately the reprieve doesn't last. Your attempt to sneak up to the foot of the stairs so that you can listen for the others' positions is valiant, however just as you reach it a spot of movement to your left has the bottom fall from your stomach. Mr Price's shock at least buys you some precious moments, registering who you are and trying to sound your name without being able to put two and two together. He's like that chap you last brought in, the one who froze in the red and blue light outside the store he'd been burgling; there's something in the eyes. Well what do you do to ne'er-do-wells? Turn him around, arm behind his back and face down, in this case into the broth he'd just been serving to muffle any undue protesting. Ooh it's hot, well at least hot enough, the uncaring liquid beyond your line of sight tinging the features it fills, the tone of consumption turned. It's taking all you've got to keep him subdued, even taking one of the scattered forks and stabbing his other hand again and again, the red erupting in unsettled pools to slowly paint the skin, each time for what he'd done. What has he done? He would lock you away. Your resolve hardened, scrabbling fingers claw for one of the candles decoratively set. With his face still just below the verge of siphoning oxygen, Mr Price's conservatively-styled hair in turn soon caught alight, two sides for friend and foe. Through the sulphurous stench more bubbles form in the broth, just for a short while. You were careful about how you positioned your grip.

Mrs Price is waiting in the hall, pretty face contorted, phone shuddering in hand. Together you pirouette, the phone shared in your clutches, until you twist for your baton and get her out the way. You don't even make it across the hall though. You no longer have the keys. Three steady steps is all it takes to have you facing them again, albeit now with a wide-eyed Michael on the other side. Your attentions lock. You need those keys. But the kid's bold, and is already snatching them up before he pelts into the room behind him and through beyond to the outside world.

By the time you're out there Michael's already through the gate, pelting into the woods, desperate to slip into the trees with your prize. He's young though, you're big and strong; it won't take you long to catch up. In the crisp evening air a chorus of cracks of twigs underfoot circles your ears. Your vision's all but tunnel for the panting bobbing head of black hair. Panting turns to screaming as you swing around a tree to cut across his erratic path, screaming turns to howling as you stamp on his leg. You have to get back. The boy's selfish, the apple not falling far from the tree. Well with trees on the mind...Into the bark of the nearest trunk the side of the kid's face goes. Up and down, up and down, wearing down his spirits, up and down, a little harder. His fist unfurls. As you hold the keys up in triumph they even glint in the radiant moonlight dancing between the trees.

Feel the weight in your feet as you tread your way back over the threshold. Don't feel the lack of remorse in your chest. Feel the unquestionable yearning, the allure, the draw to go forwards. Walk to the carpets you've already trod. Remember where to go.

Someone stirs. The other one. Mrs Price, she'd been left lying on the floor by the wayside, only now having risen to her feet again. It's only because this puts her in your path that you numbly lumber to a halt. You're so close. The keys' teeth are digging encouragingly into your palm. Through the red haze you're acutely aware that she's picked up a knife from somewhere, a big one, but that doesn't matter. She plunges it through your uniform into your abdomen, but that doesn't matter. With her still gripping the handle you rip it out of yourself, slashing sideways through your own throbbing flesh in a motion that carries her off balance also. Not wishing to give her the chance to block your path yet again, you bring the two of you down onto the hard floor, pressing your weight down upon her, pressing your thumbs into her tear-stained orbs, waiting for some kind of jolt. The texture's hard to describe, but maybe that's because she's being distracting. The food had smelt good.

You should probably take a few moments to catch your breath. You're feeling a little...Oh...That's not good. Your abdomen's rather more open than it should be, entrails squelching in putrid agony. There's stuff coming out. It's like...the blackness within you reaching out towards your goal, every tingling sense coalescing in your core to squeeze out of you as one. Don't be left behind. All there is for you is desire, and now there's nothing standing in your way.

Smile why don't you.

Into The Sanctum Of Those Lost

“Move that camera just a little to the left. There, good; that should give us angles of everywhere in the room.”

“And the lighting?”

“Natural as always.”

“Gloomy as always. Where’s Efaz at?”

“He said he left home a little while ago. I imagine he’ll be joining us any minute now. Check the battery on that one will you.”

“Efaz has the papers I take it? And the EMF readers?”

“Yes. Shouldn’t need the papers though. Okay I think you’ve done enough. Sit down.”

“I’m good, thanks.”

“How have you worked with us and not got used to dilapidated couches? Just ignore the mould and...Oh speak of the devil.”

“Descending to calling me the devil now are we, Maseo? I didn’t realise things were so bad between us.”

“Oh come here.”

“So how are we in the way of preparations?”

“Ready when you are, assuming you brought the rest.”

“Horrible place. God why do we bring ourselves to this stuff?”

“You should ask more why the ghosts gravitate towards these places first.”

“So do you each know the profile details of this place? You don’t need me to go over any of it with you?”

“Yes, Fleur, we know it; but what gives you the position to direct us?”

“...Well...”

“I’m only joshing you, thanks for checking. Oh, here, take this. Just to have it on hand.”

“Do you think we’ll need it?”

“You can never go wrong by having a bit of salt accessible.”

“Right, if it’s okay with you two I’d rather get this one over and done with a.s.a.p. Something about this place makes me even more unsettled than usual.”

“Isn’t that promising though?”

“When you’ve done as many of these as we have, you know what makes for a good or bad vibe, in any respect; what you ask is a matter of perspective. It’s all good, Mas, we can start rolling. Where should we start?”

“This good?”

“Try... Yeah, okay. Budge up a little.”

“Was this the room then that—”

“We can’t be certain so far as the reports go. This seemed a good spot though, not that we actually looked around anywhere else.”

“Well there’s no reason to change the format now. Follow that gut instinct.”

“Uh, guys?”

“What is it?”

“Something’s up with this camera.”

“Could you elaborate?”

“I don’t know, must just be something on the lens...Oh, it’s gone now.”

“Are you sure it wasn’t...”

“Is wasn’t activity, no, pretty sure. Just technical issues.”

“And you’d definitely know the difference?”

“Oh come on. Even if it’s not as obvious as the chalky scrapes of ancient bones echoing against the inside of my skull from down within the depths of the deep dark hallway wherein who-knows-what bloody denizens of midnight chills lurk and swarm, awaiting the hour of their unrelenting vengeance on the unsuspecting mortal fools...”

“We get it.”

“...I’d still think I could pick out the real thing.”

“Good. Now, before anything else trips up, four, three, two...”

“An unassuming house. A horrific scene. A lingering sorrow. Welcome to ‘The Restless Room’.”

“For those new to the show or just in need of reminding, for the next half hour you, dear viewer, will be taken along with us as we delve into the heart, the lounge, of this cursed abode.”

“Our cameras are set up such that you should be able to see every inch of this room, which being one of the key spots of the tragedy that took place here should, according to our experience over

the last three series, make it a prime site for denser Activity; unlike other shows where mobile equipment might miss something by seconds, here nothing can go undetected.”

“For some backstory to this room, then: six years ago this now dank space was very much...”

“Was that from upstairs?”

“Sounded like it.”

“Starting early today. Right.”

“We don’t know yet if that’s just a taunt or if they’ll be coming down here soon though.”

“Are we going to keep this bit in then?”

“Of course.”

“Just checking, off script as it were.”

“In case you can’t hear that folks, which would be very unfortunate, there’re clearly footsteps making their way down the landing above us.”

“We can hope, especially since the layout of this house is the same as it was when this family lived here, that any apparitions follow the layout of these rooms, meaning if they were headed that way, they should be coming down those stairs just out there any minute now.”

“If I position myself here by the doorframe, I can see the base of the stairs. (Fleur, man that camera, make sure we’re getting this.) Ooh, wait, I think I can hear something more, words maybe? Let’s listen closely.”

“‘Are they still’...‘Are they still here?’? That’s what I’m getting. But there’s something else, another voice, or more. It’s faint, muffled as might be expected...but I don’t think that the fragments I’m catching are connected to one another. ‘Re’...‘Reconstruction’? Oh, and perhaps a third: ‘only...host’? Is that...”

“There, to the left!”

“I see it. Ladies and gentlemen, if you...What? Sorry, just...Excuse me, who are you?”

“Is it not...”

“No, they’re not ghosts.”

“Oh. Wait, then who...”

“Excuse me, hi, hello, who are guys? What...Okay what is with the masks? Okay slow down there.”

“You should not be here.”

"I beg your pardon?"

"Don't try anything, wē'rē rolling."

"Stay calm, Fleur."

"In the face of thrē mēn in body armour? Surē."

"That'll be your van outside? 'The Restless Room'?"

"We're here under fair use of this property. Now if you will please take those masks off. I don't know what need you could have for such heavy-duty attire here."

"Restrain them. Get them on their knees with their arms behind their backs."

"Hey, no, get your hands off me!"

"Whoa! There's no need for any manhandling! Get—"

"And what will you do?"

"You do understand that this is being filmed?"

"None of these cameras have been recording anything."

"I was just manning them."

"I don't know what to tell you, other than these have been of no use to you. Now why don't you settle down and listen to those who outnumber you?"

"Outnumber? There's three of you and...Where's Mas?"

"'The Restless Room': according to this all your savings are tied up in one account."

"Where's my husband? If you've done anything—"

"If you don't agree to leave this house and never—"

"I swear to God if you don't start explaining yourself—Ow!"

"If your fellow has gone then it was not by our doing. There's another door right there."

"Maszo wouldn't have just run off."

"Clearly he must have. And if he did that door only leads to...You two, bring these ghost groupies: I want them in my sights."

"You can't...Oh here we go again."

"Geez it got cold in here."

"Where does that lead?"

"On the other side is the basement. It's locked. Yet your friend must have somehow got inside. Call out to him."

"...Maseo, are you down there?"

"Efaz? Ef, I don't know how I got here..."

"Sure you don't."

"...but there's something in here with me."

"There's...What is it?"

"It's a remnant, of something that was here before."

"Our ghost is down there?"

"There's no such thing as ghosts. But yes it is something beyond the ordinary."

"What does it look like? Listen, whoever you are, we need to document this."

"You wouldn't believe some of the things we've cleaned up from this place already. Did you see the stain above the front door? None of it's meant for you. This is what you get for prying. I'm not sure your friend could comprehend what's with him; it's become aged, not all there."

"You came prying."

"A girl came to us for help, from that we found so much more. We have an obligation to-"

"Efaz, I think it's heard you. It's coming up to the door. I can't get between it and you."

"Don't worry, it's corporeal, can't just pass through."

"Have you got your phone on you, Mas?"

"Hello?"

"Can I help you?"

"...Mr Price? Is that you?"

"Price...No, not Price. I...just have my basement...Do you need anything?"

"As I said, not your family ghost."

"Are you kidding me? You think this isn't exactly what we came here for?"

"Trust me, it's nZurrgghh!"

"My torch is acting up. What's happening out there?"

"I don't know. Lights are flickering out here too."

"Perhaps more pressingly something's messing with whatever comms system these guys have in their masks; the sound's seemed to have got them distracted for the moment."

"Run, while you have the chance."

"I'm going to try to get you out of there. Is the apparition still with you?"

"Efaz, can you make out what's coming through their masks?"

"Not now."

"Just listen again... 'are watching'? I swear it...Whoa!"

"Jesus!"

"Well that was unpleasant. Don't you two go anywhere."

"Felt like the entire house moved."

"What are you doing to my basement?"

"It would seem our crew has arrived. Now there really isn't time for you three to be getting in the way. Gentlemen, if you will."

"No more! We told you—"

"On the mask goes, down presses the button and off you go to sleep."

"Efaz! Efaz!"

"Well that shouldn't have been necessary. You two get their equipment out of here, I'll deal with their man in there. We have work to do. I think the codename should be 'Incubation'."

Appendix:

Figure 1: First Floor

