

# The Haunting of Hill House



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SHIRLEY JACKSON

Shirley Jackson was born in 1916 in San Francisco, California and raised in Burlingame, a middle-class Bay Area suburb. She had a difficult childhood marked by loneliness and a difficult relationship with her parents. After her family moved across the country to Rochester, New York, Jackson attended University of Rochester and Syracuse University. At Syracuse University, she became involved with the campus literary magazine and there met her husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman, who would go on to become a noted literary critic. Jackson and Hyman lived in New York and then Vermont, where Hyman taught at Bennington College; in the town of North Bennington, Jackson felt out-of-place and secluded, and struggled to gain respect and recognition from her husband as her own literary career flourished. Jackson was subject to her husband's controlling behavior for years, during which she developed agoraphobia and a dependency on prescription drugs even as her dark (and darkly funny) literary novels *The Bird's Nest*, *The Sundial*, *The Haunting of Hill House*, and [We Have Always Lived in the Castle](#) gained her renown in the literary world. Jackson died in 1965 at the age of 48, and in the years since her passing, her work has been given a second life through the publication of *Let Me Tell You*, a collection of unpublished stories and essays, as well as widely-celebrated screen and stage adaptations of *The Haunting of Hill House* and *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The Haunting of Hill House* takes place in the mid-to-late 1950s, and the characters within it—though self-consciously isolated from the world around them—nonetheless wrestle with the social conventions of the time. Eleanor Vance, unmarried at thirty-two, is shy and reserved—even wearing red toenail polish is too garish a gesture for her, and she feels rebellious when she dons a pair of pants. Eleanor has spent most of her life caring for her ailing mother, and as she comes into her femininity like a teenage girl might, she's both drawn to and frightened by the changing limitations on how women her age are expected to dress, speak, and behave. This issue is also exemplified through Theodora—a bold and bohemian woman who lives alone with a female roommate in an unnamed city, and who experiences a palpable attraction to Eleanor during their shared time at Hill House. The bond between the two women suggests a subtext of homosexuality that would still have been socially unacceptable at the time. For her part, Eleanor is drawn to Theodora for many reasons, which are

hinted at but never fully explained—Theodora may be a representation of Eleanor's desire to be free and unburdened by responsibility, by the expectations of others, and by the pressure to emulate a traditional social or romantic life.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Victorian ghost stories and Gothic horror fascinated Jackson, and they have also been ripe fodder for many other novelists throughout the years. Susan Hill's [The Woman in Black](#) is yet another twentieth-century novel which pays homage to some of the most famous ghost stories of English literature—notably Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. More contemporary novelists, too, have been inspired to use a haunted house—as Jackson did in *Hill House*—as a metaphor for the psychological and emotional conflicts facing a character or a group of characters; Jac Jemc's novel *The Grip of It* and Gillian Flynn's short story "The Grownup" both feature this chilling premise.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Haunting of Hill House*
- **When Written:** 1950s
- **Where Written:** Bennington, VT
- **When Published:** 1959
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary/Postmodern
- **Genre:** Fiction; horror; suspense
- **Setting:** Northeast USA
- **Climax:** Eleanor Vance, who has become possessed by Hill, decides to crash her car into an oak tree on the property and commit suicide rather than drive away after being forced to leave by Doctor Montague.
- **Antagonist:** Hill House; Theodora
- **Point of View:** Third-person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**A Haunting Tale.** *The Haunting of Hill House* has been widely adapted for screen, stage, and radio; its best-known adaptations are perhaps the 1999 film *The Haunting* and the 2018 Netflix series, *The Haunting of Hill House*, which takes considerable liberties with Jackson's source material.

**Intense Research.** After endeavoring to write the novel after reading about a real-life group of nineteenth-century researchers who ventured to a haunted house and reported on their experiences there, Jackson undertook a great deal of research, studying plans of large, possibly-haunted houses

throughout the country, reading multiple volumes of ghost stories, and sketching out plans of her vision of Hill House and its expansive grounds.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Anthropologist and parapsychologist Doctor John Montague, hoping to legitimize the field of parapsychology through groundbreaking new research, invites a carefully-selected group of psychically sensitive individuals from around the country to spend part of the summer at **Hill House**—a manor in the northeastern United States with a reputation for being deeply haunted. The only two people to accept his invitation are Eleanor Vance, a childhood victim of poltergeist activity who has spent most of her adult life caring for her ailing mother, who has very recently passed away; and Theodora, a bohemian psychic with clairvoyant capabilities who lives with a roommate in a large city. Luke Sanderson, the young man who stands to inherit Hill House from his relatives, also pledges his time for the summer—Montague’s lease states that a member of the family who owns Hill House must be present during the experiment to keep an eye on what the renters are doing to the house, as past tenants have had troubles up at the manor.

Eleanor Vance steals the car she co-owns with her sister Carrie and her brother-in-law and drives over a hundred miles to Hill House, excited to finally have an adventure of her own. As she arrives at the house and meets the caretakers, Mr. and Mrs. Dudley, she realizes she is the first one there—and she senses a deeply malevolent energy coming from the house.

Nevertheless, Eleanor is hungry for an adventure, and she decides to stay rather than turn tail and head for home. She soon meets Theodora and the two young women bond quickly—Eleanor is dazzled by Theodora’s beauty and wit. Doctor Montague and Luke Sanderson soon arrive, and Doctor Montague explains that Hill House has been the site of a haunting for as long as eighty years. The man who built it, Hugh Crain, purposefully designed the house to be labyrinthine and disorienting, and after his wife’s death in the house’s driveway, a series of strange occurrences took hold of the place.

As the four begin their stay at Hill House, they explore and chart the manor’s twisting depths. A series of strange disturbances occur, mostly at night—but the pounding, rattling, strange laughter, and cold spots throughout the house and on the grounds actually excite the group. The jovial foursome joke about the presence that is all around them, and they have long discussions over meals and after-dinner drinks about the nature of fear, the feeling of terror, and the possibility that the house is trying to pit them against one another. However, after writing in chalk appears on the wall of the great hall one afternoon—writing which is directed at Eleanor—the terror the group feels increases, as does their suspicion of one another. The others suspect Eleanor of writing the scary words herself,

while Eleanor reels at the possibility that the house is singling her out. After more frightening occurrences—a terrifying presence which Theodora spots in the woods, and more writing on the wall (this time in blood)—Doctor Montague summons his wife, Mrs. Montague, who is also a parapsychologist, to come join the team.

Mrs. Montague arrives with her friend and traveling companion, Arthur Parker, and expresses her disappointment with how things are going so far—she seeks to draw the lonely, tortured spirit within Hill House out by communicating with it using a planchette, an automatic writing device. Mrs. Montague is contemptuous of her husband’s methods and resistant to hearing about the very real terrors the group has already witnessed, and she insists on contacting the presence on her own. As Eleanor begins to suspect Theodora and Luke of talking badly about her behind her back and even scheming against her, she begins to lose her grip on reality, and feels that the house is urging her to “surrender” to it. She begins seeing and hearing things that the others seem immune to—and most chillingly of all, Mrs. Montague reports back that her planchette has written copiously about Eleanor.

During a night of physical and auditory phenomena, Doctor Montague, Theodora, Luke, and Eleanor all huddle together in the doctor’s room for strength, but at the height of the disturbance, Eleanor willingly gives herself over to the house. She wakes up in the morning with a renewed sense of joy and a strange ability to hear what is happening all over the house. Eleanor confronts Theodora about the tension between them and asks if she can come live with Theodora once the experiment is over. Theodora coldly refuses Eleanor, saying she doesn’t take in strays. That night, Eleanor gets out of bed in the middle of the night and gleefully causes a ruckus, raising the others from their beds by pounding on their doors. She then runs away into the library, from whence she feels the voice of her deceased mother beckoning her. She climbs a rotting staircase in the corner of the library to get to a trap door that will allow her access to the house’s highest turret. The group comes into the library and coaxes Eleanor down from the precarious staircase, reproaching her for her childish and worrisome behavior.

In the morning, Doctor Montague and the others tell Eleanor that she needs to leave Hill House for her own good. Eleanor is unable to express to the others just how much she feels a part of the house—and how impossible it seems that she could ever leave. The others help Eleanor pack and retrieve her car from the garage. As she bids tearful goodbyes to her companions, she begs Doctor Montague to let her stay. He forces her into the car, however, and tells her she’ll feel better once she’s away from the mansion. Eleanor begins leaving the driveway, but is, at the last minute, compelled to crash her car into a large oak tree and commit suicide. In the seconds before impact, Eleanor has a moment of clarity, and wonders why she’s doing what

she's doing.

In a brief epilogue, it is revealed that Doctor Montague published his article about Hill House to great contempt from his colleagues, and was all but forced to retire from academia. The presence which has always haunted Hill House remains there, walking its halls alone.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Eleanor Vance** – Eleanor Vance is the isolated, fanciful, and disturbed protagonist of *The Haunting of Hill House*. A thirty-two-year-old woman who has spent the last eleven years—the majority of her adult life—caring alone for her invalid mother, Eleanor is desperate to find where she belongs in the world. When she receives an invitation from the mysterious Doctor Montague to spend the summer at **Hill House**, she leaps at the chance to get away from her controlling sister Carrie, her brother-in-law, and her young niece—whom she greatly dislikes—and strike out on her own. Eleanor goes so far as to steal the car she and her sister share in order to make the hundred-mile drive to Hill House. Once at the manor, Eleanor recognizes the evil and danger within immediately—but she is so determined to establish her independence, make some friends, and exist on her own in the world that she stays on. As the disturbances within the house increase in frequency and intensity, the house seems to be communing with or calling for Eleanor—writing addressed to Eleanor appears on the walls of the house in chalk and in blood, and Eleanor feels herself fracturing and slipping, tempted by the desire to “surrender” to whatever haunts the house. Eleanor’s fraught and possibly romantic relationship with her roommate at Hill House, Theodora, is a source of anxiety and frustration for Eleanor, who longs for connection with another person but seems uncertain of how to make her desires known. Throughout the novel, Jackson sustains a sense of mystery surrounding Eleanor—she lies almost constantly about her age, her background, where she lives and how. What’s more, she seems not to know the truth of important details about her own life, insisting for example that a widely-reported poltergeist incident at her childhood home was simply the taunting of angry neighbors. The mysteries surrounding Eleanor only multiply and thicken as the novel goes on. As she ultimately falls entirely under the house’s spell, she attempts one night to commit suicide by jumping from its tallest turret after being lulled onward by a voice she believes to be the voice of her dead mother (whom, the narrative implies, she may actually have killed or allowed to die). At the novel’s conclusion, Eleanor commits suicide by driving her car into the oak tree in the house’s driveway, effectively choosing to die rather than allowing the other characters to send her away. Eleanor is one of contemporary literature’s most fascinating and mysterious

protagonists and anti-heroes, and her arc encompasses all of the novel’s major themes: the war between the supernatural and the psychological, the search for home, the perils of isolation, and the dissociative properties of fear.

**Doctor John Montague** – Doctor John Montague is an anthropologist with a secret passion for parapsychology—the study of supernatural psychic phenomena. Hoping to quietly advance his research away from the prying eyes of his judgmental colleagues, Doctor Montague rents the famed haunted mansion of **Hill House** for the summer and invites several people from around the country who have, through magazine articles and other records, come to his attention as people with psychic sensitivities. The only two to actually show up for the experiment are Eleanor Vance and Theodora, who join Montague and Luke Sanderson, who stands to inherit Hill House, at the imposing manor. Doctor Montague is clearly fascinated with and knowledgeable about the dark history of Hill House, and he is determined to get to the bottom of its mysteries both for his own personal satisfaction and his professional glory. Montague is a kind and mild man who seems to genuinely enjoy the company of his three companions at Hill House. Though he’s brought them there to draw out the house’s disturbances, he never uses them as bait or exploits their suffering—anytime there is a disturbance, or the sense that one is about to begin, Montague actually tries to shelter his companions and bring them all together so that they can offer one another solace. Doctor Montague also seems to be dominated in his personal life by his wife, Mrs. Montague, who joins the experiment late in the novel and refuses to value the work he has done. Doctor Montague goes on to publish an article about Hill House after the fraught conclusion of his experiment there—but it is poorly received, and he retires from scholarly life. Doctor Montague’s arc embodies several of the novel’s major themes—the pain of isolation, the search for home, and the delicate dance between the world of the supernatural and the world of the psychological.

**Theodora** – Theodora is a young and beautiful bohemian who lives with a female roommate in an unnamed city and is summoned to **Hill House** by Doctor Montague because of her reputation for psychic sensitivity. She is rumored to be able to guess the faces of cards when they are held up out of her sight and hearing, and Doctor Montague hopes that her apparent clairvoyance will bring out the presence that haunts Hill House. Theodora is flirtatious, light-hearted, and open-minded, and she and Eleanor bond right away over their many similarities—though it’s unclear whether each of them is really telling the truth. Though Theodora refers to her female roommate as a “friend,” it’s implied that the two may actually be romantically or sexually involved. As with so much else in the novel, the truth of Theodora’s past—and even her present—is shadowed and uncertain, but what is clear is that Theodora’s attachment to Eleanor, and vice versa, becomes the primary

source of tension and suffering for each of them in spite of the terror all around them. Their relationship arc is emblematic of several of the novel's major themes and theories—that isolation, lack of connection, and the recesses of the human mind are all more frightening than supernatural or paranormal horrors. Glamorous, spiteful, fickle, and emotional, Theodora is Eleanor's perfect foil. The women orbit one another, drawing closer until they ultimately cause each other's suffering and confusion within Hill House to escalate—perhaps, it's implied, past the point of no return, and into the realm of madness.

**Luke Sanderson** – A rakish young man, a liar, and a thief who stands to inherit **Hill House** from his aunt, its current owner. Doctor Montague's lease on the house carries the stipulation that a member of the family must be present during his tenure there—Luke, a young rascal with an impish curiosity about the house, tags along and soon realizes he's gotten much more than he bargained for. Luke reveals himself to be a handsome lush with an almost bewilderingly positive attitude and a joke always at the ready. Theodora and Eleanor find themselves competing for Luke's affection and using it against each other, even as the romantic undertones in their own friendship seem to be the real root of their animosity towards one another. Luke is clearly rattled by the things he experiences within Hill House, and, because he stands to inherit the house himself one day, it's obvious that he processes his experience of the “haunting” through a very different lens than the other characters. Still, Luke uses humor to lighten the mood every chance he gets, and he rarely lets his terror get the best of him. At the end of the novel, Luke moves away to Paris.

**Mrs. Montague** – Doctor Montague's wife. Mrs. Montague joins the research team at **Hill House** nearly a week into their tenure there—she sweeps in with little regard for the delicate observations they've been doing so far, determined to contact the presence within Hill House through her planchette, an automatic writing tool. Mrs. Montague speaks of the presence that haunts Hill House as one or several poor souls desperate to have their stories heard—she turns a blind eye to the malevolence of the house, and in spite of her clear ignorance as to the truth of what resides there, she acts as if her word is law. Mrs. Montague clearly has great contempt for her husband, and for Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke, as well—her companion Arthur Parker is the only one whom she will allow to help her work.

**Mrs. Dudley** – The housekeeper and cook at **Hill House**. Mrs. Dudley speaks in a flat, robotic tone, never conversing with anyone other than to explain her schedule over and over. She and her husband Mr. Dudley, the caretaker, leave Hill House before it gets dark and refuse to return after nightfall, completing their duties there during daylight only. The only person to whom Mrs. Dudley seems to take a shine is Mrs. Montague, for reasons that are never explained.

**Hugh Crain** – The man who built **Hill House**. Hugh Crain

delighted in creating a place which did not subscribe to traditional rules of design and architecture, seemingly hoping to make the house as disorienting as possible. Hugh Crain's wife died on her way up to visit the completed manor for the first time, leaving Crain to care for their two daughters on his own. Little is known about how he raised the girls, but Luke Sanderson finds evidence—in the form of a scrapbook which cobbles together Bible verses, art, etchings, and disturbing illustrations—that Crain was, in all likelihood, deranged, controlling, and even abusive. It is unclear whether Crain's influence on Hill House has made it the evil entity it is today, or whether it is the house which corrupted him.

**Old Miss Crain** – Hugh Crain's elder daughter, and one of the previous owners of Hill House. She lived out her life alone and left the house to a young woman from the nearby village who had acted as her companion. Old Miss Crain's younger sister later sued the companion for Hill House, furious that Old Miss Crain had not left it to her, and the conflict eventually led to the companion's suicide at the house.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Arthur Parker** – Mrs. Montague's traveling companion on her journey to **Hill House**. A brash, imposing, indelicate man who brandishes a gun with gusto, he seems to be the polar opposite of Doctor Montague.

**Mr. Dudley** – The caretaker at **Hill House**. An imposing and sarcastic man, he tries to dissuade all who enter Hill House from coming onto the property. He is married to Mrs. Dudley, and both of them undertake their duties at the house in a begrudging and fearful manner.

**Carrie** – Eleanor's sister. She seems to view Eleanor as a burden and a simpleton, and she doesn't show any thanks to Eleanor for caring for their ailing mother for over a decade.

**Eleanor's Brother-in-law** – Carrie's husband. A cruel, sniping man whom Eleanor dislikes.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### THE SUPERNATURAL VS. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL

A war exists at the heart of Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House*—a war between supernatural and psychological phenomena. At the start of the novel, a group of individuals with psychic sensitivities is

recruited by anthropologist—and closet parapsychologist—Doctor Montague to spend a summer at the “evil” mansion, delving into the house’s terrifying mysteries as part of an experiment which Montague hopes will validate his research in the field of paranormal activity. Through their adventures at **Hill House**, Jackson shows how each individual is also at the mercy of the horrors that dwell within his or her own mind. Jackson argues that the traumas, illusions, and terrors lurking within the human psyche are often more frightening than ghosts or hauntings—and that the line between supernatural and psychological phenomena is often blurry and porous.

As Jackson describes the supernatural and paranormal phenomena that take place within the walls of Hill House, she leaves open the possibility that at least a portion of the “haunting” is taking place in the minds of the four characters who have come to investigate the manor—primarily within the troubled brain of the novel’s protagonist, Eleanor Vance. Jackson uses Eleanor’s unstable and rapidly deteriorating mental state to break down the boundaries between paranormal events and psychological ones, and to show that the recesses of the human mind hold far greater horrors than even a haunted, accursed house. When Eleanor first arrives at Hill House, she immediately senses evil and hopelessness emanating from the manor. Even though her instincts tell her to turn around, decline Dr. Montague’s invitation, and return to the cramped apartment she shares with her sister, brother-in-law, and niece, Eleanor’s desire to break free of her claustrophobic circumstances and strike out on her own pushes her forward. Eleanor begins to relax as she meets the other subjects of Dr. Montague’s experiment: Theodora, a psychic who is sensitive to the realm beyond the human one, and Luke Sanderson, the young man who stands to inherit Hill House. However, Eleanor tells no one the truth of her life: that after years of caring for her sick and ailing mother, she is now, at thirty-two, unequipped emotionally or financially to handle the world. What’s more, she remains haunted by a childhood encounter with what may have been a poltergeist.

As the narrative progresses, Jackson casts doubt over whether the “haunting” from Eleanor’s childhood was truly the work of a poltergeist—or the result of Eleanor’s own telekinetic abilities. The writing on the walls that appears throughout Hill House in chalk and later in blood, entreating Eleanor to “COME HOME,” may also be the work of her powerful subconscious. Jackson never provides an answer as to the truth of Eleanor’s powers or lack thereof—Eleanor may be at the mercy of supernatural or paranormal tormentors, or her own mind may be her worst enemy. In cultivating ambiguity surrounding Eleanor’s capabilities, Jackson creates a potent metaphor about the terrifying power of the human mind to isolate, debilitate, or even defeat the individual ostensibly in control.

Though Eleanor is the novel’s primary protagonist, she’s not the

only one who suffers during her time at Hill House. The phenomena which Eleanor, Theodora, Dr. Montague, and Luke all experience come in many forms: phantom dogs, loud knocking and shaking at their bedroom doors, and, most ominously, the writing on the wall. At one point, Theodora experiences a frightening vision, which she never describes but is clearly terrified by, while Eleanor is seized by a strange, giddy desire to throw herself off the roof of Hill House. As Eleanor’s mental state declines, the group tries to send her away—only to watch helplessly as she crashes her car and commits suicide in front of them on her way out of the Hill House gates. By showing that other people besides Eleanor are physically and emotionally affected by the house, Jackson further complicates the question of whether the strange happenings outlined in the novel are the result of a true “haunting,” or part of individual or collective delusions which grip those who visit the house. Though Jackson ultimately offers no definitive answer, she uses the mysterious ambiguity surrounding the “haunting” to suggest that perhaps the most frightening thing of all is a psychologically haunted self.

*The Haunting of Hill House* uses the trappings of Gothic horror and familiar haunted-house tales to tell a different story entirely, one rooted deeply in metaphor: the story of a mind becoming unhinged. As the titular haunting unfolds, Jackson muddies the boundaries between what is real and what is imagined, what is supernatural and what is terrifyingly mundane—to Jackson, the human mind is, at the end of the day, the most haunted and unknowable place of all.



## THE SEARCH FOR HOME

**Hill House** is an enormous, oddly constructed manor whose seclusion from society, odd angles, labyrinth-like layout, and disturbing history all make it a decidedly inhospitable home. Still, the characters who venture there to study the house’s mysteries and discover its secrets all have one thing in common: they are looking for a sense of home and belonging. As Doctor Montague, Eleanor Vance, Luke Sanderson, and Theodora play house inside of their haunted retreat, it becomes clear that all four individuals are searching for connection and a sense of belonging in all the wrong places. Ultimately, the characters fail to find what they’re looking for—and Jackson uses their collective failure, combined with the potent central symbol of Hill House, to make the bleak argument that for some people (or perhaps even *all* people) home and belonging can never be found.

Through the journey of Eleanor Vance and her companions at Hill House, Jackson shows how embarrassing, vulnerable, and ultimately fruitless the search for home can feel, or even be. Eleanor has never felt at home in the world. Once the caretaker for her ailing mother, and now a burden to her sister, brother-in-law, and niece, with whom she lives in a small apartment, she has never known independence or belonging. She has never,

she tells Theodora, been “wanted” anywhere—she has merely bounced from place to place. Eleanor arrives at Hill House with a repetitious phrase in her head, a line of Shakespeare which she remembers as a song: “Journeys end in lovers’ meeting.” Eleanor believes, as she arrives at Hill House, that despite the place’s malevolent energy, her journey there will end in happiness and recognition. However, when the presence haunting Hill House begins attempting to communicate directly with Eleanor—by scrawling, in chalk and then in blood, the words “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME” over and over again—a strange paradox emerges. Eleanor is being summoned “home,” but as the house itself makes increasingly desperate attempts to connect with Eleanor, she starts to go mad and believes that the house is the only home she has ever, or will ever, truly know. When she briefly tries to find “home” and friendship in Theodora, and expresses her desire to move to the city where her new friend makes her own home, Theodora’s rejection makes Eleanor lose all hope of ever feeling wanted, needed, or loved. The novel ends with Eleanor, who has been urged to leave Hill House in light of her worsening mental state, crashing her car into an oak tree at the foot of the driveway and committing suicide rather than departing from the only place where she has ever felt welcomed or wanted. The bleak irony of the fact that the only place Eleanor has ever felt at home is a twisted, haunted, and inhospitable mansion is Jackson’s way of metaphorically expressing the true depths of Eleanor’s isolation, and of showing that for some unlucky people, the search for home ends in being called “home” to a realm beyond.

The other visitors to Hill House—Doctor Montague, Theodora, and Luke Sanderson—are united with Eleanor in their search for home and a sense of belonging. Doctor Montague, an academic compelled by a fascination with the strange, the occult, and the paranormal, longs for the clout that will allow him to make a name and a home for himself in the field he wants to pioneer. Theodora, a psychic who has abandoned her last name (and symbolically her ties to her past and her original home), lives a freewheeling and bohemian lifestyle, and it’s heavily implied that she longs for family, stability, and permanence (though she ultimately rejects Eleanor’s offer of friendship and companionship). Luke Sanderson, the heir to Hill House, is searching for home in a more literal sense—he knows the dark history of the house he stands to inherit, but he wants to get to the bottom of what may or may not be haunting the strange place so that he can decide what to do once it falls under his ownership. All four of these characters are drawn to Hill House because of what the place represents. Home is a place where one feels safe, known, and welcome: at Hill House, Eleanor, Montague, Luke, and Theodora find the opposite. There’s a reason Hill House is always referred to as a house, not a home—though it’s a domicile, it’s been unoccupied for years, and the family that once resided there was broken, ruined, and indeed haunted. None of the characters can, in the present day, find any trappings of home in the manor, in spite of

all their efforts to convince themselves that the place could lead to happiness. The search for home ends in failure not just for Eleanor, but indeed for all of the other characters who venture to the house: Luke runs off to Europe, Theodora returns to her unhappy apartment and roommate in the city, and Doctor Montague, shamed due to his inability to produce any substantive research pointing to paranormal activity at the house, is forced to retire from academia.

Jackson herself, in real life, moved to North Bennington, Vermont in the mid-1940s with her husband, who worked as an instructor at Bennington College. Jackson felt isolated from the rest of the town, and during her time living there she wrote several works of fiction which reflected the competing feelings of misanthropy and exclusion she was experiencing. *The Haunting of Hill House*, then, adopts as its thesis the bleak suggestion that the idyllic, perfect idea of “home” perhaps does not exist for anyone, really—home is made of memories, imperfect and unreliable, and the attempt to reconstruct an ideal of home will almost always fail. Jackson’s characters search for security, family, and the familiar in an almost comically bleak and inhospitable place, hoping against hope they’ll be able to find a place to belong. But in the end, all of them fail, and they’re flung back to their far corners of the world just as alone as when they began their journey to Hill House.



## FEAR AND DISSOCIATION

Throughout *The Haunting of Hill House*, Shirley Jackson creates a palpable atmosphere of fear. As she builds terror and dread, Jackson examines the effects of prolonged bouts of fear on her four main characters—Eleanor, Doctor Montague, Luke, and Theodora—and, in so doing, ultimately suggests that the state of being acutely afraid over such an extended period of time creates an effect of dissociation or depersonalization, rendering individuals strangers to themselves and one another.

When Eleanor first arrives at **Hill House**, she is tethered to reality—though a little whimsical and fanciful at times, there’s nothing about Eleanor to suggest that she’s insane, delusional, or prone to dissociative episodes. As the house deepens its claim on her, however, Eleanor slowly loses her grip on reality—and on herself. She begins to feel she is “disappearing inch by inch” into the house, “going apart a little at a time” due to the pressure of the fear she’s experiencing, and the increasing frequency with of sounds, noises, and even presences that only she can perceive. In the book’s denouement, as Eleanor’s spirit seems to meld with—or be taken over entirely by—whatever possesses Hill House, Eleanor runs wild through the house in the middle of the night. She is both herself and not herself; she clearly is in possession of her own memories, but she refers to herself in the third person and speaks of having at last found her way “home” to

the very “inside” of Hill House. The morning after the episode, once Luke and the others have coaxed Eleanor down off of a rotting iron staircase from which she was, ostensibly, preparing to plunge to her death, Eleanor is encouraged to leave the house but seems reluctant to—she has become obsessed with the house, and decides to commit suicide in its driveway rather than leave it. Only in the “unending, crashing second before the car” hits a giant oak tree does Eleanor briefly seem to return to herself, wondering at last why she is “doing this” and why no one is stopping her. Eleanor’s fear seems to have completely severed her connection with reality until that final moment, when it’s already too late to reclaim her sense of self.

The housekeeper and cook, Mrs. Dudley, is perhaps the most profound example of someone whose elongated exposure to the evil within Hill House—and the terror it inspires—has resulted in a kind of dissociation. Mrs. Dudley speaks robotically and flatly in sentences that describe only her schedule in the house—her entire existence has become oriented around the times at which she enters the house, performs her duties, and leaves again. She never reveals anything more about herself or her life to the new guests, and she doesn’t ask any questions about them either—in fact, she never even varies the words she uses. Mrs. Dudley’s flat affect, depersonalized speech, and inability to focus on anything other than getting out of the house shows that in order for her to complete her accursed duties at Hill House, it’s necessary for her to separate herself from anything but the task at hand. Just as Eleanor, in the depths of her fear, cannot access anything beyond being afraid, Mrs. Dudley’s life outside Hill House—whatever it is—becomes inaccessible to her when she’s within the confines of the house.

After an encounter in which whatever possesses Hill House writes a message to Eleanor on the walls of Theodora’s room in blood, Theodora moves into Eleanor’s room. The two sleep in separate beds, but begin sharing clothes and possessions, as all of Theodora’s things have been stained with blood. As the two of them begin dressing, speaking, and acting like one another, the line between them blurs. Theodora, dressed in Eleanor’s demure clothes, begins calling herself “Eleanor” and speaking in mocking tones about “herself” in the third person. At the same time, Eleanor allows Theodora to paint her toenails bright red—though she feels provocative and out of place in her own body once the job is done—and begins adopting some of Theodora’s more fiery characteristics. As the two women seem to meld together, it is almost as if they are latching onto one another’s personalities as they feel their own selves dissolving in the presence of their constant state of fear and disorientation. It’s easier to embody another person than it is to reckon with the confusion and strangeness that has infiltrated their own minds, and as Eleanor and Theodora both consciously and subconsciously adopt parts of one another’s appearances and personalities, it seems they’re trying to hide

themselves away, perhaps out of an instinct to preserve whatever is left of their true selves.

Additionally, Doctor Montague, Theodora, and Luke Sanderson all discuss the strange effects of being exposed to heightened fear over a long period of time. In humorous, almost academic discussions each morning as they lay out their plans for the day—and in the evenings, often after an encounter with the presence within Hill House—they deconstruct the emotions they experienced during the episodes with an eerie detachment, often poking fun at their own terror or one another’s. As the novel progresses, these chats become more and more ludicrous to the imperiled Eleanor, who is—depending on how one views the narrative—either drifting further away from herself, or closer to the true core of who she is: a woman possessed by an entity even she can’t understand. Indeed, as the others try to bring Eleanor back from the brink of her own destruction, they do so with the same tongue-in-cheek, disbelieving irony with which they’d deconstructed their encounters with the presence at Hill House days earlier—it’s as if what’s happening to their friend right before their eyes is at a distance or remove from them.

“When I am afraid,” Eleanor Vance states at a crucial point in the novel, after a horrific message has been scrawled in blood on the walls of Theodora’s room, “I can see perfectly the sensible, beautiful, not-afraid side of the world [...] But when I am afraid I no longer exist in any relation to these things.” Jackson’s attempt to define fear as a state of dissociation, in which the “not-afraid side of the world” exists but becomes inaccessible, is her novel’s great experiment. Through the omnipresent atmosphere of terror and dread which permeates Hill House, she explores how fear slowly but surely detaches her protagonists from reality.



## ISOLATION

All of the characters in *The Haunting of Hill House* are isolated in their own ways—so, too, is the remote and looming manor at the center of the action. As she examines the effects of both physical and emotional isolation throughout the novel, Shirley Jackson ultimately suggests that true loneliness is the most terrifying force on earth—and more deserving of fear than even the strangest, most bone-chilling experiences with the supernatural.

Eleanor Vance is a very isolated woman, and Jackson uses her character to posit that the prospect of a life spent in emotional and physical isolation from the rest of the world is more terrifying than ghosts, spirits, or unexplained phenomena. “I am always afraid of being alone,” Eleanor admits after one of several encounters with whatever entity may or may not be haunting **Hill House**. After stating the words aloud, she is shocked by her own candor—the admission itself has made her feel even more isolated, vulnerable, and lonely. Eleanor has

been a loner all her life. Eleanor has long been the caretaker to her ailing mother—now, at thirty-two, she lives with her sister and brother-in-law, but she has few friends of her own and spends most of her time daydreaming not of love or companionship but of possessing a large house all her own where she can tend to small daily rituals like cleaning, strolling through the yard, and preparing meals in peace. Eleanor, who has been lonely all her life, seems to have come to crave isolation; it is only within the halls of Hill House that she sees for the first time just how pitiful loneliness truly is, and begins to question whether a life lived out alone is even worth living. Eleanor’s suicide at the end of the novel—tragic, sudden, and yet committed almost gleefully—seals the thesis that Jackson has set forth throughout the novel: that being alone, cast out, and unwanted is more terrifying than death itself.

The other characters who visit Hill House are isolated in their own ways. Theodora is unmarried, marked by her psychic sensitivities, and lives with a roommate with whom she often quarrels. Luke Sanderson is a dishonest bachelor, a thief whose devilish ways—not to mention his motherless existence—have left him feeling alone in the world. Doctor Montague is intellectually isolated, as his burning desire to research the paranormal has made him feel shameful and outcast. Eventually, his failure at Hill House renders him a complete pariah in his field and forces him to retire. He’s also emotionally isolated, constantly bullied and undermined by his imposing wife, Mrs. Montague, who believes that she alone is the authority within their marriage. Doctor Montague loves being at Hill House with Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke because they regard him as an expert, take his work seriously, and make him feel less alone. All of the characters in Hill House, then, come to the haunted manor for a reason—they are so lonely in their own lives that even a mysterious invitation to a decrepit mansion seems like a worthwhile prospect that might ease their profound solitude. Indeed, upon arriving at Hill House and meeting one another, there is a jovial atmosphere in the air despite their dread, and even as the haunting escalates, Theodora, Luke, and Eleanor playact at being a family.

“Whatever walked there, walked alone,” Jackson writes of the entity which may or may not have overtaken the sprawling Hill House. These lines recur in both the opening and closing paragraphs of the novel, and further hammer home the idea that isolation is a terrifying and even corrupting force in and of itself. “Whatever” now resides in Hill House is doomed—or desires—to “walk” its halls “alone” forever, driving out whoever comes to visit. This isolation seems both foisted upon the mysterious entity, whatever it may be, and self-inflicted, much like Jackson’s simultaneous contempt for and exclusion from North Bennington society. The house itself is a symbol of emotional, intellectual, or circumstantial remoteness and isolation. Built at the base of a grouping of hills miles from the nearest town, Hill House was deliberately constructed to be a

lonely place removed from the world—but this seclusion, Jackson shows, has given way not to peace but to an insidious rot. The thing that haunts Hill House—if such a thing exists—is both cloying and destructive, seeming to want the attention of anyone who visits the house while simultaneously frightening them into leaving. The entity appears at times as pure force—ground-shaking, door-clattering angry energy—and other times as something childlike and desperate for connection, as when a ghostly hand holds Eleanor’s in the night. This simultaneous desire for connection and revulsion at the prospect of truly being seen is a hallmark of prolonged distrust and isolation—feelings with which Jackson herself struggled for a large part of her life, and was perhaps attempting to exorcise in the writing of Hill House.

*The Haunting of Hill House* is a slim novel that takes on expansive, existential questions: what it means to be forced into isolation and what it means to crave it, and how the great terror of existence may not be the empty, finite loneliness of death but the empty, finite loneliness of life. As Jackson’s characters wrestle with isolation, her own struggle to understand what it means to be a person in the world seems to be laid bare—the humiliations and vulnerability of human connection are just as terrifying as the prospect of a life lived all alone. To Jackson, and, to a greater extent, her characters, accepting that one’s lot in life is to be lonely, isolated, or misunderstood is more terrifying than being locked inside a haunted house.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### HILL HOUSE

The central symbol throughout the novel is the titular manor, Hill House—a vast, sprawling, and logic-defying mansion whose very design is isolating, alienating, and unsettling. From the novel’s opening, Hill House is established as a “not sane” and menacing edifice which is definitely haunted by a presence which “walk[s] alone” throughout its halls. As the characters meant to spend part of a summer at the manor in service of Doctor Montague’s experiment with the supernatural arrive there, they sense a deep, dark evil radiating from the house. No one feels this malevolence more keenly than the novel’s protagonist, Eleanor Vance—a lonely, aloof woman whose psychological state deteriorates as the house seemingly seeks to possess her. One of the novel’s central themes is the fine line between supernatural and psychological phenomena, and the house becomes a potent symbol of the unknowable gray area between the two. Ultimately, Hill House symbolizes the

mysteries of the human mind, whether healthy or “not sane,” as well as the terror the inherent strangeness of the mind can inspire.

Just like the mind, Hill House is intricate, complex, and seemingly unknowable. As Montague, Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke endeavor to explore every nook and cranny of the house, they find themselves trapped in concentric rooms, disoriented by strange angles, and made nervous by an irrational number of doors in and out of the house—doors which open and shut of their own accord, seemingly trying to keep people in or out of certain areas. The mind, too—especially a mind such as Eleanor’s which has been ravaged by isolation and her family’s manipulation—resists being studied or tamed.

The novel keeps ambiguous whether Hill House itself is evil, or whether the people who have inhabited it over the years have imbued it with an evil energy. Similarly, struggles to understand the human condition and its uncountable wonders, aberrations, and cruelties alike often come up short when it comes to the debate over nature versus nurture.

Hill House itself is, then, Jackson’s way of admitting to the idea that haunted houses—like the human mind—should perhaps be simply appreciated and left undisturbed. The desire to know too much, to probe too deep, or to determine the most basic nature of truth, fiction, fear, and desire will always end, she suggests, in calamity.

### Explanation and Analysis

In the opening lines of the novel, before any of the characters are introduced, Shirley Jackson offers this brief meditation as a prelude. Within just a few sentences, she describes the eerie loneliness which permeates the atmosphere of Hill House, and invokes several of the novel’s major themes. She draws parallels between the supernatural and the psychological, suggesting that the pain of life provokes “even larks and katydids” into dream states and escapes from reality. Dissociation, Jackson suggests, is the only “sane” response to the fear and dread which are a part of life. As she moves into a portrait of the titular manor, Hill House, she suggests that it is “not sane,” and thus not bound by the rules of “live organism[s].” For this reason, Hill House—and the presence that haunts it—are perpetually “alone,” condemned to isolation. Jackson uses these few sentences to forecast the dread, fear, loneliness, and feats of the supernatural and psychological which will recur throughout the novel.

●● During the whole underside of her life, ever since her first memory, Eleanor had been waiting for something like Hill House. Caring for her mother, lifting a cross old lady from her chair to her bed, setting out endless little trays of soup and oatmeal, steeling herself to the filthy laundry, Eleanor had held fast to the belief that someday something would happen.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 4

### Explanation and Analysis

As Jackson introduces her readers to Eleanor, the novel’s protagonist, she describes the young woman’s difficult life. The victim of a possible poltergeist attack when she was just twelve years old, Eleanor has gone on to weather contentious relationships with her hated older sister, Cassie, and her miserable, invalid mother, whom Eleanor has cared for over the last eleven years. Now, three months after her mother’s death, Eleanor feels she has at last found the adventure she’s been waiting for her whole life. Eleanor, deprived of social activity, romance, or a sense of belonging, is desperate to make something of herself and have a real experience of the world—when Doctor Montague’s invitation arrives, despite the mystery and uncertainty



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Haunting of Hill House* published in 1959.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

●● No live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality; even larks and katydids are supposed, by some, to dream. Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within; it had stood so for eighty years and might stand for eighty more. Within, walls continued upright, bricks met neatly, floors were firm, and doors were sensibly shut; silence lay steadily against the wood and stone of Hill House, and whatever walked there, walked alone.

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 1

which surround it, Eleanor leaps at the opportunity to seize her fate and strike out on her own.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

●● When they were silent for a moment the quiet weight of the house pressed down from all around them. Eleanor, wondering if she were really here at all, and not dreaming of Hill House from some safe spot impossibly remote, looked slowly and carefully around the room, telling herself that this was real, these things existed, from the tiles around the fireplace to the marble cupid; these people were going to be her friends.

**Related Characters:** Luke Sanderson, Theodora, Doctor John Montague, Eleanor Vance

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 42-43

### Explanation and Analysis

After Eleanor, Luke Sanderson, and Theodora have joined their host, the parapsychologist Doctor John Montague, at the haunted Hill House manor, the group sits together in one of the first-floor parlors to get to know one another. As the group sits quietly together, they all feel—but do not verbally acknowledge—the psychological and even physical pressure the house is already exerting upon each of them. Eleanor feels this pressure most keenly of all; sensitive both emotionally and psychologically, Eleanor finds herself dissociating from the present moment due to her own fear, discomfort, and uncertainty. She longed to come to Hill House to have an experience, and she is indeed having one, though it's not the one she wished for. Though her first hours at Hill House have been marked by an unsettling sense of dread, Eleanor reminds herself of her desire to make “friends,” be a part of something larger than herself, and grow more connected to the world around her. She pushes herself to remain at Hill House, and to maintain a sense of optimism even in the face of abject horror.

●● The doctor sighed again. “Suppose,” he said slowly, “you heard the story of Hill House and decided not to stay. How would you leave, tonight?” He looked around at them again, quickly. “The gates are locked. Hill House has a reputation for insistent hospitality; it seemingly dislikes letting its guests get away. The last person who tried to leave Hill House in darkness—it was eighteen years ago, I grant you—was killed at the turn in the driveway, where his horse bolted and crushed him against the big tree. Suppose I tell you about Hill House, and one of you wants to leave? Tomorrow, at least, we could see that you got safely to the village.”

**Related Characters:** Doctor John Montague (speaker), Luke Sanderson, Theodora, Eleanor Vance

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 48

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Doctor Montague explains his reasons for wanting to wait until the light of morning to tell his three guests about the true history of Hill House—he doesn't want to frighten them off, as anyone who tries to leave Hill House under cover of darkness may be killed by the presence haunting the house itself. This passage foreshadows, both literally and metaphorically, several of the novel's major themes and events, including Eleanor's suicide at the novel's very end. The doctor, though he claims to know little more about the house than the individuals he's brought there, seems aware in this passage that whatever haunts Hill House attaches itself to certain individuals and doesn't let them leave. He says that the last person to try to leave Hill House at night had their horse “bolt”—but re-examining this quote in the context both of the possessed Eleanor's choice to crash her car into a tree and Old Miss Crain's beleaguered companion's hanging from the top of the Hill House Tower, it seems as if some malevolent being forces these poor individuals to take their own lives rather than depart the house.

“Certainly there are spots which inevitably attach to themselves an atmosphere of holiness and goodness; it might not then be too fanciful to say that some houses are born bad. Hill House, whatever the cause, has been unfit for human habitation for upwards of twenty years. What it was like before then, whether its personality was molded by the people who lived here, or the things they did, or whether it was evil from its start are all questions I cannot answer.”

**Related Characters:** Doctor John Montague (speaker), Luke Sanderson, Theodora, Eleanor Vance

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 50-51

### Explanation and Analysis

As Doctor Montague begins telling the story of the history of Hill House to Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke on their first day at the manse, he invokes serious, mythic themes. He tells of places which are born bad; just as holy and sacred sites exist throughout the world, so, too, he argues, are places marred by diseased or malevolent presences. Montague admits, however, that he does not know whether Hill House is truly such a place, or whether the events that have transpired within its halls have turned it bad. After all, the family that originally built and lived in the mansion shouldered more than their share of hardship and bitterness; thus, it's possible that the house absorbed that negative energy, which festered over time, making Hill House the ominous, malevolent place it is today. As Hill House is, throughout the novel, a symbol for the human mind, Jackson is, perhaps, enquiring on a metaphorical level as to whether humans are born evil or made evil—whether an evil, or sick, or tainted mind is a curse at birth, or the product of years of abuse and ill treatment.

“It was accepted locally that she had chosen suicide because her guilty conscience drove her to it. I am more inclined to believe that she was one of those tenacious, unclever young women who can hold on desperately to what they believe is their own but cannot withstand, mentally, a constant nagging persecution; she had certainly no weapons to fight back against the younger sister's campaign of hatred, her own friends in the village had been turned against her, and she seems to have been maddened by the conviction that locks and bolts could not keep out the enemy who stole into her house at night—”

“She should have gone away,” Eleanor said. “Left the house and run as far as she could go.”

“In effect, she did.”

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance, Doctor John Montague (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 58

### Explanation and Analysis

As Doctor Montague plunges deeper into his story of Hill House's many horrors, he tells about the suicide committed by a young companion of Hugh Crain's eldest daughter, who inherited the house after her father's death and lived there mostly alone for years. Like a quotation from earlier in this chapter, this passage also foreshadows heavily the psychological torment—and ultimately, the drive to end her life—which Eleanor will suffer as a result of her time at Hill House. Eleanor will soon find that it's not so easy to simply “[go] away” and “run as far as she [can] go”; when Eleanor's companions effectively force her to leave the house for her own safety, Eleanor chooses (or is forced by the malevolent presence haunting the house) to commit suicide on the driveway rather than leave the grounds. Like Old Miss Crain's companion, it is only through committing suicide that Eleanor does actually “[leave] the house and run as far as she [can] go,” unraveling herself from the house's wicked grasp. Through these twinned circumstances, Jackson is suggesting, perhaps, that the themes of her novel—isolation, fear and dissociation, the search for home, and the war between the supernatural and the psychological—are cyclical issues which plague humanity time and time again. Eleanor and the others, Jackson is suggesting, are not the first to suffer these issues, nor are they the last.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

“I hate having things done to me.”

“You’re about as crazy as anyone I ever saw,” Theodora said cheerfully.

“I don’t like to feel helpless,” Eleanor said. “My mother—”

“Your mother would have been delighted to see you with your toenails painted red,” Theodora said. “They look nice.”

Eleanor looked at her feet again. “It’s wicked,” she said inadequately. “I mean—on my feet. It makes me feel like I look like a fool.”

**Related Characters:** Theodora, Eleanor Vance (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 86

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Theodora has just painted Eleanor’s toenails bright red—blood red. As Eleanor realizes what Theodora has “done to [her],” she feels a creeping sense of fear and shame. The plain, mousy Eleanor is, at thirty-two, socially awkward, lonely, and clueless about both friendship and romance. Over the course of her stay at Hill House, she’s become attracted on an emotional and, perhaps, a physical level to the confidence, beauty, and boldness Theodora exudes. The attraction isn’t necessarily sexual, but it is obsessive, and Eleanor both longs to become—and fears transforming into—Theodora, or a woman like her. This passage plays with the uncanny mirroring effect that has existed between Theodora and Eleanor since their first meeting, shortly after which they began referring to one another as long-lost cousins. Eleanor begins to dissociate here as she considers the “wicked” possibility of becoming more and more like Theodora—the sense of isolation she feels is also heightened as she realizes that even though she’s dreamed of a friendship like this one for years, actually participating in it doesn’t make her feel any less alone.

“I think we are all incredibly silly to stay. I think that an atmosphere like this one can find out the flaws and faults and weaknesses in all of us, and break us apart in a matter of days. We have only one defense, and that is running away. At least it can’t follow us, can it? When we feel ourselves endangered we can leave, just as we came. And,” he added dryly, “just as fast as we can go. [...] Promise me absolutely that you will leave, as fast as you can, if you begin to feel the house catching at you.”

“I promise,” Eleanor said, smiling.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance, Doctor John Montague (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 91

**Explanation and Analysis**

In this passage, Doctor Montague responds to Eleanor’s question about whether their group should stay on at Hill House despite the vile creepiness of the place and the doctor’s mounting premonitions that something bad is going to happen soon. Montague is fully aware that their entire group, faced with the acute fear of being isolated—trapped, essentially—inside a haunted house, have chosen to dissociate from that fear and close their minds to the horror that awaits, seemingly, around every corner. One of the novel’s major themes is the human tendency to dissociate emotionally from acute or prolonged situations of terror, as well as fear’s ability to force a dissociation or pattern of denial when things get too intense. The passage ends on a note of foreshadowing, as the doctor implores Eleanor to tell him if she feels the house begin to “catch” at her—Eleanor promises that she will, but given the number of times she’s ignored and detached herself from her own deep-seated intuition, it seems unlikely that she’ll honor her vow.

“We must take precautions,” he said.

“Against what? How?”

“When Luke and I are called outside, and you two are kept imprisoned inside, doesn’t it begin to seem”—and his voice was very quiet—“doesn’t it begin to seem that the intention is, somehow, to separate us?”

**Related Characters:** Theodora, Doctor John Montague

(speaker), Eleanor Vance, Luke Sanderson

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 99

### Explanation and Analysis

On the group's second night at Hill House, they experience the first tangible supernatural disturbance any of them have seen. A creeping sense of dread and fear has permeated all their experiences thus far, and the house's odd, uncanny architecture has left them all feeling woozy and disoriented. As knocking, banging, and pounding—accompanied by an unnatural cold and high-pitched laughter—terrorize Eleanor and Theodora, they call for Luke and the doctor, who come running, but reveal that they themselves were pulled out of the house by a presence which manifested itself as a dog, or a dog-like creature. In this passage, as the doctor reviews the phenomena their group has experienced both separately and together, he suggests that the house is trying to split the group up physically and break them apart mentally and emotionally. It's no coincidence that the house cornered Theodora and Eleanor—the only two members of the party with demonstrated psychic abilities and sensitivities—while it essentially created a decoy to distract Luke and Montague, who are merely facilitators and observers of the experiment. The house's desire to isolate its tenants so that it can more acutely inspire fear, terror, trauma, and dissociation is a chilling portent of things still to come, and an example of the way supernatural horror often operates on a psychological level.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ Looking at herself in the mirror, with the bright morning sun light freshening even the blue room of Hill House, Eleanor thought, It is my second morning in Hill House, and I am unbelievably happy. Journeys end in lovers meeting; I have spent an all but sleepless night, I have told lies and made a fool of myself, and the very air tastes like wine. I have been frightened half out of my foolish wits, but I have somehow earned this joy; I have been waiting for it for so long.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance (speaker)

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 100

### Explanation and Analysis

On the third day of her stay at Hill House, Eleanor wakes up in a brilliant mood. In spite of the terrifying disturbance she and Theodora witnessed the night before—in which Eleanor saw for the first time Hill House's true power—Eleanor feels “unbelievably happy” and invigorated. This passage shows the depths of Eleanor's isolation and desire to find a home in the world. She is so profoundly lonely that she places on the backburner the fear and terror Hill House has inspired in her, feeling that her disturbing experiences there so far have bonded her closer to her fellow tenants and made her a part of something. The phrase “Journeys end in lovers meeting,” which is a line from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, encapsulates Eleanor's longing to find kinship in the midst of the “journey” that is her stay at Hill House. She has been “waiting” for an experience like this one—something that would allow her to feel part of a home and part of a family—and even though the home she's found is a haunted house and the family is a group of misfits thrown together for a foolhardy experiment, she's ready to take what she can. However, as the novel presses on, it becomes clear that this joyous mood is not to be trusted—somehow, *everyone* in the group woke up feeling refreshed and inexplicably optimistic after a harrowing night of being tormented by Hill House's malevolent presence, so it seems that the house is merely toying with the group and trying to throw them off their guard.

☝☝ “When I am afraid, I can see perfectly the sensible, beautiful not-afraid side of the world, I can see chairs and tables and windows staying the same, not affected in the least, and I can see things like the careful woven texture of the carpet, not even moving. But when I am afraid I no longer exist in any relation to these things. I suppose because things are not afraid.”

“I think we are only afraid of ourselves,” the doctor said slowly. “No,” Luke said. “Of seeing ourselves clearly and without disguise.”

“Of knowing what we really want,” Theodora said. She pressed her cheek against Eleanor's hand and Eleanor, hating the touch of her, took her hand away quickly.

**Related Characters:** Theodora, Luke Sanderson, Doctor John Montague, Eleanor Vance (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 117-118

### Explanation and Analysis

Conversations like the one in this passage occur frequently throughout the novel as Eleanor, Montague, Luke, and Theodora either sit idly in Hill House, waiting for something frightening to happen, or dissect the terrifying noises and illusions they're hearing and seeing. These discussions—largely intellectual or academic—create a distancing effect, which plays into the novel's larger theme of fear and dissociation. By methodically dissecting the very nature of fear itself, Eleanor and the others hope to dampen or diminish their own suffering during their prolonged state of unease during their stay at Hill House. As a result of these conversations, however, Eleanor and Theodora and the others find themselves reacting strangely to the phenomenon of terror, often feeling either flat, serene, and unaffected during horrifying experiences or swinging wildly to the other side of the pendulum and being unable to escape the clutches of their own dread.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

“I must say, John, I never expected to find you all so nervous,” Mrs. Montague said. “I deplore fear in these matters.” She tapped her foot irritably. “You know perfectly well, John, that those who have passed beyond expect to see us happy and smiling; they *want* to know that we are thinking of them lovingly. The spirits dwelling in this house may be actually suffering because they are aware that you are afraid of them.”

**Related Characters:** Mrs. Montague (speaker), Doctor John Montague

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 135

### Explanation and Analysis

The four main characters' spell of isolation is broken when Doctor Montague's wife, Mrs. Montague—a parapsychologist in her own right, but a pompous, showy, and ineffectual one—arrives to join the experiment at Hill House. Mrs. Montague's arrival signals a shift in the story; as she comes into the house full of good will towards the entity haunting it, believing that one or more lost and pained souls are simply hoping to be heard and understood, she indirectly reveals that the opposite is in fact true. Mrs.

Montague's beliefs and practices are considered “balderdash” by her husband, who has opened his mind to the possibility that all of them are in quite over their heads, threatened by a deeper and more sinister presence than any of them wish to acknowledge. Meanwhile, Mrs. Montague obtusely believes that the human's presence in the house is psychologically torturing the spirits on the other side of the paranormal divide—in reality, things are the other way around.

“Eleanor Nellie Nell Nell. They sometimes do that,” Mrs. Montague broke off to explain. “They repeat a word over and over to make sure it comes across all right.”

Arthur cleared his throat. “What do you want?” he read.

[...]

“Want to be home.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Waiting.”

“Waiting for what?”

“Home.” Arthur stopped, and nodded profoundly. “There it is again,” he said. “Like a word, and use it over and over, just for the sound of it.”

**Related Characters:** Arthur Parker, Mrs. Montague (speaker), Eleanor Vance

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 142

### Explanation and Analysis

When Mrs. Montague and her companion Arthur Parker conduct an automatic writing session with the spirit of Hill House, Doctor Montague dismisses the technique—and any results it might yield—as juvenile nonsense. However, as Arthur reads aloud the notes produced by the planchette, it becomes clear that whatever guided Mrs. Montague's hand during the session is once again calling to or taunting Eleanor by making reference to her nickname (“Nell”), her desire for a home, and the prolonged feeling of “waiting” which has characterized her life. Hearing these notes, which echo the earlier writing on the wall (first in chalk, then in blood), Eleanor is horrified. It is perhaps at this point that she comes to believe she has no choice but to accept the house's desire for her, give herself over, and abandon all

hope of escaping its clutches with her body, mind, and soul intact.

☞ Somewhere there was a great, shaking crash... [...] Eleanor heard the laughter over all, coming thin and lunatic, rising in its little crazy tune, and thought, No; it is over for me. It is too much, she thought, I will relinquish my possession of this self of mine, abdicate, give over willingly what I never wanted at all; whatever it wants of me it can have.

"I'll come," she said aloud, and was speaking up to Theodora, who leaned over her. The room was perfectly quiet, and between the still curtains at the window she could see the sunlight.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance (speaker), Theodora

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 150

### Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, at the height of a particularly harrowing, gut-wrenching, and disorienting wave of disturbances in the middle of the night, Eleanor has at last had enough of the house. She knows it is trying to single her out from the writing on the wall and the other horrible illusions and hallucinations she's experienced—now, Eleanor at last decides to “give over willingly” the whole of who she is. Eleanor “never wanted at all,” she says, to be in possession of a self—she has always wanted to be a part of something larger. Now, she decides that if she cannot make the human connections she hoped to make on this journey, she may as well sacrifice herself to something else. The time jump that occurs when Eleanor says she'll “come,” meaning she'll go with the presence haunting the house wherever it wants to take her, shows that something within her has undergone a severing or a schism. She has lost time, and has no sense of what happened to her after she made her silent, unholy pact with the spirit of Hill House.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ “And your night?” the doctor asked timidly. “Did you spend a—ah—profitable night?”

“If by profitable you meant comfortable, John, I wish you would say so. No, in answer to your most civil inquiry, I did *not* spend a comfortable night. I did not sleep a wink. That room is unendurable.”

“Noisy old house, isn't it?” Arthur said. “Branch kept tapping against my window all night; nearly drove me crazy, tapping and tapping.”

**Related Characters:** Arthur Parker, Mrs. Montague, Doctor John Montague (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 152-153

### Explanation and Analysis

After surviving a night of terrifying disturbances alone in a room with his three subjects and companions—Luke, Theodora, and Eleanor—Doctor Montague comes to breakfast feeling shaky and frightened. When he asks his wife and her travelling companion, Arthur, how they fared throughout the night, they seem to have no knowledge of any sort of disturbance having occurred. This shows that in spite of Mrs. Montague and Arthur's unwavering confidence in their methods of communicating with the spirits of the beyond, they are in fact so inconsequential (or even repulsive) to whatever is haunting Hill House that the pair have become unable to hear or see that presence at all. This selective haunting mirrors the ways in which the presence appeared in a different form to Luke and the Doctor than it did to Theodora and Eleanor on their second night at Hill House, and shows that the presence has clear, conscious designs on each member of the party.

☞ She heard the little melody fade, and felt the slight movement of air as the footsteps came close to her, and something almost brushed her face; perhaps there was a tiny sigh against her cheek, and she turned in surprise. Luke and the doctor bent over the chessboard, Arthur leaned confidently close to Theodora, and Mrs. Montague talked.

None of them heard it, she thought with joy; nobody heard it but me.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance (speaker), Mrs.

Montague, Theodora, Arthur Parker, Doctor John  
Montague, Luke Sanderson

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 167

### Explanation and Analysis

As Eleanor sits around the rest of the group in the parlor after dinner, she delights in being able to see and hear a gentle, childlike presence in the room, which no one else can see or hear. Eleanor has been longing all her life to be wanted and beloved—to be somebody's favorite. After giving herself over to the house the previous night, Eleanor now feels that the house has chosen her for some great purpose. When the house originally singled Eleanor out by writing her name on the wall and responding to her taunts during episodes of shaking and pounding at the doors at night, Eleanor felt attacked and bullied—now that she has surrendered to the house, though, she feels powerful, loved, and, most important of all, at home in the world. The dramas of her human companions mean nothing to her now—she no longer cares about winning Theodora or Luke's favor, and is only interested in her relationship with the house and the unnamed entity which haunts it.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ Dancing, the carpet soft under her feet, she came to the door behind which Theodora slept; faithless Theo, she thought, cruel, laughing Theo, wake up, wake up, wake up, and pounded and slapped the door, laughing, and shook the doorknob and then ran swiftly down the hall to Luke's door and pounded; wake up, she thought, wake up and be faithless. None of them will open their doors, she thought; they will sit inside, with the blankets pressed around them, shivering and wondering what is going to happen to them next; wake up, she thought, pounding on the doctor's door; I dare you to open your door and come out to see me dancing in the hall of Hill House.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance (speaker), Doctor John Montague, Luke Sanderson, Theodora

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 169

### Explanation and Analysis

The night after being possessed by the house, Eleanor wakes up in the middle of the night and sneaks out of her bed. She delights in creeping up and down the halls of the house banging on her neighbors' doors, knowing that they will believe her to be the presence haunting the house, and refuse to open their doors for her. Eleanor has spent the day creeping around the house out of sight, listening in to others' conversations and behaving, already, like a ghost. Now, Eleanor leans into the fact that she has, in a way, become part of the entity which possesses the house. She feels powerful and at home in a way she never has before, and her glee and happiness in inspiring in others the terror the house so recently created within her shows that she wants to share her newfound sense of belonging.

☝☝ No stone lions for me, she thought, no oleanders; I have broken the spell of Hill House and somehow come inside. I am home, she thought, and stopped in wonder at the thought. I am home, I am home, she thought; now to climb.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance (speaker)

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 171

### Explanation and Analysis

As Eleanor runs gleefully through the halls of Hill House in the middle of the night, she feels powerful and safe rather than vulnerable and anxious. She has, she believes, melded with the presence which possesses the house, and become privy to all its secrets. The air which once seemed cold and carried a putrid smell is now warm and inviting; rooms which once repelled Eleanor now invite her in. Eleanor's journey throughout the novel has been a search for home, friendship, and community, and though she has failed every step of the way, she has at last convinced herself that she's found the place where she belongs. The novel suggests this is part delusion and part truth—Eleanor *does* have a strange connection to the house, which is a malevolent energy seeking to possess her. Eleanor, in a dissociative and desperate state brought on by prolonged terror, believes the house is her friend or companion, when in reality, it has nefarious designs on her life and her independence. Eleanor, though, is so desperate for a place to call home that she

willfully tips herself over the edge, surrendering to the house's influence and becoming a malleable puppet.

“I haven't any apartment,” she said to Theodora. “I made it up. I sleep on a cot at my sister's, in the baby's room. I haven't any home, no place at all.” [...] She laughed, hearing her own words, so inadequate and so unutterably sad. [...] “So you see there's no place you can send me.”

I could, of course, go on and on, she wanted to tell them, seeing always their frightened, staring faces. I could go on and on, leaving my clothes for Theodora; I could go wandering and homeless, errant, and I would always come back here. It would be simpler to let me stay, more sensible, she wanted to tell them, happier.

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance (speaker), Carrie, Theodora

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 177

### Explanation and Analysis

Eleanor, having exhibited definitive signs of supernatural possession (or at the very least intense psychological disturbance), is, in this passage, being told that she'll need to leave Hill House and return home. She is reluctant to do so—she feels that Hill House, now, is her true home, and that her connection to the place is fated and spiritual. As her companions, including Theodora, try to coax her to return home with kind words about all she has waiting for her, Eleanor reveals that she has been lying to everyone about the quiet, pleasant life she lives back in the city. Eleanor has no apartment of her own, and instead sleeps “on a cot” in her niece's room. She is profoundly isolated, and always has been. She has “no place at all” in the world, and no possessions to her name other than the few things she's brought with her to the manse. Eleanor's friends are horrified to learn the truth, and profoundly saddened by what they now recognize as Eleanor's desperation to attach herself to the house. Eleanor, however, has no shame or anxiety about revealing the truth any longer—all she wants is to be allowed to stay at Hill House and be “happy.” Eleanor's journey to Hill House has been a search for a new place to call home—and in spite of all she's suffered at Hill House, she'd rather stay here than return to the drab, cramped apartment in the city where she's unloved and

unwanted.

“Go away, Eleanor, you can't stay here; but I can,” she sang, “but I can; *they* don't make the rules around *here*. They can't turn me out [...]; I won't go, and Hill House belongs to *me*.”

With what she perceived as quick cleverness she pressed her foot down hard on the accelerator... [...] I am really doing it, she thought, turning the wheel to send the car directly at the great tree at the curve of the driveway, I am really doing it, I am doing this all by myself, now, at last; this is me, I am really really really doing it by myself.

In the unending, crashing second before the car hurled into the tree she thought clearly, *Why* am I doing this? *Why* am I doing this? *Why* don't they stop me?

**Related Characters:** Eleanor Vance (speaker), Luke Sanderson, Theodora, Doctor John Montague

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 181-182

### Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's penultimate passage, Eleanor—who has been forced to leave Hill House after displaying signs not just of psychological disturbance, but supernatural possession—decides to crash her car into a large tree in the drive of Hill House rather than leave the place she has come to believe is her one true home. Eleanor's frenzied desire to show that Hill House “belongs” to her and that she “make[s] the rules” not just of the house, but of her own life, spirals out of control as she makes the choice (or *believes* she's making the choice) to commit suicide rather than leave. Eleanor experiences a heady glee as she puts her plan in motion, and it is only in the last instant before the collision that she seems to snap out of her trance for some reason and reckon with what she's doing, why she's doing it, and why her so-called friends are not coming to her aid. Eleanor's desperate search for a place to call home has culminated in her giving her entire self, body and soul, over to the evil entity that possesses Hill House. Eleanor feels she has melded with the house and found her true home—after a life spent in isolation, she does not want to give up the feeling of belonging she's found. Her final and tragic moment of clarity, however, shows that Eleanor was truly under the house's influence during her whole stay there—she has been tricked and possessed, and her painful

existence has come to an end which renders her Hill

House's victim, once and for all.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

The novel opens with a description of the titular manor **Hill House**, a “not sane” place which contains an unnamed presence that “walk[s] alone.” The narrator posits that “no live organism can continue for long to exist sanely under conditions of absolute reality.”

Doctor John Montague is a Doctor of Philosophy in anthropology who secretly harbors a desire to study and analyze “supernatural manifestations,” yet fears besmirching his name and shattering his “air of respectability.” He has rented **Hill House** for three months, hoping to study the haunted place and finally legitimize the study of paranormal happenings. Inspired by “the methods of the intrepid nineteenth-century ghost hunters,” Montague plans to bring a group of psychically sensitive people to Hill House for a summer to provoke and observe whatever presence resides within the secluded manor. Having combed parapsychologists’ reports, “sensational newspapers,” and other records, he has assembled a list of people who meet his criteria, and mailed invitations to Hill House which explain the purpose of the retreat to this select group. Out of a dozen letters sent, Montague has received only four replies—out of those four, only two will ultimately show.

Eleanor Vance, one of the participants in the **Hill House** experiment, is thirty-two years old. She has been caretaker to her invalid mother for eleven years, nursing a hatred of the woman all the while. Now that her mother is dead, Eleanor lives with her brother-in-law, her sister Carrie, and their five-year-old daughter—all of whom she hates. Due to the isolated nature of her life, Eleanor is awkward and profoundly lonely. When she was twelve, “showers of stones” fell intermittently for three days on the home she and her sister shared with their mother. Though their mother claimed the stones were thrown by angry neighbors, the story became local lore and evidence of a poltergeist in the house—for this reason, Eleanor has wound up on Doctor Montague’s list.

Eleanor receives Montague’s invitation with glee—all her life, she has been waiting for something exciting to happen to her. She accepts the invitation and begins looking forward to the summer at **Hill House**, despite her sister and brother-in-law’s suggestions that Montague is a scammer or predator who is seeking out vulnerable young women like Eleanor so that he can “experiment” on them.

*The novel opens on a distant and rather hopeless note that establishes the stakes of the narrative: this passage lends an objectivity to the fact that something is haunting Hill House.*



*For Doctor Montague, a summer at Hill House is a chance to redeem his career and legitimize years of research. He approaches each step of bringing the experiment to fruition with a calculating hopefulness that verges on desperation. Montague is going into the summer at Hill House with something to prove—but as the novel will soon reveal, he’s not the only one with a chip on his shoulder.*



*This passage introduces Eleanor and shows that she is vulnerable in many ways. Isolated, lonely, and plagued throughout her life by burdens that seem to be at turns supernatural and psychological, Eleanor seems like the perfect subject for Montague’s experiment at Hill House.*



*Eleanor is so excited by the chance to participate in something larger than herself—and get herself away from her controlling family—that she ignores possible threats to her own health and well-being.*



Theodora, a psychic who goes by her first name only, also accepts Doctor Montague's invitation with excitement. She is renowned for her ability to identify nineteen out of twenty cards held up by an assistant out of sight and hearing. Theodora shares an apartment with a female friend, with whom she quarrels terribly shortly before departing for Hill House for reasons indefinable. Luke Sanderson is a liar and a thief, and the third person confirmed to visit **Hill House** for the summer. He is not a psychic subject, however—he is the man who stands to inherit the house once his aunt, its current owner, passes. Luke has been forced by the family lawyer to accompany Montague to the house for the summer to ensure that nothing goes wrong and no damage is done to the property.

Eleanor argues with her brother-in-law and Carrie about whether she can take the car she helped pay for, and which they all share, to **Hill House** for the summer. Eleanor's sister worries that they'll need it on their own summer vacation should their daughter Linnie fall ill. In spite of Eleanor's protestations that the car is half hers, Carrie insists that due to the mysterious nature of Eleanor's summer plans, she shouldn't be allowed to take the car.

The next morning, however, Eleanor takes a taxi into the city, to the parking garage where the car is kept—she plans to steal it, knowing she has a right to take the vehicle for a few weeks. In her hurry to get to the parking garage undetected, she bumps into a little old lady on the street, spilling the woman's groceries onto the sidewalk. Eleanor offers to pay the woman's taxi fare home to make up for the blunder, and as the woman tucks herself into the taxi, she thanks Eleanor and tells her she'll be "praying" for her.

Eleanor takes the car out of the garage and begins driving out of the city, thrilled to have "finally taken a step" in the direction of her own independence. As she leaves the city limits, she pulls out a letter from Doctor Montague which contains detailed directions to **Hill House**. The directions specify that anyone travelling to Hill House should not stop in the village at the foot of it, Hillsdale, as the people there are "openly hostile to anyone" who inquires about the mansion.

*Theodora and Luke are introduced as individuals who live very different lives than Eleanor, but nonetheless wind up at Hill House—and are on a journey that could be called a search for home. Theodora is assertive and independent where Eleanor is meek and needy, but her home life clearly leaves something to be desired. Luke is searching for home in a different sense, as he stands to inherit Hill House one day.*



*This passage shows just how deeply Eleanor's own family infantilizes and thus isolates her—a pattern which has recurred all her life.*



*Eleanor is determined to get herself to Hill House in spite of her sister's protestations. However, this strange encounter with the old woman could be seen as an omen of bad things to come, as it suggests that Eleanor will need prayers.*



*Doctor Montague's direction to the house are themselves foreboding, and yet Eleanor has no reservations about setting out on her journey without looking back.*



Eleanor, who has never driven far alone before in her life, is excited and thrilled to be out on the open road. She tries to savor each mile she travels and soak up every minute of her newfound independence. She considers abandoning her plans to go to **Hill House** and simply living a vagabond existence throughout the countryside, but is ultimately forced to admit that her curiosity about the house and Doctor Montague is driving her forward. As Eleanor passes a large and beautiful house with stone lions at the front, she descends into a deep fantasy in which the house belongs to her.

Eleanor stops for lunch after having driven just over a hundred miles. At a restaurant she sits near a family of four, and watches as a little girl, who has ordered milk, nearly throws a tantrum over not being able to drink out of a special cup she has at home—a cup with stars at the bottom, which she can look at as she drinks. Eleanor wishes she could urge the little girl not to settle for drinking out of a cup that isn't special, because "once they have trapped [her] into being like everyone else," everything will change.

As she arrives in crooked, dirty, gloomy Hillsdale, Eleanor instantly regrets her decision to stop and rest in the town against Montague's advice. Nevertheless, she goes into a diner and orders coffee from a glum and "chinless" waitress. Eleanor sips coffee silently alongside a man whom Eleanor believes is making fun of her to the waitress using glances and gestures. Eleanor feigns ignorance about the town, asking its name and insisting she's just passing through. As Eleanor enquires about how large the town is, what there is to do within it, and whether it gets many visitors, the man at the other end of the counter becomes upset. He stands swiftly, pays for his food, and says abruptly to Eleanor that people only leave Hillsdale—they never come to it. After the man leaves the diner, the waitress glumly agrees with him—"the lucky ones," she says, leave Hillsdale forever.

Eleanor gets back in her car and starts on the rocky, unpaved road up to **Hill House**. She worries that the rutted road will damage the car—and, for the first time all day, wonders if her sister and brother-in-law have realized yet that she's stolen the car. She laughs almost gleefully, happy to be far from home. As the road up to Hill House thickens with overgrowth, she becomes aware of the decreasing amount of sunlight, and as she comes around a curve and enters the clearing at the gate of Hill House, she is full of dread, and wonders why she has come after all.

*The novel implies that there is a difference between being alone and being lonely—though Eleanor has always been surrounded by her family, she's been lonely all her life. Now, out on the open road all on her own, she feels a sense of freedom, and dreams about the possibilities that could open up to her.*



*Eleanor is highly attuned to this benign interaction she witnesses in the restaurant, showing that she is a deeply sensitive person—and someone who knows what it's like to be controlled by others and deprived of her dreams. This passage hints at Eleanor's lonely, stifling past.*



*Eleanor is having so much fun on her road trip that she decides to extend her journey a while longer by stopping in Hillsdale, even though Montague expressly warned everyone not to in his directions. Eleanor sees, as she stops in the town for a while, that there is a dark, resentful, almost cursed energy to the place—people here long to get out of their present circumstances, and seem almost crushed by the gloomy atmosphere of the town. How this connects to the house remains to be seen—but as Jackson plays with the idea of cursed or evil places, the relationship between Hillsdale and Hill House will become a bit clearer.*



*Eleanor remains cheerful even after the strange experience at the Hillsdale diner—but as she continues up the road to Hill House, even her unrelenting optimism about her newfound independence is challenged by the dark force that seems to permeate the air around the house.*



The tall, heavy gate to the house is locked, chained, and barred. Eleanor presses the horn of her car, and soon a man appears on the other side of the gate. He peers through the bars and demands to know who Eleanor is and what she wants. She insists she's been invited to **Hill House** by Doctor Montague, but the man at the gate taunts her, and refuses to let her in. He tells Eleanor that she's the only one of Doctor Montague's guests who's shown up, but Eleanor insists that she wants to be admitted to the house anyway.

*Eleanor has ignored every warning sign so far—and despite the heavy-chained gate and the agitated caretaker stationed there, she remains determined to press on in her search for independence and adventure.*



Before opening the gates, the caretaker states that he wants to make sure Eleanor knows what's "waiting for [her] in there." Eleanor feels a strange relief at being given one final chance to turn the car around and go home, away from the looming manor before her, but summons her courage and demands to be let in at once. The caretaker opens the gates for Eleanor, but as she drives the car through them, he approaches her window and warns her that she'll soon be sorry she made him open the gate. The caretaker introduces himself as Dudley, and tells Eleanor that no one but he and his wife has stayed around **Hill House**—but even the two of them won't stay on the property after dark.

*The caretaker, Mr. Dudley, seems to want to taunt Eleanor for her foolishness in coming to such a place—but also seems to want to save her from becoming trapped in the house's orbit. The question remains throughout the novel of why Dudley and his wife have stayed on at Hill House despite their obvious fear and hatred of the place, suggesting that a dark, mysterious force keeps people roped in to Hill House's designs. This is reminiscent of what the people in the diner said about how only "the lucky ones" ever leave Hillsdale, suggesting that the town itself also keeps people ensnared in its grasp.*



Eleanor drives up to **Hill House** along the winding, twisting road, occasionally catching a glimpse through the trees of the house's tall towers and spires. As she finally comes into full view of the house, she puts her foot on the brake and stares at the manse: it looks "vile" and "diseased," and Eleanor longs to get away from the property "at once."

*The energy emanating from the house immediately strikes the sensitive Eleanor as terrifying and sickening. As the chapter closes on a cliffhanger, Jackson introduces the central symbol of Hill House in its full terror.*



## CHAPTER 2

**Hill House** is a "place of despair," a house which seems almost "awake" to Eleanor. She feels the house is "without kindness" and was never meant to be inhabited by humans. There is something about it which tells her it will not be changed unless it is "destroyed." Eleanor wishes she would have turned back at the gate, and though a voice inside her tells her to leave, she convinces herself to press on.

*Without even setting foot in the house, Eleanor is able to sense certain things about it just by looking at it. This foreshadows her odd, uncanny connection to the house, as well as its supernatural pull on her in spite of her very real fear and hatred of the place.*



As Eleanor puts her foot on the bottom step up to the front door, she finds that doing so takes a great deal of strength. She tries to sing a small song to herself—the refrain "Journeys end in lovers meeting" lifts her mood as she approaches the "enormous and dark" manor. She uses a heavy knocker in the shape of a child's face to rap at the door. A woman answers it—Eleanor realizes this must be Mrs. Dudley, the caretaker's wife. As the woman lets Eleanor inside, Eleanor senses an "air of dirtiness" about the woman in spite of her tidy appearance and clean apron. She realizes the murky energy she's feeling is a product of **Hill House** itself.

*Eleanor lives much of her life in her head, indulging fantasies of alternate paths she could have taken and singing herself strange little songs. This one is not actually a song but a line from Shakespeare's **Twelfth Night**. By telling herself that her journey is about to end in a fortuitous meeting or even romance, Eleanor convinces herself to put aside her very real fears and press on. This shows Eleanor's ability to dissociate from the truth and take charge of her own thoughts—for now.*



Eleanor asks Mrs. Dudley to show her to her room, willing herself not to cry—she feels abject horror as she looks around the house’s main hall, which is “overfull of dark wood.” Mrs. Dudley wordlessly begins climbing the stairs, and Eleanor follows, clutching her suitcase. At the top of the stairs, on the second floor, Eleanor looks around and gets the impression that the upper floors of the house were finished hastily during its construction—the ornate carvings found in the wood on the first floor are mirrored upstairs in a hasty, deranged manner. Mrs. Dudley shows Eleanor into her room—“the blue room”—which is filled with a “clashing disharmony” just like the rest of **Hill House**.

As Eleanor sets her suitcase down, Mrs. Dudley robotically explains the schedule at **Hill House**. Mrs. Dudley states that she sets dinner out at six o’clock sharp and leaves shortly thereafter. Breakfast is ready at nine o’clock each morning. Mrs. Dudley and Mr. Dudley live in town, six miles away, and never stay on the grounds after dark. She is sure to tell Eleanor that there won’t be anyone around should she or the other guests need help—and no one in town would “even hear [them] in the night.” No resident of Hillsdale will come near the manor.

Mrs. Dudley leaves the room. Even though she doesn’t want to stay in the “awful” house and is off-put by the blue room’s “chillingly wrong” atmosphere and dimensions, Eleanor tries to shake off her fear and get in a cheery mood as she unpacks her suitcase. She admires the clothes she’s brought along—including several pairs of slacks, which her mother, she knows, would have disapproved of. As soon as Eleanor is finished unpacking, she feels a sense of fear and dread creep in again—she is relieved when she hears the sound of a car approaching, and another person entering the front doors of **Hill House**.

Eleanor runs downstairs to greet the new arrival—a woman who introduces herself as Theodora. Despite having just set foot in the house, Theodora is clearly already experiencing the same fear and dread Eleanor is. Eleanor introduces herself and leads Theodora upstairs to the green bedroom adjacent to hers. The two are connected by a shared bathroom. Mrs. Dudley comes upstairs with the two women, and begins giving Theodora the same speech about the meal schedule she gave Eleanor in the same flat tone.

*Eleanor travels deeper and deeper into the house, ignoring the warning signs it’s giving her and her own personal terror. Here, Jackson begins developing Hill House as a symbol which stands in for the depths of the human mind, as Eleanor seems fascinated by how horrible and nonsensical the house is.*



*Mrs. Dudley, like her husband, seems to have been adversely affected by her prolonged association with—or exposure to—Hill House. Mrs. Dudley’s flat voice suggests that she must dissociate, to some degree, whenever she enters the house, in order to protect herself. She attempts to warn Eleanor that there are risks to staying at this place, but Eleanor does not heed the woman.*



*Eleanor reminds herself of her newfound independence and freedom as a balm against the inexplicable fear she’s feeling. She’s telling herself that ignoring her fears about the house is the right thing to do—when she should, in reality, be trusting her instincts.*



*Eleanor and Theodora bond almost immediately. Their innate, shared hatred of the place, and the outsized gratitude they feel at each other’s presence as a result, provides both of them with the illusion of closeness and destiny. However, in reality the two women will come to find that they’re very different, and often emotionally or ideologically at odds.*



After Mrs. Dudley leaves, Eleanor shows Theodora her room, and the two discuss how hungry they are. Despite how “terrible” the house is, Theodora and Eleanor quickly bond over their shared horror of their new surroundings. Theodora suggests they go outside and explore the grounds for a little while before dark, and Eleanor puts on a red sweater and matching sandals. Theodora changes, too, into a bright yellow shirt. Eleanor feels envious of Theodora’s beauty.

Eleanor and Theodora step out onto the veranda and take in the expansive grounds of **Hill House**. The house is aptly named—behind the manse there are many green, rolling hills. Theodora predicts that she will be terrified of the hills falling down on the house during the entirety of her stay at Hill House. Eleanor becomes afraid that Theodora is going to pack up and leave, but Theodora excitedly runs off onto the lawn, calling to Eleanor to come help her find a brook somewhere on the property where they can have a picnic.

The girls follow a path through the trees until they reach a pretty stream. They lie down in the grass together, at peace for their first time since setting foot on the **Hill House** grounds. As the girls discuss their childhoods, they find similarities their lives have shared—Theodora jokingly declares them “cousins.” The girls’ laughter is cut short, though, when Theodora spots something moving in the grass and grows frightened. She clutches Eleanor’s hand, but after a moment declares that she must have just seen a rabbit. Eleanor suggests they hurry back up to the house in case Doctor Montague and the others have arrived. As they walk back, Eleanor pauses, and tells Theodora that she’s afraid to set foot in the house. Theodora embraces Eleanor and encourages her to have courage—she jokingly adds that they can’t be separated now, just when they’ve realized they’re “cousins.”

## CHAPTER 3

As Eleanor and Theodora arrive back at **Hill House**, it is nearly dark. The women spot a man waiting on the veranda—upon seeing him, Eleanor finds herself thinking again of the refrain “Journeys end in lovers meeting.” As the man sees the women approaching, he remarks that if the two of them are the “ghostly inhabitants” haunting the house, then he will stay forever. Eleanor finds the flirtatious comment “silly.” The man introduces himself as Luke Sanderson, and Eleanor recognizes by his last name that he is a member of the family who owns the property. Luke tells the girls that Doctor Montague is inside, exploring the “haunted house.” Theodora looks around at how dark it’s become, and notes that as night approaches, the idea of the house being haunted isn’t so “funny” anymore. Doctor Montague emerges from the front doors, welcoming Theodora and Eleanor formally to Hill House.

*Eleanor is slightly jealous of Theodora right from the start. Theodora is beautiful and confident—all the things that Eleanor wishes she could be, and resents having been held back from all her life. On another note, the two women’s quick bond is immediately heightened as they both choose to match with one another by wearing yellow.*



*The beautiful and idyllic exterior of Hill House stands in sharp contrast to its monstrous visage and interior. The girls rejoice in being outside—but the illusion of safety they feel there is just that, a trick of the mind.*



*The many similarities Theodora and Eleanor find between their lives makes them feel intimately connected to one another despite having just met. The parallels between the two girls—which often reads as a kind of twinning phenomenon, despite the very obvious differences between them—serve to deepen the uncanny nature of the events that take place in the house, and set up a closeness as well as a rivalry between the two psychically gifted women.*



*The relationship between Eleanor and Luke is purposefully confusing and confounding. She has ingrained within herself the idea that “journeys end in lovers meeting” (a line from Shakespeare’s [Twelfth Night](#)), and so when she sees a man on the property for the first time, she’s filled with a kind of romantic hope. However, at the same time, she seems to look down on Luke and find him “silly” or annoying. Eleanor has told herself that her search for home, companionship, and purpose will end in a traditional way—the novel, however, will come to show that Eleanor could not be headed down a darker, stranger path towards a sense of “belonging.”*



Doctor Montague, Eleanor, Theodora, and Luke retire to the dim, firelit study, where Luke fixes them all drinks. Doctor Montague makes a toast to their group's "success at **Hill House**," and Luke asks what exactly Montague defines as "success" in a place like this. Montague says he hopes their visit will be exciting, and that the book he'll write about their experiences will "rock [his] colleagues back on their heels." Eleanor remarks aloud that she can't believe they're all really at the haunted Hill House, and the room grows quiet—all four of them feel the "weight of the house press[ing] down" on them.

Luke suggests the four of them get acquainted with one another. All four begin self-consciously and jokingly telling farcical tales about their past—Luke describes himself as a "bullfighter" and Eleanor says she is an "artist's model" who lives a "mad, abandoned life" as a transient. Theodora claims to be the daughter of a great, rich lord, and Doctor Montague declares himself a "pilgrim" who wanders the earth.

Montague states that tomorrow, the four of them will get to exploring the house room by room—right now, though, he suggests they all go see about dinner. As they make their way to the dining room, Theodora becomes disoriented by the dark, twisting hall. Montague, who has studied maps of the house at length, offers to lead the other three through the "little odd rooms" which open up onto the dining room. As they walk, Doctor Montague describes the uncanny and strange layout of the house, which features rooms within rooms seemingly designed to disorient those who venture inside.

In the dining room, the group finds the table set lavishly. Food in warming dishes has been set out on the sideboard. As the group begins discussing the odd Mrs. Dudley and the fine table she's laid for them, Theodora suspects that Mrs. Dudley feels **Hill House** "belongs" to her, and is waiting for all of the Sanderson heirs to "die off in various horrible ways" so that she can get at a secret underground chamber full of treasures and jewels. Doctor Montague insists there are no secret chambers at Hill House—the others ask why they are here, if not to find out about the house's secrets.

*As the group gathers together for the first time, there is a strange energy around them. They feel an air of comingled hope and hopelessness—but try to push away the "weight" of the house and focus on their dreams of success, glory, and fulfillment.*



*Luke's use of humor, levity, and distraction to keep everyone's spirits high will be shown to have significantly diminishing returns as the novel progresses. For now, the lightness is welcomed—later on, however, it will just serve to highlight how truly dire things are at Hill House.*



*Hill House isn't hostile just in terms of its energy—the very bones of the house are designed to confuse and isolate the people who inhabit it, and perhaps even drive them mad. These cruel aims mirror the confounding twists, turns, and uncertainties of the human mind itself.*



*This passage seems to suggest that Hill House is not like other haunted houses, which promise some reward to its inhabitants or visitors for their troubles. Doctor Montague suggests that Hill House has nothing to offer—there are no jewels or prized possessions lying in wait, only more and more suffering to be found within.*



Doctor Montague confesses that he knows little more about the house than any of the others—he promises to tell them his mission tomorrow, in daylight. Luke, Eleanor, and Theodora demand to know the story of Hill House, but Doctor Montague is reluctant to tell it. He says that if he were to tell them, he'd frighten them off—and Hill House itself “dislikes letting its guests get away.” The last person to try to leave Hill House in darkness, he says, nearly two decades ago, was killed at the turn in the driveway when his horse “bolted and crushed him against [a] big tree.” When this anecdote only makes the group hungrier for the truth, Doctor Montague acquiesces, and promises to tell them everything in the drawing room after dinner.

After the meal, the group gathers in the little study again, and Doctor Montague sips a glass of brandy. He admits that he is nervous to tell them all he knows about **Hill House** and color their perception of it or influence their minds. Theodora, however, suggests it's the perfect time “for a ghost story.” The doctor warns Theodora not to speak flippantly about their surroundings or hold any “preconceived notions of ghosts and apparitions.” Montague wants the group to be “ignorant and receptive” as they encounter whatever psychic phenomena reside in Hill House—and to take copious notes. Doctor Montague says, however, that the group does deserve to be prepared for what they're going into.

Doctor Montague begins describing this history of **Hill House**. He states that “the concept of certain houses as unclean or forbidden” is an ancient one—just as some sites in the world are sacred or holy, some are inherently bad and evil. For over twenty years, Hill House has been uninhabitable—and has possibly been “evil from its start.” Doctor Montague sees the house not quite as evil, but as sick or “deranged.” Doctor Montague heard about the house a year ago, from a previous tenant—after investigating the place, he learned that no one who had rented the house had stayed more than a few days. Montague admits that he himself had a hard time securing even a short lease—and was able to do so only under the provision that a member of the family, Luke, accompany him.

Montague says that he has summoned Eleanor and Theodora because of their psychic sensitivities—Theodora has telepathic abilities, and Eleanor has been “intimately involved in poltergeist phenomena.” Eleanor balks at the categorization—she has always believed the stones thrown at her childhood home were the work of angry, “jealous” neighbors.

*Doctor Montague knows only the basic history of the house—but even this, he suggests, is too frightening for people to hear in the dark of night. He is afraid of scaring off the subjects of his experiment, and ending his own work before it's begun. Ultimately, though, Montague—a genuinely kind man—puts his participants first, and bends to their requests, showing he values them more than his research already, or at least wants to seem to.*



*This passage makes it clear that Doctor Montague is fearful of whatever resides in or controls Hill House to the point of reverence. He wants his companions to also be respectful of the entity all around them, and to understand its true power.*



*Though Jackson never reveals the full truth or specifics behind Hill House, she engages with tropes of myth and legend in this passage as she describes, through Doctor Montague, the mysterious root of Hill House's affliction. Jackson is suggesting that all the worst things people fear about hauntings are real.*



*Eleanor's past is another one of the novel's great unsolved mysteries. Whether the hail of rocks that fell upon her childhood home was the work of poltergeists, angry neighbors, or secret telekinetic abilities belonging to Eleanor herself is never revealed and is instead left ambiguous—and therefore all the more terrifying.*



Theodora asks what could truly live in the house that frightens people so—Doctor Montague replies that he does not want to “put a name to what has no name.” Doctor Montague asks the other three if any of them wants to leave, but they all admit that though they’re frightened, they want to stay. Eleanor says none of them could leave even if they wanted to—but is surprised by the utterance, as she was unaware the words were coming out of her mouth.

Doctor Montague pours himself another drink and tells the group more about **Hill House**. He explains that it was built over eighty years ago by a wealthy man named Hugh Crain as a home for his family. The house though, seemed to have been cursed from the outset—Crain’s young wife died before even setting eyes on the house, when the carriage bringing her up the road crashed in the driveway. The lady Crain was brought dead into the house. In the wake of his wife’s death, Crain became “sad and bitter,” and stubbornly insisted on raising his two daughters in Hill House, inhospitable though it was. Crain married twice more, but both wives died tragically. Crain traveled to Europe, where he remained abroad for most of the girls’ youth; they moved out of Hill House and went to stay with a cousin of their mothers’.

After Hugh Crain died, the house was left to the two sisters, who were by then young ladies. The older sister, a spinster, returned to **Hill House** to live alone, eventually taking a girl from the village of Hillsdale into the house “as a kind of companion.” Old Miss Crain, as she became known, quarreled constantly with her younger sister, who demanded to be given several family heirlooms kept in the house—jewels, furniture, and china. Eventually Old Miss Crain died in the house, and though her companion from the village insisted the house had been left to her, the younger Crain sister laid claim to the manor. The case went to court, where Old Miss Crain’s companion testified that the younger Crain sister had been spotted frequently inside the house at nights, making off with “her” heirlooms. This, Doctor Montague states, is potential evidence of the house’s powers.

*Again, Doctor Montague’s reverence for whatever haunts Hill House is clear in this passage. He does not see the force as something to be tamed, understood, or exorcised—he sees the chance to merely observe it as a gift.*



*This anecdote about Hill House’s history further complicates the places origins, raising the question of whether the house and its grounds were always evil and corrupt, and thus killed the lady Crain, or whether her death somehow sullied or corrupted what was then a normal house, forever warping the property into a house of horrors rather than a loving home.*



*The familial resentment which echoed through the generations of the Crain family is suggested to have furthered the destructive energy of Hill House. Hill House seems to reflect the fears of its inhabitants—perhaps as a way of driving them mad or pushing them to their limits.*



Though the companion won the case, the other Crain sister harassed her constantly with letters and threats. The companion eventually left the house “in terror,” insisting all the while that Crain sent cronies to burgle the house each night. The companion eventually killed herself—with no friends in the village and the constant threat of the Crain family’s harassment, not to mention the invisible burglars who still tormented her mind, she went mad and hung herself, rumor has it, from a tower of **Hill House**. Her cousins are the Sandersons, who now own the house. Though the other Crain sister is now dead, too, she insisted all her life that she never once went to the house, nor did she ever send anyone to burgle Hill House. At the conclusion of Montague’s horrible tale, Luke remarks jovially that he thinks they’ll all be “very comfortable here.”

Eleanor begins growing sleepy. The others discuss what games they could play. Montague says there’s a chess set in another room, and goes out to get it. When he returns, he is visibly shaken—as he lays out the chess set, he suggests that from now on, none of them should wander the halls alone. The **house**, he feels, is watching them all.

As the men play chess, Eleanor and Theodora sit by the fire and talk about their lives. Eleanor remembers feeling lonely as she cared for her mother, bored with nothing to do but read love stories. Eleanor reveals that she cared for her mother for eleven years—the woman just died three months ago, and Eleanor was not sorry when she went; her mother had not been a “happy” woman for a long time.

Eleanor asks Theodora about her life, and Theodora tells Eleanor about the bohemian apartment she shares with a friend—the two of them have filled it with old furniture and gaudy decorations. Theodora asks Eleanor where she lives, and Eleanor replies that she has a little place of her own, too, and is working at furnishing it slowly.

Everyone is sleepy, and they decide to head upstairs together. Montague announces his intent to read for an hour or so before bed, and offers to read aloud to anyone who isn’t ready to be alone in their rooms. As they all mount the stairs Eleanor realizes just how tired she is. The four of them all go off to their separate rooms. Eleanor’s room is freezing, and she locks her bedroom door, gets into bed, and pulls the quilt around her. She is very afraid, and believes the door to be moving. She comforts herself with thoughts of home, and reminds herself how brave she has been in coming such a long way.

*The story about Hill House, and the way it drove Old Miss Crain’s companion to psychosis and eventually to death, is terrifying and bleak, suggesting that Eleanor and her companions are in a dire situation indeed. Once again, Luke uses humor to lighten the mood, but the story leaves an indelible mark on the group, showing it just how powerful the place they’re staying truly is.*



*When in a group, Montague and the others can sense the house’s weight and presence—but when isolated, it seems, they have more profound and terrifying experiences within it.*



*Eleanor’s dark backstory is bleak and lonely. The fact that she lost her mother just three months ago suggests that she is still grappling with the loss, even if she was on some level grateful to be done with caring for her mother.*



*Eleanor, envious of Theodora’s independent and freewheeling lifestyle, lies about her own circumstances (recall that she lives with her sister and brother-in-law, not on her own) in order to make herself seem more normal and worldly.*



*Eleanor is terrified as she gets into bed on her first night at Hill House. As she waits for something horrible to happen, she tries to distract herself by thinking of what she’s gained through her journey to Hill House: a newfound sense of independence, and in many ways, a new self entirely. Eleanor’s journey into Hill House is symbolic of one’s journey into one’s own psyche: harrowing, but not without reward.*



## CHAPTER 4

Eleanor wakes in the morning having slept, surprisingly, quite soundly. She hears the water running in the bathroom, and calls out “good morning” to Theodora, who answers her sunnily and tells Eleanor she’s run a bath for her. Eleanor gets out of bed and looks out of the window—it is raining heavily outside. Theodora bangs on the door and says she’s starving—she urges Eleanor to hurry and bathe and dress sunnily, in bright colors, to lighten the mood inside the house.

Eleanor washes herself and dresses, and then the two of them start downstairs. Theodora is worried they won’t even be able to find the dining room, and indeed when they get to the first floor, they have to try several doors and call for Luke and Montague before they open the right one and find the men inside, eating at the table. The doctor, upon seeing the women, remarks that just a few moments ago, the doors to the dining room were ajar—they shut suddenly just before Theodora started calling.

The group remarks on the unexpectedly quiet, uneventful evening they all had. Eleanor says it’s embarrassing to recall how afraid she was that something would happen in the night, and then notices that as the conversation continues, the others try to steer the discussion away from the topic of fear. The group decides that they should spend the day exploring every nook and cranny of the house, leaving trails or signs for themselves to help navigate it and naming the rooms together. Mrs. Dudley comes into the room and robotically states that she is going to clear the dishes at ten. They all greet her good morning, but she simply repeats her refrain until they stand up and leave the dining room.

As the group sets out to explore the **house**, they are amazed by how dark and dreary the windowless, concentric rooms which make up the first floor are. Even the game room is bleak and macabre, with a large deer head mounted on the wall. Eleanor feels awful for the poor little Crain girls who were forced to grow up here. Montague points out the house’s odd features, like the verandah that wraps all the way around, the dank library, and the ominous tower at the top of the house, accessible through a trap door and an outdoor balcony. Eleanor balks at the idea of going into the tower, stammering something about her mother before growing embarrassed and shutting up.

*Eleanor’s second day at Hill House starts off in a positively cheerful way. Nothing bad happened in the night, and Eleanor—and Theodora—are riding high on this energy, feeling almost invincible.*



*There are spooky, inexplicable things happening within Hill House—but the group is, at this point, enlivened and intrigued rather than horrified by the strange happenings.*



*The group’s jovial and inquisitive mood grows heightened when they’re all together—but the reminder that Mrs. Dudley is a woman transformed and hollowed out by Hill House shows them all that there are still very real consequences to remaining alone and unguarded within the manor for too long.*



*The connection between Eleanor, her past with her mother, and her present at Hill House is tenuous and mysterious—but something about the imposing tower reminds Eleanor of her past and truly frightens her. Jackson purposefully keeps this connection ambiguous, allowing the atmosphere to darken on a more visceral level rather than explaining away Eleanor’s mental state easily.*



As the group continues exploring the house, Theodora points out the odd architecture—she and Eleanor should be able to see the tower from their bedroom windows, and yet they cannot. The doctor explains that **Hill House** has been designed to disorient its inhabitants—Hugh Crain wanted the house to be a “showplace,” a marvel of design, but organized the whole house so that “every angle [would be] slightly wrong.” Being in the house for a prolonged period of time and experiencing its angles, walls, and floors that are all just a fraction of a degree off from “normal” homes has a cumulatively maddening effect. Balance and reason, the doctor says, cannot be trusted in Hill House.

The group continues their tour. In one room, they find a huge and grotesque marble statue of the Crain family—Mrs. Dudley and Old Miss Crain’s young companion are featured in the sculpture, as well. The statue makes Eleanor want to cover her eyes, but Theodora is drawn to it, and even reaches out to touch it. There is a door out to the veranda on the far end of the room, and Theodora and Eleanor decide to have a little race around the perimeter of the house. They laugh gleefully and breathlessly as they run, but when Theodora darts into an open door, they stop short, face to face with Mrs. Dudley—they have entered the kitchen. Theodora apologizes for being so noisy, but Mrs. Dudley replies only that she sets out lunch at one o’clock. She then leaves the kitchen through a different door.

As Theodora and Eleanor look around the bright kitchen, they notice that there are over five doors out of the room. Theodora supposes that Mrs. Dudley wants to be able to “get out fast in any direction” should the need arise. Eleanor heads back out onto the veranda, and wanders around the circumference of the house. She spots the “hideous” tower again, and is struck by the thought that even if the rest of the house were to burn away, the tower would still stand. Eleanor is lost in thoughts of the tower when Luke comes up behind her and warns her to watch her balance—Eleanor realizes she has been staring upward, leaning back at a precarious angle. The group hurries back inside to have some sherry in the parlor before lunch.

After lunch, Montague suggests that everyone take some time to rest in their rooms. Eleanor and Theodora, though, unaccustomed to naps, spend the afternoon lounging on Theodora’s bed. Theodora paints her nails bright red, and offers to paint the plain, unglamorous Eleanor’s too. Eleanor enjoys having her toenails painted, but when she looks at them and sees them bright red, she becomes alarmed, and says she wants to go into the bathroom to wash it off. Theodora is disturbed by Eleanor’s panic, and suggests Eleanor go home. Eleanor says she doesn’t want to. Theodora touches Eleanor’s toes and tells her it’s too late to wash the polish off—it’s dry.

*Again, the ambiguous question of the origins of Hill House’s evil arises in this passage. Its confounding, bizarre design was born out of a desire to push boundaries and create something new—but when coupled with the malevolent presence within Hill House, its strange design reads as a purposeful trap.*



*As the group makes their way through Hill House, Eleanor and Theodora try to comfort one another by playing games, imposing an artificial sense of levity on their grim circumstances. The rollercoaster of terrifying lows and exhilarating highs they feel is brought on by a desire to stave off the dread being in Hill House inspires.*



*The house repulses and disorients everyone in the group, but Eleanor seems to be the individual most sensitive to its tricks and traps, and is most affected by the malevolent energy at the house’s core.*



*This scene seems to use the ritual of the pedicure to show that Eleanor both longs to be like Theodora, and fears leaving her old self behind. However, the application of blood-red nail polish also foreshadows another terrifying incident yet to come, one of Hill House’s darkest and most malevolent tricks. Eleanor’s visceral dread of the polish, then, may be a result of her psychic sensitivity to what the house has in store for her and Theodora rather than the fear of becoming more like Theodora.*



In the hall, the group reunites. Luke admits that he is decidedly not looking forward to inheriting **Hill House**. Montague leads the group down the hall to the nursery, which is a cold spot—as she enters the room, Eleanor feels she is “passing through a wall of ice.” The doctor says the phenomenon cannot be explained—though he believes the cold barrier at the door marks “the heart of the house.” The nursery itself is warm, marked by an “indefinable air of neglect” that upsets Eleanor. Theodora pulls Eleanor out of the room, and the doctor and Luke follow. The doctor says he wants to come back with chalk, a measuring tape, and thermometer to study the cold spot at night and see if it worsens when the sun goes down.

After dinner, the group retreats to the parlor, which they have been working to make cozier. As Luke and Theodora converse lightly and jokingly, Eleanor cannot shake a sense of dread. Montague notices she is nervous and admits that he is, too—they discuss the feeling that “something [...] is going to happen soon.” The doctor points out the ridiculousness of their collective choice to stay in the **house**, and urges Eleanor to promise him that she’ll leave immediately if she feels the house “catching at [her].” Eleanor smiles and promises that she will.

In the middle of the night, Eleanor hears something calling her name. She stumbles out of bed, disoriented, and says she’s “Coming, mother” as she reaches for the lights. She remembers that she is at **Hill House**, and realizes Theodora is calling her. She walks through the bathroom to Theodora’s room, where Theodora is sitting up in bed, wide-eyed. Theodora says that something is knocking at the door, and sure enough, Eleanor can hear a noise coming from down the hall. The air in Theodora’s room is “terribly cold.”

Eleanor tells herself to remain calm, even as she feels chills spreading up and down her spine. The hollow pounding noise grows closer, and Eleanor believes she can hear the distant sounds of Luke and Doctor Montague calling her name. As the knocking grows louder, Eleanor runs to the door and shouts “Go away!” as loud as she can. There is silence for a moment, but the cold persists, and soon the noise starts up again. Eleanor warns Theodora that she might scream, and Theodora laughs. The two of them hold each other on the bed as the doorknob twists and the wooden frame of the door trembles. Eleanor says tauntingly, “You can’t get in,” and the knocking stops—but is replaced by a terrifying giggle, which floats through the air and then disappears.

*The cold spot is a haunted house trope—a familiar phenomenon that most everyone recognizes as evidence of a haunting. Considering the more subtle tricks Hill House has been playing, Montague almost rejoices at this piece of evidence, grateful that there is classic proof of a disturbance—and oblivious to the fact that this easy, common cliché might be a trick in and of itself.*



*This passage contains an important bit of foreshadowing, as the Doctor seems to sense that the house may try to single Eleanor out and isolate her from the others with its tricks.*



*This passage starts with a deliberate blurring of the lines between the supernatural and the psychological—it’s unclear whether Eleanor is dreaming of her mother calling her name, or whether the house is creating an illusion meant to frighten and disorient her.*



*Eleanor and Theodora have their first encounter with the presence haunting Hill House together—they cling to one another for support, and even make fun of their instincts to scream and express their fear despite knowing it will do nothing to help save them. When Eleanor speaks to the presence, it reacts to her directly—growing angry and then taunting her, seeming to accept her boast as a challenge.*



Theodora and Eleanor hold each other on the bed as the cold dissipates. The episode is over, and they can hear Montague and Luke calling for them down the hall. Theodora opens the door for them; Luke cheerfully greets her, saying she looks as if she's seen a ghost. Luke is grateful for an excuse to drink in the middle of the night, he says, and procures a bottle of brandy and some glasses. The four of them sit in Theodora's room and drink together, and the doctor and Luke explain that while the knocking and the cold assaulted Eleanor and Theodora, the two of them encountered a dog—or a presence “like a dog”—which led them outside.

*Theodora, Eleanor, Luke, and Montague have all survived their first earnest encounter with the presence haunting Hill House—and attempt to comfort one another with lighthearted jokes and serious dissection of what happened to them all alike. The fact that the presence appeared to them as two different entities suggests that it is able to be in many places—and do many things—at the same time. Also of note is that the presence tried to distract Luke and Montague—those with no psychic sensitivity—while it came directly for Eleanor and Theodora, who both are more psychically gifted.*



Montague remarks that whatever presence was making so much noise against the door to Theodora's room could not be heard by him or Luke—they only came back inside when they heard Theodora and Eleanor shout. The doctor wonders if Hill House's “intention” is to separate the four of them from one another.

*The idea that the presence haunting Hill House is trying to separate their group in order to turn them against one another and isolate them from each other shows just how diabolical the house truly is.*



## CHAPTER 5

As Eleanor wakes in the morning, she thinks to herself how “unbelievably happy” she is. After a sleepless, frightening night, she nonetheless feels purely joyful, and the refrain “Journeys end in lovers meeting” fills her head. Eleanor hears Theodora calling flirtatiously to Luke from her room, and then hears Theodora knock on her own door. As Theodora enters Eleanor's room, she remarks on how beautiful Eleanor—whom she calls “Nell”—looks, and states that the “curious life” at Hill House agrees with her. Eleanor smiles, and notices that the life agrees with the radiant-looking Theodora, too.

*Despite the terrors of the previous night, Eleanor and the others all awake feeling oddly refreshed and even rejuvenated. The bracing nature of fear, perhaps, is emboldening them all—or perhaps something more sinister is at work, grooming them for continued encounters with the bizarre and unnamable. The line “Journeys end in lovers meeting” is from Shakespeare's [Twelfth Night](#), and enfolds the idea that Eleanor is longing to glean friendship and belonging from her “journey” of staying at the house.*



Theodora and Eleanor race laughing down the stairs to the dining room, where they greet everyone happily. Luke, too, is in a sunny mood, and only Doctor Montague looks drawn and tired. Despite his appearance, he is excited and thrilled by the previous night's events, and says he can't wait to tell his wife. Eleanor reflects on the previous night—though she remembers being afraid, she can't “imagine” the sensation of being frightened. Luke agrees that this morning he had to remind himself that the previous night's events had all been real. The doctor admits he is “trouble[d]” by the good mood everyone shares—he wonders if they are falling under a spell. When everyone seems frightened by this, the doctor reminds them that there is no physical threat to any of them—ghosts break down people's minds, not their bodies.

*The house's attempt to isolate and hoodwink its guests are clear—and the doctor is onto whatever is happening. He expresses skepticism about the glee and invincibility they're all feeling, and warns the others not to succumb to the house's subtle trickery.*



Mrs. Dudley enters the dining room and announces that it is ten o'clock—time for her to clear the table. Montague asks if they can sit at the table another fifteen minutes or so, but Mrs. Dudley seems to panic, repeating over and over that she clears breakfast at ten o'clock. The doctor acquiesces, and says that Mrs. Dudley can clear the table. They all leave the dining room laughing at the odd woman. They retreat to the parlor, but the doctor has a hankering for coffee, and sends Luke—who, he believes, Mrs. Dudley must regard as her future “master,” to ask her to put on a pot.

Just a few moments later, Luke bursts back into the parlor, white-faced and grinning. He urges everyone to come into the hall, and they all follow him; on the wall, there is writing in chalk. The lettering is huge and scraggly, taking up nearly the entire wall. The words read: “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME.” Eleanor is chilled and frightened, and begs the others to wipe the writing off the walls. Theodora puts an arm around Eleanor and guides her back into the parlor while Luke begins wiping the writing away with his handkerchief. Back in the parlor, Eleanor, paralyzed with fear, cries to Montague that the **house** knows her name. She begs Theodora to say she wrote it as a joke to frighten Eleanor, but the doctor assures Eleanor that none of them wrote it. Luke returns to the room and insists he didn't write the message, either.

Eleanor wonders why the **house** has chosen to taunt her. Theodora suggests that Eleanor wrote the letters herself, and the two begin quarreling quite viciously. Montague, after a minute or two, suggests that Theodora tried to make Eleanor angry in order to stop her from being afraid. A suspicion at the back of her mind, however, tells Eleanor that Theodora was not doing any such thing.

The rest of the day passes “lazily.” The group explores the grounds, and spends some quiet time alone in their rooms, writing accounts of what has befallen them so far. The next morning, the group's third morning in **Hill House**, Montague and Luke try to measure the cold spot while Eleanor and Theodora take notes for them. After the miserable work is done, the doctor, over lunch, suggests they all spend some time outside. Eleanor wonders if there is “still a world somewhere”—she is having trouble remembering the outside world. Luke agrees, saying that he feels as if he is marooned on an island. The doctor says that the outside world will soon be coming to them—his wife, Mrs. Montague, is arriving the day after tomorrow to join the group.

*Mrs. Dudley cannot deal with a break from routine—the depths of her fear are clearer than ever in this passage as she balks at a change to her schedule rather violently.*



*Though Eleanor and the others were feeling confident and even giddy in the wake of the previous night's disturbances, this new happening—which directly attempts to communicate with or intimidate Eleanor—is a different level of terrifying. Eleanor is convinced that the others, not the house, have turned against her, showing that she believes in the badness of people more than she believes in the supernatural. Just as Eleanor wanted to believe neighbors, not poltergeists or other unseen forces, were assaulting her childhood home, she wants to believe a human is responsible for the writing on the wall.*



*The budding rivalry between Eleanor and Theodora deepens in this passage as it becomes clear that despite the superficial closeness between the two, neither of them really trust one another.*



*As the hours turn into days, Eleanor and the others feel themselves losing their grip on reality—and their connection to the world beyond Hill House. The doctor assures them all that the spell will soon be broken by the arrival of new guests, but he himself seems worn down by the frightening work at hand.*



After lunch, Theodora and Eleanor head upstairs, planning to take naps. Shortly after entering her room, though, Eleanor hears Theodora scream. Eleanor hurries out to the hall to find Theodora staring “aghast” in the hall. Eleanor peers into Theodora’s room to find that there is red paint everywhere, all over Theodora’s things. Eleanor remarks that the room smells awful—Theodora, swooning, realizes that her room has been covered in blood. Both girls realize, at the same time, that there is more writing on the wall, but don’t step far enough into the room to see what it says. Eleanor suggests they call for Luke and Montague; Theodora implies that Eleanor is responsible for the damage, asking if she doesn’t want to keep the massacre a “secret just for the two of us.”

Theodora runs into her room and opens up the wardrobe to find that all her clothes are torn and stained with blood. Eleanor calls calmly for Montague and Luke, who come upstairs to find Theodora sobbing and kicking on the floor of her room in a full-on tantrum. Eleanor, entering the room for the first time, sees that the writing on the wall reads, once again, “HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR.”

Eleanor urges Montague and Luke to take Theodora into Eleanor’s own room to get her away from the horrible smell. Eleanor wonders what is happening, and why her name has again appeared on a wall of **Hill House**. The doctor returns from Eleanor’s room and tells Eleanor that Theodora will have to stay in there a while, and share Eleanor’s clothes, too. Eleanor tells the doctor that she’s not as frightened as she should be, and keeps thinking the writing must be paint, or even toenail polish—not blood. The doctor suggests they close up the room for the time being, and only return to study the writing on the wall once everyone has calmed down.

Eleanor returns to her room where she helps Theodora clean blood off her face and hands. Theodora laments to Montague that she and Eleanor will have to share a room and clothes—they’ll be, she says, “practically twins.” Eleanor says “cousins” quietly, but no one hears her.

Later, in the parlor, Eleanor finds herself disturbed by cruel and even violent thoughts about Theodora. She is angry with Theodora for having accused her of being responsible for the writing—and hates seeing her new roommate dressed in all her clothes. Theodora has tenderly apologized to Eleanor for behaving so irately and cruelly earlier, and Eleanor has pretended to accept Theodora’s apology.

*The rivalry and suspicion between Eleanor and Theodora intensifies in this passage, as the house attacks Theodora’s room and possessions. The house seems to be mirroring Theodora’s painting of Eleanor’s toenails by painting Theodora’s own room in bright-red blood—Theodora believes Eleanor is responsible for the attack, and cruelly says so.*



*The fact that the message on the wall is again meant for Eleanor seems to incriminate her more deeply—or demonstrate that she’s in more profound danger than the others. Whether the happenings in the house are supernatural or psychological is cast into even further doubt by this latest development.*



*Eleanor is just as distraught as Theodora, and yet seems to be at a calm remove from what’s happening. Her own intense fear is causing her to dissociate, which isolates her from the others. The house has a clear mechanism for picking off its victims psychologically rather than physically, as Montague warned it would.*



*Eleanor and Theodora’s doubling or mirroring is deepening, even as the two of them experience a growing sense of resentment towards one another.*



*The rift between Eleanor and Theodora continues as Eleanor begins to see Theodora, not necessarily the house or its malevolent presence, as her enemy.*



The group muses on the nature of fear—Montague posits that people are only afraid of themselves, and Luke adds that what people truly fear is seeing themselves “clearly and without disguise.” Theodora, sitting on the floor at Eleanor’s feet, adds that people are afraid of knowing what they “really want,” and presses her cheek against Eleanor’s hand, but Eleanor pulls her hand away. Eleanor remarks how violated she feels at the thought of whatever haunts **Hill House** using her name against her. She feels she’s splitting in half, she says, between her fearful self and her rational self, and wishes she could “surrender.” The others seem perturbed by this comment, and Eleanor apologizes, but they assure her she has nothing to be sorry for.

*As Eleanor expresses out loud the fact that despite fearing the house, she feels a sympathy with it—and even wishes she could give it what it wants from her, or ally herself with it—she upsets the others, who remain in abject fear of what the house’s goals are. While the others want to resist the house’s attempts to isolate and frighten them, Eleanor wants to give herself over to the house, and this might put her at odds with the rest of the group.*



That night, another bed is moved into Eleanor’s room for Theodora. The two of them sit up in their pushed-together beds, holding hands—they can hear the sound of a low voice in Theodora’s room. It laughs and warbles, and the two women hold hands in the dark, clutching each other for comfort. Eleanor drifts in and out of sleep, clinging all the while to Theodora’s hand, and believes that the sounds from the next room are the cries of a tortured child. Eleanor squeezes Theodora’s hand tightly and calls for whoever is torturing the child to “STOP IT”—then wakes with a start to find the lights in the room on, and Theodora, in her own bed, asking what the matter is. Eleanor wonders with a fright whose hand she was holding.

*Shortly after Eleanor expresses her desire to surrender to the house, the house contacts her directly by creating the illusion that Eleanor is holding hands with Theodora—when really the house is reaching out to her. Eleanor is horrified, but also realizes that she’s getting exactly what she asked for: the house is making it harder and harder for Eleanor to defend herself against it.*



## CHAPTER 6

The next day, Eleanor, exhausted and pale, sits beside Luke outside on the steps of **Hill House**’s smaller, adjoining summer home. They are having a deep discussion about how impossible it is to ever really know another person. Luke confesses that he never had a mother, and is always looking for someone to “make [him] be grown-up.” Eleanor privately finds Luke’s expression of this sentiment to be selfish, but tells him she feels sorry for how lonely he must be. Luke tells Eleanor that she is lucky to have had a mother.

*The house’s influence is beginning to wear on Eleanor—and, it seems, on the others as well. Eleanor is tired and worn out, while Luke finds himself ruminating on the pain and suffering he’s endured. Eleanor has a hard time feeling sympathy for Luke, and possibly feels he’s monopolizing her time, even as he’s simply trying to get closer to her.*



Later, back inside, Luke presents the group with a book he has found in the library—a book made by hand by Hugh Crain for his eldest daughter. It is a kind of scrapbook which Luke feels has been designed to teach the girl “humility.” The book is a strange collage full of Bible quotations mashed up with horrible drawings and etchings. It warns again and again of eternal damnation, and features a section which details the levels of hell. There are sexually explicit drawings and terrifying descriptions of “everlasting fire,” and as the group looks over it, they are all deeply perturbed. On the last page of the book, Crain writes that he has smeared the page with his own blood to “bind” his daughter to the lessons within the tome. After finishing the book, Theodora curses Crain for writing a dirty book and building a dirty **house**.

While Montague and Luke play chess, Theodora teases Eleanor about whether she’ll invite Luke over to her apartment after they’re all done at **Hill House**. She mentions Eleanor’s “cup of stars” and “stone lions,” seeming to make reference to lies Eleanor has told about her life beyond Hill House. Feeling attacked, Eleanor runs out of the study and onto the lawn, but Theodora follows her, and they fall into silence as they walk into the darkness. Theodora and Eleanor apologize to one another, but Theodora warns Eleanor to stay away from Luke. As they walk on across the grounds in silence, Eleanor feels they have an almost psychic connection, and can sense one another’s shortcomings, fears, and feelings.

As the two come upon a widening of the path, they are simultaneously gripped by cold and fear. Theodora clutches Eleanor’s hand as the landscape seems to glow around them, threatening to consume them. They walk slowly and deliberately, keeping to the path and wondering where it is taking them. The girls are positively lost when they arrive at a small garden and see, in spite of the dark of night, a sudden flash of sunlight and rich color. They hear children’s laughter and glimpse signs of a picnic. Theodora looks over her shoulder and screams, then urges Eleanor to run and to not look back.

Eleanor and Theodora run, holding hands all the way, and finally find themselves back at the house. They crash through a back door into the kitchen, where Luke and Montague are waiting for them. The doctor says he and Luke have been searching for Theodora for hours. Eleanor collapses into a chair, babbling about the picnic they saw. Theodora begins to describe what she saw when she looked over her shoulder, but cannot finish her sentence.

*The disturbing tome Luke presents to the group doesn't necessarily seem connected to the hauntings—but it suggests that Crain was truly a disturbed man, and is in some way responsible for Hill House's nature. His desire to stave off sin and damnation may be connected to very real fears stirred up by the house itself, and his impassioned book may have been a misguided last-ditch effort to protect his family from being taken over by sinister forces beyond their control.*



*Despite the deep animosity between Eleanor and Theodora, the two share an undeniable connection. Their fighting over their connection to Luke seems to be a sublimation of their greater, forbidden desire to be, possess, or love one another. As they wander from the group and get lost in the grounds of Hill House, their journey is one into both their own psychic interiors and the house's supernatural heart.*



*The house, which has been so focused on Eleanor, now seems to communicate directly with Theodora, producing an illusion only she can see—something that terrifies her to the bone.*



*Theodora and Eleanor have experienced something harrowing together—something which highlights the pettiness of their earlier arguments, and shows how the house is alternately attempting to bring them together and tear them apart as if toying with them.*



## CHAPTER 7

It is Saturday—the day Mrs. Montague is expected to arrive. Eleanor goes alone into the hills, wanting to be alone and away from the darkness of the **house**. She lies down in the grass, but is unable to be comforted by nature. She picks a daisy and stares into its “dead face” as it dies instantly in her fingers, wondering what she is going to do.

Late that evening, Mrs. Montague arrives with her friend, Arthur Parker. Doctor Montague rushes to greet her, and excitedly introduces her to Theodora, Eleanor, and Luke. It is after dark, and Mrs. Montague chastises the group for not waiting for her for dinner—the doctor confesses he’d given up on Mrs. Montague showing up. The doctor and Luke help Mrs. Montague with her suitcases as she demands to be housed in the “most haunted room.” The doctor tells Luke to take the bags to the nursery.

Mrs. Montague begins chiding her husband for having done no work with a planchette or automatic writing in nearly a week. Montague tries to impress his wife by telling her about the cold spot in the nursery, but she is disappointed that things at the house are not in “order.” She states that she herself is going to “get things going right.” When she orders Arthur to go put the car away in the garage, Luke warns her about their policy of not going outside at night, established after Eleanor and Theodora’s terrifying encounter. Mrs. Montague dismisses Luke as a coward, and so does Arthur; he heads outside to park the car.

As Mrs. Montague and Arthur head into the dining room to fix themselves some dinner, she rails against her husband’s incompetence, bragging about Arthur’s intelligence and interest in the “other world.” Mrs. Montague sets out a plan to sit up all night in the nursery—she says she never sleeps when troubled spirits are about. After dinner, she wants to do a planchette session in a quiet room alone with Arthur. Doctor Montague suggests they use the library. Mrs. Montague orders her husband to take her there at once—she cannot waste too much time on conversation, she says, lest it dull her mind and make her less receptive to the spirits.

Luke, Theodora, Eleanor, and Doctor Montague gather in the parlor, and the doctor begins explaining how planchette works. A device similar to the Ouija Board, it allows for automatic writing—the spirits guide the planchette and write out their thoughts and intentions. The doctor dismisses the planchette as “balderdash” for “schoolgirls.”

*Even Eleanor’s attempts to comfort herself in nature are now tinged with death and decay—but again, whether her own psyche or the house’s malevolent influence is responsible remains unclear.*



*Mrs. Montague is an imposing and fearless figure, a parapsychologist like her husband who nonetheless believes that her methods are superior and unimpeachable. Doctor Montague is clearly intimidated by his wife, afraid of making her angry as he is disturbing the house itself.*



*Mrs. Montague haughtily believes that she alone can communicate with the house and solve its mysteries, even as she disregards and even flouts the discoveries her husband and his team have made so far.*



*Mrs. Montague is extremely self-serious and steamrolls everyone in her presence, even as she espouses lofty ideals about the necessity of sensitivity and delicacy when dealing with the supernatural. This passage implies that she is really just a charlatan and a pretender desperate to one-up her husband.*



*The doctor is as contemptuous of his wife’s methods as she is of his, and yet he indulges and supports her for fear of rocking the boat.*



Sometime later, Mrs. Montague and Arthur join the group in the parlor, where they announce that the planchette has given them a lot of information about a nun. Doctor Montague questions the validity of planchette, as there is no story of a nun associated with **Hill House**, but Mrs. Montague insists her methods are correct. She goes on to say that a woman by the name of “Helen, or Helene, or Elena” spoke through planchette and warned of the presence of a monk. Mrs. Montague speculates that a monk and a nun are “walled up” somewhere in the house, and says she wants to dig up the cellar—Doctor Montague reminds her that they are simply renting the place, and have no authority to do so. Mrs. Montague shames her husband for being incurious.

Mrs. Montague pulls out some papers from her automatic writing session and reads them aloud. Apparently, the spirit guiding planchette introduced itself as “Nell Eleanor Nellie Nell Nell,” and said it wanted “home.” When Mrs. Montague asked the spirit why, it replied only “Mother.” Eleanor and Theodora listen in horror. Eleanor is miserable to have been “singled out again” by the presence haunting the **house**. Eleanor wishes she could have some peace, quiet, and rest.

As the group heads upstairs to bed, Arthur announces that he will patrol the house with his revolver so that everyone can sleep soundly. Mrs. Montague assures the group that the spirits of the house want only to “tell their stories” and free themselves from their “sorrow”; they mean no one any harm. Mrs. Montague fawns about the “unfortunate beings” who need only to be shown some “heartfelt fondness” and be extricated from their loneliness. The rest of the group listens, half-amused and half-impatient.

Everyone bids one another goodnight and retreats to their separate rooms, but Theodora tells Eleanor to wait a minute and to not get undressed—Luke whispered to her earlier that the original four are to meet in the doctor’s room. The girls wait a minute before tiptoeing down the hall to meet with Luke and Montague. Once they’re all together, the doctor announces that he believes something is going to happen tonight—he wants the girls to be with him, where they can all keep an eye on each other. The group makes fun of Mrs. Montague for a moment, and then, sure enough, a crashing sound comes from the hall, blowing the door open and then slamming it shut again.

*Even as Mrs. Montague’s ludicrous claims of undead nuns and monks roaming the walls of Hill House seem to invalidate her planchette session, the presence of a name which bears resemblance to Eleanor’s foreshadows the idea that perhaps Mrs. Montague is not as hopeless as her manner and protocol suggest.*



*The house continues to wage war against Eleanor, almost taunting her this time by contacting Mrs. Montague rather than communing with Eleanor directly—and by making reference to Eleanor’s painful past as a long-time caretaker for her mother.*



*Mrs. Montague’s claims about the innocence and loneliness of the spirits that haunt Hill House contradict everything the doctor and his team have seen: in reality, whatever haunts Hill House is malicious, conniving, and desperate to isolate those who trespass within it.*



*Doctor Montague, though not clairvoyant himself, has some knowledge of how supernatural phenomena work—and he knows that the disturbance his wife’s arrival represents is more than likely enough to upset the house and provoke it.*



The group is, at this point, almost amused by these occurrences, and they try to comfort one another by making jokes about the hostility of their summer lodgings. Theodora even makes fun of the **house** for having “exhausted [its] repertoire,” and repeating the “pounding act” from several nights ago. Eleanor is the only one who is profoundly affected by the happening—she rocks back and forth and presses her hands into her eyes.

As the noise recedes, Luke offers everyone some brandy. They all accept, and Eleanor sips nervously, believing they are only in the “eye of the storm.” Sure enough, the pounding begins again and the door shakes, seeming about to come off its hinges. Theodora tells herself, over and over, that the presence “can’t get in,” but Eleanor, freezing, feels that the house is “breaking” her apart. As the pounding quiets, she predicts that the noise is about to change—sure enough, the babbling laughter starts in the hall. Eleanor briefly wonders if she is the one laughing. Eleanor feels the laughter is inside her own head. Eleanor, feeling mad, decides to give herself over to the **house** at last.

When Eleanor regains her senses, the room is quiet, and sunlight is coming in through the window. Theodora is leaning over her, and Montague has been to check on his wife and Arthur, who are “sleeping like babies.” Eleanor asks what happened, and her mouth feels stiff as she does. Theodora offers to help her wash her face and prepare her for breakfast.

## CHAPTER 8

At the end of breakfast the next morning, the group worries that Mrs. Montague and Arthur, still sleeping soundly, will miss breakfast. Eleanor, though, assures them that their guests are coming—she says she can hear them on the stairs. What she doesn’t say is that she can now hear “everything, all over the **house**.” Soon enough, Mrs. Montague and Arthur soon come through the dining room doors, Mrs. Montague complaining about the dustiness of the nursery and the cold breakfast awaiting them.

Doctor Montague asks his wife how her night was—Mrs. Montague says she didn’t sleep a wink due to the air in the nursery. Arthur complains that the house is noisy—a tree branch scraped his window all night. Mrs. Montague sits down to breakfast and says she refuses to give up hope that tonight, perhaps, there will be “some manifestations.”

*Though the others try to use humor to get through this latest disturbance, Eleanor’s patience and sanity are both wearing thin. She’s sick of being singled out by the house, taunted time and time again—she feels, perhaps, as if a knife is hanging over her head.*



*Eleanor knows what’s coming, now, which shows that she’s able to predict the house’s actions. The haunting affects her more deeply than it does anyone else, and she feels as if she’s melding with the house and becoming one with whatever forces are tormenting her. She cannot endure the haunting anymore, and her psyche buckles as she relents and communicates to the house that it can do what it wants with her. The house has psychologically broken Eleanor down so profoundly that she feels compelled to give up.*



*Though everyone else is grateful for the end of the disturbance, Eleanor has lost a large chunk of time and feels stiff and embattled. Clearly, something has shifted—how this night will come to affect Eleanor in the light of day remains to be seen.*



*After the terrifying events of the previous night, Eleanor seems to have a new power: she is attuned to everything happening in the house, a power that no one else seems to have. Eleanor feels quietly confident about this new ability, and now appears secretly thrilled at the idea that the house has chosen her. Rather than feeling lonely or afraid, Eleanor feels special.*



*Mrs. Montague and Arthur were unable to see or hear the disturbances in the house the night before—the house does not want them the way it wants the others. Just as Luke and Montague and Eleanor and Theodora experienced separate disturbances early on in their stay, the larger group is now having various experiences of the haunting.*



Later, Theodora and Eleanor are working on their diaries when Eleanor confesses that she's not sure of what to do once she leaves **Hill House**. She says that she wants to go home with Theodora, and live with her—Eleanor says she's never had anyone to care about, and wants some place she "belong[s]." Theodora coldly replies that she's "not in the habit of taking home stray cats." Eleanor begs Theodora to take her home with her, but Theodora refuses, accusing Eleanor of trying to "go where [she's] not wanted." Eleanor calmly replies she's never been wanted anywhere.

Eleanor continues pestering Theodora, who suggests they go for a walk to get out of the house. Luke offers to come with them. Theodora suggests Luke accompany her, and Eleanor stay home to "write on walls." Luke, however, taking pity on Eleanor, insists she come along—the three of them leave the house and begin walking down to the brook. Eleanor, seemingly in a daze, says she was responsible for her mother's death—she failed to awaken when her mother called for her to bring her some medicine.

As the path narrows, Eleanor takes the lead. As she walks, she believes Theodora and Luke are talking nastily about her behind her back. She grows lost in thought as she leads the way down to the brook. She sits down when she arrives, turning her head to look behind her for Luke and Theodora—but she sees that she is alone. A ghostly voice calls to her, intoning "Eleanor" over and over again—but it is not her friends. She stands up and runs through the woods until she finds them, leaning against a tree and talking together. Eleanor says she's been waiting for them by the brook—Theodora says they called after her that they were going to stay in the shade. Luke, grinning, echoes Theodora's claim.

After lunch, Luke and Theodora spend some time outside together laughing in the grass. Eleanor follows them but stays hidden—she is determined to find out if they really hate her. Luke sings a little song to Theodora, and then the two of them wonder if they'll appear as characters in the book *Doctor Montague* will write about **Hill House**. Eleanor listens as the two of them decide to go into the hills looking for a swimming hole.

Inside, Eleanor listens at the library door as Arthur pesters Montague with inane observations about the house as the doctor tries to write his notes. She then creeps to the dining room door, where Mrs. Montague is conversing with Mrs. Dudley—who speaks to her pleasantly, despite having never engaged the doctor or his subjects in polite conversation.

*Theodora's cruelty to Eleanor is born out of a sense of distrust and disgust. Theodora pities Eleanor, but doesn't want to claim responsibility for her—Eleanor, on the other hand, is desperate to find where she belongs, and still believes that her place could be with Theodora, whom she recognizes as a double of sorts.*



*As Eleanor feels lonelier and lonelier, she begins revealing more of the truth about her past, hinting at the fact that she may have willfully ended her mother's life after reaching the end of her rope or encountering a psychotic break of some sort.*



*This passage is one of the novel's most potent examples of the blurry lines between supernatural and psychological phenomena. Eleanor, feeling isolated and lonely—but also potentially possessed by Hill House—believes Luke and Theodora are gossiping about her. When she turns around, they're nowhere to be found—and yet when she finally catches back up with them, there is something sinister about both of them. Eleanor's own paranoia may be getting the best of her—or the presence haunting Hill House may be emulating her worst fears in order to break her down.*



*Eleanor is increasingly obsessed with the relationship between Luke and Theodora—during the stay at Hill House they have found comfort in one another, while Eleanor has alienated them both and connected with only the malevolent presence inside the house.*



*Eleanor is making herself a bit like a ghost in these passages—she is silently stalking her companions, listening in on their conversations without participating in them. She is becoming the thing that is in a way haunting Hill House.*



Later that evening, Luke compliments Theodora on how fine she looks in Eleanor's clothes. Eleanor sits quietly alone, listening to "the sounds of the **house**." She can hear everything everywhere—every creak, every bird alighting on the roof. The only room she cannot hear is the library, where Mrs. Montague and Arthur are holed up, doing planchette.

Mrs. Montague bursts through the parlor door, incensed because she has not been able to get the planchette to communicate with her at all. She blames the silence on the rest of the group and their "skepticism." Everyone tries to assuage her and assure her that they would never interfere with her work, but Mrs. Montague will not be comforted. Eleanor becomes aware of a presence in the center of the room—a child's voice—singing a little song. As the song ends, Eleanor feels footsteps walk by her, and something brush her face. Eleanor looks around the room and realizes, "with joy," that no one but her has noticed anything at all.

## CHAPTER 9

In the middle of the night, Eleanor rises from bed and leaves her and Theodora's room quietly. She tiptoes through the halls so as not to disturb anyone, even as it occurs to her that if ever there was a house not to worry about making noise in at night, it's **Hill House**. She feels compelled to go to the library, telling herself it's because she can't sleep—when really she's being drawn there by a force she can't name. The air feels warm as she descends the staircase and approaches the library door. As she steps inside, she recoils at the nauseating smell within—she is reminded of her mother.

A voice upstairs urges Eleanor to "come along." Believing the voice to be her mother, Eleanor scampers back upstairs and runs down the hall towards the nursery, where she finds the cold spot at the door has disappeared. Eleanor bangs on the door, and Mrs. Montague answers, telling "whatever" is out there to feel free to come in. Eleanor decides not to go in, but instead runs up and down the hall knocking and pounding on everyone's doors. She knows that none of them will dare open up to her.

*Eleanor is humiliated by being overlooked by everyone else—but secretly enjoys her special new powers and her undeniable connection with the house itself.*



*As Mrs. Montague fails to communicate with whatever presence is haunting the house, Eleanor's ability to commune with it directly suggests that she is the only one with any influence over the house any longer.*



*The house has possessed Eleanor, and is leading her through its halls as if by magic. Eleanor is semi-conscious of what's happening to her, but she seems to be in a state of gleeful, even mischievous dissociation and isolation within her own mind.*



*In this passage, Jackson examines the strange paradox that has emerged. Eleanor is imitating the presence haunting the house by knocking on everyone's doors—and in doing so, possessed as she is by the house itself, she has in a way become the thing haunting Hill House.*



Eleanor hears Theodora calling for her, and then shouting to Luke and Doctor Montague that she's gone missing. Eleanor runs back down the stairs, hearing the others' voices behind her as they come out of their rooms. Eleanor whispers for her mother as she runs through the house, hoping to avoid being found. She finds one of Theodora's fancy scarves in the parlor and shreds it with her teeth. Hearing the others' voices growing nearer, she runs further down the hall. The others believe Eleanor has gone out onto the lawn, and they head outside into a group to search for her—Eleanor dances along the veranda in and out of the house, going from the room with the marble statues to the kitchen to the great hall again, rejoicing at the warmth she feels in each room.

Eleanor at last runs into the library, where the air is warmer still. She feels she has broken the spell of **Hill House**, and is at last home. She begins climbing the little iron stairway which leads to the tower. As she climbs higher and higher, she feels "time is ended," and when the others at last burst into the library, she hardly recognizes them.

Doctor Montague urges Eleanor to come down the staircase carefully—it has rotted away from the wall, and is in danger of collapsing. Luke begins carefully climbing the stairs to try and get Eleanor down. Eleanor is very close to the trapdoor which leads to the tower's turret—she tries to open it, but it will not budge. She bangs against it with her fists, upsetting the others, who urge her to be still. Luke at last catches up with her and tries to help her down—she is reluctant to accept his help, but slowly starts climbing back down. The journey is precarious, and as Eleanor creeps down, the staircase rocks and clangs. Soon she is on the ground again, and as she looks up at the "infinitely high" spot she has just come from, she is amazed.

Mrs. Montague remarks that Eleanor's "childish nonsense" has "destroyed any chance of manifestations" for the evening, and hurries back to bed. Luke calls Eleanor an "imbecile" for climbing the stairs, and the doctor agrees. Theodora, too, chastises Eleanor for her foolishness. Eleanor replies only that she came down to the library to get a book to read.

The next morning is "humiliating [and] disastrous." No one says anything to Eleanor at breakfast, though they all pass her food politely. Eleanor notices that Theodora is wearing her red sweater. Doctor Montague tells Eleanor that she has to leave—Luke is going to bring her car around, and Theodora is going to pack her things for her.

*Eleanor is both fearful and feral as she runs wild through the house. She is haunted by the belief that her mother is somehow in the house—perhaps the house has disguised itself in order to get to Eleanor. At the same time, Eleanor feels a deep kinship with the house, and doesn't suspect that it's preying on her in any way.*



*The house seems to be pulling Eleanor up to the tower in order to force her to commit suicide—just like Old Miss Crain's young companion. Whether the house or Eleanor is behind this dark death drive remains murky, but what is clear is that Eleanor believes she is a part of the house, and sheltered by it, when in reality it has dark designs on her life.*



*When the others find Eleanor, she is angry, and desperately tries to complete the mission she feels has been hardwired into her—to get to the tower at the top of the house. When she fails to do so and is able to be coaxed down, she seems to return to her consciousness for a brief moment, breaking the house's hold on her.*



*Mrs. Montague's ironic statement that Eleanor has destroyed the chance of a disturbance shows just how amateur she is—Eleanor is the disturbance, but Mrs. Montague has a very narrow vision of what constitutes a connection with the supernatural.*



*Eleanor feels embarrassed by the events of the previous night, and seems to have been reconnected to her body and her consciousness. She is back to being envious of Theodora and highly self-conscious.*



Mrs. Montague speaks up and says she's examined Theodora's room—it is totally clean, and all of Theodora's clothes are "perfectly fine." Theodora corroborates Mrs. Montague's report. Doctor Montague speaks over his wife, apologizing to Eleanor for having to send her away. Eleanor insists she can't leave, but Theodora urges Eleanor to "get away" from the house. Eleanor insists again that she cannot leave. Theodora remind Eleanor that she has her own little apartment to go to, where all her things are; Eleanor replies that she has no apartment, and sleeps on a cot in the nursery at her sister's. She has no home—everything she owns in the world is here with her at **Hill House**.

Mrs. Montague suggests someone should drive Eleanor home to the city, but Doctor Montague says that to "prolong the association" with **Hill House** would only damage Eleanor further. He asks if she feels comfortable finding her own way home—Eleanor only laughs in response. Theodora goes upstairs to pack Eleanor's things, and orders Luke to go get Eleanor's car.

Later, everyone sees Eleanor out of the house, and as she looks up at the tower above them all, she feels as if she's going to cry. She feels the house has been waiting for her and her alone—"no one else [can] satisfy it." Eleanor begs Doctor Montague to see that the **house** wants her to stay, but he urges her into her car, repeating the instructions back to the highway. He apologizes for putting Eleanor at such horrible risk. Eleanor insists she isn't afraid, and never was—she's fine and even happy now. The doctor urges Eleanor to forget everything about Hill House, but she says she won't be able to—being here is "the only time anything's ever happened" to her.

Montague helps Eleanor into her car, even as she clutches at his arms and begs him to let her stay. He shuts her door and insists she leave. Eleanor calls Theodora over to the window, and Theodora tearfully urges Eleanor to get better. Theodora promises to write to Eleanor, and whispers that perhaps one day, they can meet up at the **house** again and have a picnic by the brook.

*When the group announces their intention to get Eleanor away from the house, something loosens within her once again, and she begins disconnecting from herself. She is determined to remain in the house, and at last reveals the depths of her loneliness—she has nothing and no one, and Hill House is the only place she's ever felt a sense of belonging.*



*Doctor Montague is determined to get Eleanor out of the house and back home—he doesn't realize, or refuses to see, that Eleanor has chosen the house as her true home, or has been chosen by it.*



*Eleanor's connection with the house is undeniable, though why it has chosen her—and why she has let it possess her—are still unclear. Even though everyone around Eleanor is trying to get her out of harm's way, she insists that the house is her home, and the only place she's ever belonged. Her torturous relationship with Hill House has broken and remade her all at once, and the barrier between the supernatural and psychological disturbance within Eleanor is murkier than ever.*



*Theodora tries to soothe Eleanor with lies and promises, but Eleanor is not looking for home in another person any longer, and cannot be mollified by Theodora's attempts to comfort or sedate her.*



Eleanor waves goodbye to everyone and starts the car. She starts off down the drive, even as she thinks to herself that she doesn't want to go. The others are telling her to leave—but she knows they're powerless against **Hill House**, which wants her to stay. Eleanor points her car at a large oak tree and presses down hard on the accelerator. She can hear the others' voices calling to her as she careens towards the tree—in the final seconds before she collides with it, she wonders why she's doing what she's doing, and why none of them are stopping her.

After Eleanor's suicide, Doctor Montague and his party vacate **Hill House**. Theodora returns home to her apartment and her roommate. Luke goes to Paris to stay a while with his aunt, the house's owner. Doctor Montague publishes an article analyzing the psychic phenomena of Hill House, but it is received with contempt by his peers, and he retires from "active scholarly pursuits." Hill House, meanwhile, remains standing and "not sane." Whatever presence walks within it continues to walk alone.

*Eleanor's final act is to commit suicide on the Hill House grounds rather than leave the one place in the world she has felt a sense of belonging. As Eleanor approaches the oak tree, though, she seems to snap briefly out of whatever spell has bound her, and has a terrifying moment of clarity in which she feels more lost and alone than ever before. In choosing to commit suicide by ramming her vehicle into an oak tree, Eleanor joins the ranks of Crain's young wife, who died (accidentally) when her carriage crashed in the driveway, as well as the man Doctor Montague referenced earlier in the novel, who tried to leave Hill House at night eighteen years ago and was crushed against the oak tree by his horse.*



*Hill House proves itself an unconquerable force in the end. It kills Eleanor, it isolates those who have visited it, and though Montague reports on what he's seen there, no one in the world believes him. Hill House is victorious, and whatever lives inside it is doomed—or free—to be alone again at last.*





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