

The Haunting of Hill House Study Guide

The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson

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Plot Summary

The Haunting of Hill House takes place over a single week in rural 1950s America. The story begins with a brief introduction to the cast of characters. Dr. John Montague is the psychic researcher who instigates the adventure in Hill House. An anthropologist and doctor of philosophy, Dr. Montague's true passion lies in the study of supernatural phenomena. All of his life he has searched for a truly haunted house. His search leads him to Hill House. After interviewing several former tenants as well as researching the personal effects and papers left behind by the family that built Hill House some eighty years ago, Dr. Montague is elated to realize that he has found the real thing. Hill House is the quintessential haunted house and a perfect location for him to study. Dr. Montague hopes to gather incontrovertible evidence of the haunting of Hill House. Afterwards, he plans to publish his findings with the goal of legitimizing his field of study in the academic arena.

To that end, Dr. Montague seeks out assistants to join him for a summer stay in Hill House. He combs through the records of psychic societies and paranormal laboratories to obtain a short list of twelve promising candidates. To each of these, he writes a letter of invitation. Dr. Montague is a circumspect man and does not state directly in his letters that Hill House is haunted. He refers to troubling rumors about the house, hoping to catch the imagination of just the right sort of assistant. From this exhaustive search, Dr. Montague nets two assistants: Eleanor Vance and Theodora. Eleanor is invited because of her past experience with poltergeist phenomena. Dr. Montague has found a reliable account of a rain of stones, which pelted Eleanor's family home when she was just twelve-years-old.

Theodora, a modern woman who eschews the use of her last name, is valuable to Dr. Montague because she once, on a lark, took some laboratory tests to gauge her psychic ability. She scored amongst the top candidates ever seen by the lab. The final member of the party is Luke Sanderson, a rakish young man whose family owns Hill House. He is sent along to ensure that no one steals the family silver; however, his rich aunt, who owns Hill House, is actually just trying to give him a useful occupation for a few weeks, hoping to help him stay out of trouble. Hill House is hardly the best place for staying out of trouble. From the moment they arrive, they can each sense the malevolence of the house.

Eleanor and Theodora both choose to accept Dr. Montague's invitation for personal rather than professional reasons. Theodora has a huge fight with her female roommate and thinks a summer in the country at Hill House might be the best way to cool off their overheated tempers. Eleanor decides to take Dr. Montague up on his offer in hopes of having an adventure. She has spent the past eleven years caring for her sick mother, who has recently died. Eleanor has sacrificed much of her youth and personal happiness for her mother and now lives unhappily with her sister's family. She desperately longs for a home and a life of her own. When her sister and her husband refuse to let Eleanor drive the car to Hill House, Eleanor sneaks out early one morning and takes the car without permission. Eleanor spends the journey to Hill House



dreaming of living in the various houses she passes along the way. She hopes that, finally, something interesting will happen to her at Hill House. An old song echoes in her mind as she approaches Hill House; the song's refrain is *journeys end in lovers meeting*.

Eleanor is the first to arrive and she is greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Dudley, the caretakers of Hill House. Villagers from nearby Hillsdale, the Dudleys don't care much for outsiders staying in Hill House. Mr. Dudley warns Eleanor away and Mrs. Dudley advises her that no one will hear if Eleanor screams for help in the night. Given this chilly reception and the palpable evil she can sense in the house, Eleanor is terrified to be alone in the huge, old manor. Thankfully, Theo arrives in short order and her sunny presence mitigates the gloom of Hill House. She and Eleanor set off to explore the grounds before it grows dark. They become fast friends as they walk along a picturesque path, which takes them to a babbling brook. Eleanor quickly realizes that Theo is highly perceptive. Theodora picks up on Eleanor's social awkwardness and fear and treats her with gentle kindness. Suddenly, Eleanor becomes alarmed by something in the shadows. Theo feels it, too and the two women race back to the relative safety of Hill House. When they arrive back at the house, they see Luke for the first time. Eleanor thinks to herself, *journeys end in lovers meeting*.

Dr. Montague welcomes them all inside and that night the foursome convenes for the first time in the parlor, which is to become their headquarters. The parlor, with its fireplace, is the coziest room in Hill House, yet it falls short of actually being cozy. The group does its best to liven up the haunted house with their high spirits. Everyone is looking forward to their adventure and they spend their time together convivially. In the spirit of adventure, none of them discusses their ordinary, mundane lives. Eleanor, Theo, Luke and Dr. Montague all introduce themselves playfully, making up entertaining stories about their supposed pasts. The first night, Dr. Montague reveals why he selected Theo and Eleanor. Eleanor is visibly upset to be reminded of the rain of stones, an incident she had put out of her mind completely. She reacts defensively and Theodora's attempts to soothe Eleanor betray Theo's belief that Eleanor herself was responsible for the falling stones. Nevertheless, the first night ends well, although Eleanor chides herself for being so openly grateful at having been accepted by their social circle.

Time loses all meaning at Hill House as the participants in Dr. Montague's study settle into a routine. They spend their days exploring Hill House and napping, because beginning on the second night they are kept awake by ghostly disturbances. Nonetheless, the little group is elated by the evidence they find of a bona fide haunting. Montague's prize piece of evidence is the undeniable cold spot, which exists at the entrance to the decrepit nursery. At night the group feels frightened, but during the day the spirit of adventure lifts their spirits. Their time at Hill House, at least during the day, feels like a leisurely vacation at a summer home, complemented by the wonderful cooking of old Mrs. Dudley.

Things become more complicated, however, when a lovers' triangle develops between Theo, Eleanor and Luke. Both Theo and Eleanor pursue Luke, or rather, in deference to



the morality of the era; both women encourage and allow Luke to pursue them. Yet behind the scenes, sparks fly between Theo and Eleanor. Theo's vaguely defined relationship with her female roommate hints at her sexual preference. Eleanor finds herself responding more to Theo's seductive ways than to Luke's flirtation. However, unlike Theo and Luke, who are both just looking for a summer fling, Eleanor is looking for her happily ever after. She chooses Theo as her life's companion and announces to the shocked Theo that she intends to follow her home and move in with her. To dissuade Eleanor, Theo's interest in Luke takes a sharp upswing. Eleanor's jealousy simmers below the surface and gradually builds to a boiling point.

When a message about Eleanor appears on the walls, followed by a supernatural attack on Theo's room and belongings, the party begins to fear for their physical safety. Although the learned Dr. Montague insists that the ghosts of Hill House cannot harm them, he pointedly comments that poltergeist phenomena can cause damage in the physical world. Everyone begins to suspect Eleanor of causing the frightening phenomena, especially Theo, who outright accuses her of seeking revenge and attention.

The evil that lurks in Hill House thrives on the growing enmity between the two women. In fact, Hill House seems to be waging psychological warfare on Eleanor and Theo, driving a wedge between them. The behavior, thoughts and feelings of these two women eerily echo the relationship between the Crain sisters, two little girls who grew up in Hill House decades ago. The Crain sisters also had a falling out over a man and it seems at times that the resentment Eleanor feels is really the resentment of the eldest Crain sister. The older sister, like Eleanor, became an old maid after losing her beau to the younger sister. The vindictive and painful emotions of this family battle still reside within Hill House and feed Eleanor's own sense of loss and thirst for revenge. The reader cannot be sure whether it is Eleanor or Hill House that is truly responsible for the increasingly threatening manifestations. In Eleanor, Hill House has found a perfect vehicle for reliving the tragic struggles of the past.

When Dr. Montague notices how deeply ensnared Eleanor has become by the ghosts of the house, he insists that she leave for her own safety. Hill House, however, having claimed Eleanor, has no intention of letting her go. As Eleanor drives away from the house, she feels compelled to speed up and turn her car towards an ancient tree at the bend in the driveway. Feeling triumphant, Eleanor thinks she's discovered a way to stay at Hill House despite having been so rudely kicked out. Only in the final moment before her car smashes against the tree does Eleanor's lucidity return. She wonders why she is doing such a disastrous thing, but it is already too late. Hill House has claimed yet another victim to add to the long list of mysterious deaths and supposed suicides which have taken place on the grounds.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Dr. John Montague is a doctor of philosophy with an undergraduate degree in anthropology. He uses his title scrupulously and hopes that his education will lend credibility to his most passionate interest, the study of supernatural manifestations. His entire life he has been searching for a bona fide haunted house. Thus, when he finds a candidate as promising as Hill House, he is willing to invest a substantial sum of money in renting out the house for three months. Dr. Montague intends to borrow the methodology of the brave nineteenth-century ghost hunters by actually living in the haunted house and documenting his experiences. In order to do this, he will need to take on assistants. Dr. Montague pours through the literature of psychic societies and parapsychological reports. Over time he assembles a list of a dozen names and to each person on the list, he sends a letter.

The letter extends "an invitation to spend all or part of a summer at a comfortable country house ... to observe and explore the various unsavory stories which had been circulated about the house for most of its eighty years of existence. Dr. Montague's letters did not say openly that Hill House was haunted, because Dr. Montague was a man of science" (pg. 6). His letters contain a certain "ambiguous dignity calculated to catch at the imagination of a very special sort of reader" (pg. 6). Dr. Montague receives four replies from the twelve candidates to whom he has written. He writes to all four, informing them of the specific time and date of their appointment with Hill House. A careful man, Dr. Montague provides detailed directions to all four candidates. Of these four individuals, one he never hears from again, a second sends regrets, but the other two accept their invitations. In addition to these two assistants, Dr. Montague has accepted the company of a member of the family that owns Hill House.

Luke Sanderson is the family representative, appointed by his wealthy aunt, in part to keep an eye on the family property, but mainly to keep Luke out of trouble for a few weeks. Luke is a cad and a ladies man, but not at all as dishonest or unreliable, as his aunt believes. Dr. Montague senses a certain strength in Luke, which makes the doctor glad of his company at Hill House.

Eleanor Vance's imagination is captured by Dr. Montague's letter. This thirty-two-year-old woman is one of the two candidates to take the doctor up on his offer; she has been waiting for such an adventure her entire life. Having spent eleven years nursing her sick mother all on her own, Eleanor now finds herself resentful and lonely. It has been far too long since she spent any time in the company of other people and she hopes to expand the narrow boundaries of her life with this journey to Hill House. For his part, Dr. Montague has chosen Eleanor because of an incident, which occurred when she was twelve-years-old. The local papers had reported a rain of stones falling on Eleanor's childhood home, where she had lived with her mother and sister. At the time, both Eleanor and her sister blamed each other for the odd phenomenon.



Theodora is the second and final candidate to accept Dr. Montague's vaguely worded invitation. She finds both her psychic abilities and Dr. Montague's letters to be entertaining, nothing more. And yet an angry quarrel with her roommate prompts Theodora to accept the invitation to live at Hill House for the summer.

Her mother's death has left Eleanor homeless and penniless. She is desperate to escape the house where her older, married sister and her brother-in-law grudgingly allow her to sleep. Eleanor hates her sister and dislikes her brother-in-law and young niece. She is bitter about the years she lost caring for her mother and is even more resentful about the lack of support she received, both then and now, from her sister's family. So when her sister and brother-in-law oppose her taking their car, which Eleanor half-owns, Eleanor decides to sneak out early in the morning and disappear with it. In her rush to get the car out of the parking garage, she knocks over a tiny lady. Eleanor offers to pay the woman's cab fare home to make amends and the woman promises to pray for Eleanor. Eleanor is bemused that one person, at least, is praying for her. She has not informed her family of the location of Hill House, so once on the road, she feels free of them for the first time in a long time. Eleanor soaks up the scenery as she drives through the country towards Hill House. She follows Dr. Montague's careful instructions precisely and allows her pent-up imagination to run wild as she drives along.

Eleanor reveals a dreamer's mind as she makes up stories about the scenery. She passes a large house with stone lions out front and Eleanor imagines that she lives in that house. She imagines a lifetime spent living in the house, polishing her stone lions each morning. Further down the road, she becomes entranced by an abandoned archway. The crumbling stone pillars mark the beginning of a short road, which is bordered on both sides by gorgeous oleander trees, but leads nowhere. The road and the line of trees end in an empty grass square, also bordered by oleanders and next to a little river. She wonders what was supposed to have been built within that square.

Eleanor pulls off to the side of the road, wishing to walk into this enchanting space. She imagines it might take her into a fairyland, where she is the fairy princess whose return releases the castle from its spell. The castle in the magic oleander square would become visible once again and Eleanor would live happily ever after with the prince. She smiles at her whimsy and resumes driving without having entered the archway at all. She stops for lunch at an old country mill restaurant and eats at a table on a charming balcony overlooking a stream. At the neighboring table, Eleanor watches a little girl refuse to drink her milk because she doesn't have her cup of stars. Under the stern eyes of the waitress and the girl's father, the girl's mother asks her daughter to please drink from the restaurant glass. Eleanor silently roots for the girl to hold out for her cup of stars. She does hold out, after all and when the family leaves, the little girl turns and waves to Eleanor.

Back on the road, Eleanor follows Dr. Montague's instructions on the final leg of her journey. Route 5 takes her through the tiny town of Hillsdale. Dr. Montague has warned her in his letter that it is best not to stop in Hillsdale for directions to nearby Hill House, because the locals become quite unfriendly when Hill House is mentioned. However, Eleanor wishes to prolong her journey, so guiltily stops for coffee. The only diner in the



dismal town is dirty and unwelcoming, but Eleanor forces herself to be cheerful and complimentary in her conversation with the moody waitress. She digs unsuccessfully for information about Hill House, pretending to be in the market for a hillside, country home.

As she pulls away from Hillsdale after her coffee, Eleanor remembers her sister and brother-in-law; they must surely have discovered her treachery by now. The thought makes her laugh because she knows they never would have believed that Eleanor could behave in such a manner. However, her laughter dies as she approaches Hill House. Her very first view of the front gate strikes her as dismal and inspires feelings of helplessness in her. She shakes them off and does her best to sound authoritative as she addresses the surly gatekeeper. A local man by the name of Dudley, the caretaker takes obvious pleasure in warning her of the dangers of Hill House. Eleanor feels as if she has won a battle when he finally agrees to open the gate to admit her. However, her victory is quickly forgotten when she gets her first glimpse of the house itself. "The house was vile. She shivered and thought, the words coming freely into her mind, Hill House is vile, it is diseased; get away from here at once" (pg. 25).

Chapter 1 Analysis

Eleanor is established as the protagonist in the second half of the first chapter. First, Dr. Montague is introduced and the foundational concept of Hill House is established by a third person narrator. The selection process, which Dr. Montague uses to choose his assistants, is reviewed and the three of them are introduced. Until this point, the narration has presented a balanced view of all the characters as well as the house and all are equally central to the story. The narration provides an intimate, even cozy view of each character, yet the narrative style is that of historical documentary; it is as if an unknown future historian is writing a sympathetic portrait of Dr. Montague and his assistants. This detached historical tone veers suddenly into a first-hand accounting of Eleanor's miserable domestic life. From this point on in the story, the narration centers directly on Eleanor.

Eleanor's long drive through the countryside provides the reader with a detailed glimpse into her mind. At first, Eleanor seems charmingly creative. Her sheer joy over her rebellion and the freedom of a long, country drive incline the reader to feel sympathetic towards this still-young woman who has been deprived of much of the joy of life. Her heartless sister and brother-in-law elicit further sympathy for Eleanor by refusing to validate the sacrifices she has made. Eleanor is viewed as a burden by her sister's family and is treated like the scullery maid despite the financial contributions she makes to the household.

Eleanor's imaginative vision of a fairy tale castle helps create an image for the reader of her as the protagonist in a fairy tale, like Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty. One can imagine Eleanor finally free of her wicked stepmother and her evil stepsister. She has high hopes for her Hill House adventure and the reader can readily lose him or herself in the romantic vision of Eleanor finding her true heart's desire and living happily ever



after. Yet in this sympathetic portrait of Eleanor, the author paints some dark edges. The submerged fires of anger, bitterness and resentment smolder within her.

The reader begins to get a glimpse that Eleanor may be the author of her own unhappiness; to what extent, the reader does not yet know. However, it is clear that Eleanor has denied herself the things she wants in life. That she was raised to blame others for her problems is suggested during her lunch stop, when she wishes for the little girl to hold out for her cup of stars. The wish in itself is innocuous and in keeping with the whimsical nature of Eleanor's dreamy drive through the country, yet the thoughts which accompany the wish are disturbing: "insist on your cup of stars; once they have trapped you into being like everyone else you will never see your cup of stars again" (pg. 18). This is just a tiny hint of Eleanor's paranoid bitterness, but the author drops several other foreboding hints about her state of mind during her journey to Hill House.

The fact that Eleanor denies herself the simple pleasure of strolling along the oleander path after having pulled her car over to the side of the road is surprising and makes the reader wonder why. As she stares at the empty grass square, Eleanor's thoughts convey the possibility of her getting lost in her own fantasies. She seems afraid to indulge her imagination, as if she senses that her grip on reality is not sufficiently stable. She thinks frequently of stopping forever at various places along the road. "She nearly stopped forever just outside Ashton, because she came to a tiny cottage buried in a garden. I could live there all alone, she thought, slowing the car to look down the winding garden path to the small blue front door with, perfectly, a white cat on the step" (pg. 18).

Eleanor is a woman on the verge of abandoning her life in some way. At this moment, all possibilities are open to her. In order to create a wonderful new future, however, Eleanor needs to embrace her creative imagination. Her creativity is a charming, vivacious part of her personality. It is precisely this type of personal charm, which could help her out of her loneliness. If Eleanor can recover her *joi de vivre*, she could easily attract friends, lovers and perhaps even a husband. Yet her imagination frightens her with its power. Inside of her, Eleanor knows she has the strength to stand up for herself against her family, demand her rights and create a happy future. She seems utterly afraid of this power, however and now that circumstances allow Eleanor to honor her spirit, she appears unwilling to do so. It may be easier for Eleanor to nurture her resentment than to unleash her joy. Thus, her long-standing resentments may win out over her ability to move on to a brighter future.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Hill House is described by the third person narrator as being intrinsically evil. No exorcism can clear it of the evil that inhabits its very structure; only utter destruction of the house could cleanse it. Eleanor wishes she had turned back at the gate. Yet she is unwilling to turn back now that she has reached the end of her journey and worries that caretaker Dudley would laugh at her if did so. She fights the desire to run and forces herself to set foot on the bottom front step. She feels an odd, evil sense that the house has been waiting for her. "Journeys end in lovers meeting," is the thought, which comes to her in that moment (pg. 27). It makes her laugh and she summons the courage to reach for the knocker of the iron door.

Before Eleanor can knock, Mrs. Dudley opens the door. She says not a word and merely steps aside for Eleanor to enter. The stillness of the great house frightens Eleanor, who follows Mrs. Dudley up the stairs to the blue room, which has been made up for Eleanor. Eleanor again experiences the need to be nice and compliment the room, although it feels anything but nice to her. Mrs. Dudley delivers a little speech, in which she tells Eleanor that she sets out dinner at six o'clock sharp and leaves Hill House immediately after, before it gets dark. She warns Eleanor that no one will come if she needs help in the night, then she smiles at Eleanor and closes the door to the bedroom in her face.

Eleanor stands stock-still in the room, too afraid to move. The atmosphere of the house has thoroughly invaded her sensibilities with its heavy gloom of hopeless despair. She shakes off the ill feeling and forces herself to unpack. She is careless with her new clothes. The two pairs of slacks which she purchased just for the trip no longer seem as exciting as they had when she bought them. Eleanor had felt daring buying clothing, which would have infuriated her mother, had she still been alive. When she finishes unpacking, Eleanor suddenly realizes she has been intentionally silent the whole time, as if she is afraid the house will hear her. "'No,' she said aloud and the one word echoed" (pg. 31).

In defiance of the gloom, Eleanor crosses the room to pull the curtains. The watery sunlight, repelled by the thick window glass, barely penetrates the room. Eleanor stands by the window, too afraid to go back across the room. Fortunately, in that moment, Eleanor hears the sound of another human being as the heavy iron doorknocker crashes against the front door. With evident relief, Eleanor greets the new guest in the hallway. Theodora's presence lightens the mood as the two women make jokes about the house to relieve the tension. Mrs. Dudley gives Theodora the green room next to Eleanor's and Eleanor notices that Theodora's luggage is considerably more expensive than hers. Mrs. Dudley gives Theodora the same chilling speech, then leaves the two women alone together.



Theodora demonstrates her perceptiveness by noticing Eleanor's state of fright. She quickly endears herself to Eleanor by teasing that her arrival at Hill House feels like the first day of school, where "you don't know anybody and you're afraid everyone's going to laugh at your clothes" (pg. 34). Theo's attitude reassures Eleanor, who changes into slacks and her brand new matching red sweater and sandals. Eleanor is not accustomed to wearing such bright colors, but Theodora clearly is and Eleanor remarks that Theodora in her yellow sweater brings more light into the room than the window does.

Theodora teases Eleanor that the two of them have a duty to dress colorfully and bring some life to the gloom of Hill House. Laughing, they run downstairs, eager to explore the surrounding grounds. Mrs. Dudley reminds them that she sets dinner at six and leaves promptly thereafter; it sounds like a warning coming from this grim lady. Outside, the women notice the close-set hills, which give the house its name. Theodora marvels that the house isn't set atop the hills to take advantage of the view, instead of being buried in the hillside. Eleanor tries to joke about the oppressive scenery, but Theo picks up on her continual fear and gently admonishes Eleanor not to be so afraid all the time.

The two ladies follow a path, which leads to a pretty little brook where they concoct amusing stories about fairy princesses and golden fish that are really handsome princes in disguise. They fall into a friendly conversation in which both women make up charmingly false details about their lives. The laughter dies on Eleanor's lips when she sees a chilling shadow move across the bright green hillside. Theodora grabs her wrist as she too, senses the chilling, unseen thing. Theodora announces that it's gone and indeed the sunlight and warmth returns to the babbling brook. Theodora insists that she saw the thing clearly and that it was a rabbit. She jokes about them both being scared by a little rabbit and suggests she and Eleanor return to the brook another time for a picnic. Eleanor shakily admits that she doesn't have the courage to return to the brook and hurries Theodora inside to meet the others, who have surely arrived by this time. Theodora puts a comforting arm around Eleanor and continues to tease her out of her fear.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In Chapter 2, the author lays the groundwork for the tragedy, which will ultimately transpire. The reader has already been made aware of Eleanor's odd temperament in Chapter 1. She is a romantic dreamer with a dark side. The reader is not yet aware of the extent of Eleanor's dark side, but combined with the specter of Hill House, which is introduced in this chapter, Eleanor's control over the darkness within her is sure to be tested. The narrator informs the reader that Hill House is intrinsically evil.

The author relies heavily on Eleanor's frightened reactions to convey the true horror of the house. The scene in the blue room, when Eleanor is unpacking, conveys clearly the darkness of Hill House. Eleanor finds herself rooted to the spot, unable to move. This symptom of the paralysis is something the reader can identify with, as it speaks to a primal, instinctual reaction of fear. Rabbits, too, are prone to freezing upon sensing a



predator and thus the author draws a parallel between Eleanor and a frightened rabbit. This parallel is echoed later in the chapter when Theo insists that the ghostly shadow by the brook is only a rabbit. It is an unconscious association, which the author draws and yet Shirley Jackson clearly leaves the reader with the feeling that Eleanor is a frightened rabbit, being hunted by a far more powerful predator.

Eleanor's first meeting with Theodora sets the tone for their relationship. Theodora is everything the drab, unloved Eleanor wants to be but believes she unable to be. Theo brings a ray of sunshine into dark Hill House and Eleanor is instantly attracted to her cheerful demeanor. Yet already there is a subtle current of manipulation evident in their relationship. Theo reveals herself to be highly perceptive and by her reactions to Eleanor, it is evident that Theo sees Eleanor as weak and unstable. She is overly solicitous of Eleanor, much as one might treat a hysterical patient. Theo, too, is frightened of Hill House, but unwilling to admit her own fear. She projects much of her fear onto Eleanor and then treats Eleanor like a frightened child. In later chapters, Eleanor will come to resent the way the others single her out as the one in need of comfort and coddling. At this point, however, she is too unsure of herself to object to Theo's patronizing attitude.

Eleanor is unable to see herself clearly; she relies on the judgments of others to gauge her own worth. This leaves her open to manipulation. Although Theo is initially very kind to Eleanor, Theo also reveals herself to be capable of manipulation. Eleanor, the frightened rabbit, appears to be entirely at the mercy of Theo's good will. This recipe for tragedy lacks only one ingredient: something to sour the goodwill between Theo and Eleanor. As Chapter 3 begins, the reader meets Luke, who will provide that missing ingredient.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

As the two women walk back to Hill House in the gathering dusk, Eleanor sees Luke for the first time. "Journeys end in lovers meeting," she thinks (pg. 41). Luke greets the two women with courtly flirtatiousness, which Eleanor finds silly, but to which Theodora responds with her usual good cheer. They all share a laugh over the sour-faced Mrs. Dudley and her less than charming husband. Luke introduces himself and Eleanor is surprised to learn he is a member of the family that owns Hill House. Theodora introduces herself and Eleanor as two scared little girls who are afraid of rabbits. Just then, Dr. Montague appears on the front porch and welcomes the ladies into the house.

Inside, Montague acknowledges Luke as the future owner of Hill House and then asks Luke to make him a martini. Dr. Montague leads everyone down the winding corridors to a small room with high ceilings and a fireplace, which Luke lights at once. Montague toasts to success and Luke asks him to define what success means in this case. Dr. Montague replies that he hopes they will all have an exciting visit and that the book he plans to write will garner accolades from his colleagues. Dr. Montague explains that their stay will be a bit like a vacation; only they will be taking notes for him, documenting any irregularities in the house. Even as they speak, they can all feel the chill of Hill House pressing in around them.

The small group endeavors to overcome the gloom with confidence and cheer. Eleanor surveys her new companions. Dr. Montague is a cherubic man who looks like he belongs at a jollier hearth with a jolly wife and a cat on his knee. Theodora has found, with cat-like instinct, the most comfortable chair in the room, notes Eleanor. Luke makes himself busy; he is in constant motion to refill the group's glasses, stir the fire and restlessly touch the cluttered, Victorian décor. Eleanor tells herself that she is the fourth person in this room and that she belongs. The group picks up the same style of banter as Eleanor and Theodora enjoyed out by the brook.

Everyone introduces themselves comically, with some of the same frightened bravado the women had displayed upon first meeting. Luke introduces himself as a bullfighter, Eleanor as an artist's model and Theodora as a lord's daughter who has borrowed her maid's clothing to masquerade as a commoner. Even Dr. Montague joins in, proclaiming himself a pilgrim and a wanderer. They toast their little group and Montague suggests they make this room their headquarters. Tomorrow, he promises, he will show them the rest of the house. Now they propose to head down to dinner, but only Montague is able to navigate the house in the dark and only because he has studied a map of Hill House. The doors in Hill House swing shut, preventing any of the corridor light from entering the dark rooms as the small party makes its way to the kitchen.

In the kitchen they find an impressive meal laid out on the sideboard and the dining table is set lavishly for four. Eleanor mentions that she thinks Mrs. Dudley is proud of



the house and wonders what keeps her and her husband working there as caretakers. Dr. Montague responds that the Dudleys have taken care of Hill House since before the ownership of the house by Luke's family. Theodora jokes that the Dudleys are only waiting for the Sanderson heirs to die off in suspicious ways before they plunder the house for the jewels hidden in a secret passage. Dr. Montague firmly states that Hill House contains no secret passages. He has studied such possibilities before choosing the house for paranormal investigation.

Theo asks Dr. Montague precisely what is supposed to happen to them at Hill House, but the doctor puts her off till the next day. Luke and Eleanor chime in to insist that he tell them about it that night. Dr. Montague is afraid they may hear the story and decide not to spend the night. He warns them that the gates are locked for the night and that the last person who tried to leave Hill House after dark was killed when his horse bolted and crashed them into the large tree at a turn in the driveway. His three guests promise not to leave the house and the doctor grudgingly agrees to tell them about Hill House after they eat.

After dinner, with a glass of brandy in hand, Doctor Montague considers aloud how best to relate the story of Hill House. He does not wish to influence his new assistants with historical rumors until they have had a chance to see Hill House's oddities for themselves. They sit ensconced in their little parlor, warm and sleepy from their fine meal. Eleanor longingly wishes she had sat on the rug in front of the fire like Theodora, but since she didn't think of it immediately, she is afraid to call attention to herself by getting up and changing seats now. Theodora teases Dr. Montague that this is the perfect time for a ghost story. He reacts with stiff irritation and insists that they keep their language and attitude scientific and rational.

Nonetheless, Dr. Montague stands before the fire, clearly enjoying the tale he is about to tell. He tells them that most popular, modern theories of science would discount the strange events at Hill House as "the result of subterranean waters, or electric currents, or hallucinations caused by polluted air; atmospheric pressure, sun spots, earth tremors all have their advocates among the skeptical" (pg. 51). Dr. Montague admits to having told his colleagues he was going camping for the summer. His goal is to document events so logically as to prove that Hill House is haunted, although he hesitates to use the word.

Dr. Montague first heard the rumors about Hill House from one of its former tenants. He had subsequently looked up several other former tenants, none of whom would admit to its being haunted, but all of whom warned him to stay far away from the house. Excited, Dr. Montague had researched old newspaper accounts and discovered a scandalous tale of suicide, madness and lawsuits connected to Hill House. The doctor takes a moment to explain to Theodora and Eleanor that he hopes their presence will intensify the mysterious forces at work in the house. He explains that Theodora has documented telepathic ability and that Eleanor has been involved with poltergeist phenomena.

Eleanor asks him what he means and he mentions the incident of the stones raining down upon her childhood home. Eleanor's recollection of this incident is hazy at best,



although she does remember her mother telling her that jealous neighbors had caused the stones. Eleanor stubbornly clings to the subject after the doctor has moved on, sounding defensive and unsure of herself. Theodora chimes in that when she was a child she had thrown a brick through a greenhouse roof and despite the whipping she received, she had enjoyed it so much that she'd done it again. Luke brings the conversation back to Hill House and the doctor asks them if they wish to leave or if they will stay. Everyone agrees to stay. Eleanor comments that they couldn't leave now if they wanted to. Everyone stares at her sharply and so she adds that Mrs. Dudley would never forgive them if they left. "She wondered if they really believed that that was what she had meant to say and thought, *perhaps it has us now, this house, perhaps it will not let us go*" (pg. 54).

The doctor refills their brandy glasses and recommences his story. Hill House had been built eighty years ago by a man named Hugh Crain. Moments before his young wife laid eyes on the house, Mrs. Crain's carriage overturned in the driveway, killing her instantly. Her body was carried into the house and Hugh Crain was left a widower with two young daughters. The second woman he married also died unexpectedly, in a fall. Wife number three died as well, but her death did not come as a surprise. She died while traveling in Europe with her husband, seeking a cure for tuberculosis, which ultimately killed her.

While the elder Crains were in Europe, the two daughters remained at Hill House, looked after by a governess. After their stepmother's death, the girls were shipped off to relatives and Hugh Crain closed up Hill House. He lived out his few remaining days overseas. Upon his death, Hill House passed jointly to the two sisters. When the younger sister married, they agreed that the older sister would live in the house. Theodora, with her characteristic perception, guesses that the younger sister had stolen her older sister's beau. Dr. Montague admits that may indeed have been the case.

Over the years, the sisters quarreled about the house. The younger sister insisted that she had given up her claim to the house in exchange for certain family heirlooms, including a set of gold-rimmed china. The villagers of Hillsdale had sided with old Miss Crain, who had lived in Hill House with only a village girl as a companion helper for many years by this point. The younger sister had a reputation for vengefulness and a vicious tongue, which may account for some of the rumors about Miss Crain's death. The older sister apparently died of pneumonia, leaving the house to her young village companion. The younger sister sued the companion and slandered her name, spreading stories that the companion had tricked Miss Crain into leaving her the house.

In court, the companion nervously spoke about the occasions when the younger sister had broken into the house at night to steal things. The break-ins could not be documented, but it is documented that the younger sister continued to make threats against the companion even after the companion won her court case and got the title to the house. Yet despite the younger sister's poor behavior, the villagers all sided with her against the companion. Eventually the companion committed suicide. Dr. Montague believes "the poor girl was hated to death" (pg. 58).



He concludes the story by stating that the younger sister consistently denied breaking into the house at night. The Sanderson family, distant cousins of the companion, inherited the house upon her death. Luke's family had sent the younger sister packing and no more was heard from her until she died a few years later. The Sandersons had only managed to stay in the house for a few days before moving back to the city. The house has remained on the market ever since. None of the renters have been willing to stay more than just a few days, either.

As Dr. Montague concludes his story, his audience relaxes dreamily by the fire. Eleanor stares at the red sandals on her feet, pleased to own such daring shoes. She speaks the thought aloud and Theodora smiles up at her. The doctor invites them all to a game of bridge, but to his dismay, Theodora does not play. Luke challenges him to chess, instead, which cheers him instantly. The doctor leaves the room to get the chessmen and returns looking dazed. He insists nothing has happened, but decides from now on they should not wander around the house alone. He and Luke begin their game and Eleanor decides to join Theodora in front of the fire since Theo is looking sulky from lack of attention. Theo complains of her boredom and Eleanor tells of the dull routine she adhered to while caring for her ill mother.

Theo gaily apologizes for her selfishness and presses Eleanor for details about herself. Theo wants to know what Eleanor did after her mother died to make up for all those wasted years. Eleanor admits that her mother's death left her with very little money and no job. Theodora tells Eleanor about her own lovely home. Theo uses the word "we" as she discusses fixing up the house, choosing the paint and the furnishings. In response, Eleanor asks if she's married. After an awkward silence, Theodora laughs and touches Eleanor's cheek, saying she is not married. Theo asks about Eleanor's home and Eleanor tells her about her lovely apartment with the stone lions on the mantelpiece and the white cat and her blue cup with white stars. As they speak of the cup, Eleanor laughs and says she would have stolen the gold-rimmed dishes.

Luke wins the chess game and the party decides to head upstairs to bed. Dr. Montague leads the way through the darkened house and promises to be awake for a while yet, reading, just in case anyone has need of him. At her door, Theo tells Eleanor to come in if she gets scared at all. Eleanor closes her bedroom door and waits for the others to go to their rooms before locking her door. She is so sleepy that even the blue room looks cozy and inviting. Everyone falls asleep except for Dr. Montague, who stays up, as promised, reading. "Around them the house brooded, settling and stirring with a movement that was almost like a shudder" (pg. 66).

Chapter 3 Analysis

Eleanor is the type of person who displays every thought and emotion clearly on her face. The gathering on this first evening, while convivial, brings to the surface some dark undercurrents in Eleanor's emotional past. The fact that she has blocked out the incident of the stones is disturbing. The cause behind such a strange incident as a rain of stones cannot be proven, but Eleanor's blatant defensiveness causes Theo to leap to



the conclusion that Eleanor somehow willed the stones to fall. Theo does not state this openly; she merely attempts to comfort Eleanor by telling the group that she, too, had thrown some rocks as a child.

As usual, Theo is addressing the unspoken. Her perceptiveness causes her to interpret Eleanor's evasiveness about the stone incident as an admission of guilt and so she tries to soothe Eleanor by providing an example of her own childish misbehavior. By speaking to her perceptions in this manner, Theo causes the others to believe as she does, that Eleanor threw the stones. The reader is left with two disturbing possibilities: either Eleanor did cause the stones to fall and might be capable of more such behavior, or Eleanor is being maligned by Theo, accused of something she did not do. Theo may be presciently perceptive, but by voicing her more negative perceptions in an environment like Hill House, she contributes to the atmosphere of suspicion. Yet Eleanor, with her complete lack of confidence in herself, is giving good reason for suspicion. One can already see the seed of conflict between these two women.

Eleanor's desolate background is revealed indirectly. Her simple pleasure in owning a pair of red shoes indicates that she has been denied such colorful luxuries. Eleanor's limited recollection of the stone incident contains one telling piece of evidence. Her mother, recalls Eleanor, had blamed jealous neighbors for the stones; apparently, her mother often complained of the neighbors' jealousy. This clue makes Eleanor's mother sound like a paranoiac, or a woman so accustomed to being disliked that she becomes angry and bitter at the world.

Eleven years spent caring for such a woman cannot have been pleasant for Eleanor. Having been raised by this bitter woman and not having had much social contact outside the home, Eleanor was probably an obedient caretaker to her mother, unaware that not everyone sees the world in the way that her mother did. Eleanor's new clothes and her red shoes seem like small, adolescent rebellions. Her choice to lie to Theodora by pretending to have an apartment with white lions on the mantelpiece and a white cat indicates her dissatisfaction with her present reality. At thirty-two, Eleanor has not yet managed to individuate an identity separate from her mother's. She is attempting to do this now, by coming to Hill House.

As evident from her internal dialogue, Eleanor fights an internal battle against the bitterness and despair her mother taught her; a brighter, sunnier side of Eleanor attempts to escape from its cocoon. Theo is both wise and kind to encourage Eleanor out of her shell; however, she may already be too late. As with Norman Bates in *Psycho*, Eleanor's mother's voice may be so ingrained in her mind that she cannot shake it even now that Mother is dead. The other disturbing factor in Eleanor's internal and external dialogue is the way in which Hill House creeps into her words. Already she presumes to speak for the house. Yet it may be that the house is really speaking for her. She says things that might just as easily have come from the mouths of the young sister Crain or the village companion.

The reader imagines that the house, just as perceptively as Theo (if not more so), has also taken measure of Eleanor, probing her strengths and weaknesses and now seeks



to manipulate her. Perhaps it is also the house, which will later cause Theo to mock Eleanor's weaknesses and manipulate Eleanor as well. Just as Eleanor senses Theo's need for attention, the house notices, too. Hill House may be capable of using Theo's weaknesses to stir up trouble between her and Eleanor. All of these disquieting possibilities are expertly laid out by the author through subtle implication. The restrained manner in which Shirley Jackson reveals the evils of Hill House are designed to leave the reader wondering whether the house is indeed haunted, or if one's imagination is simply working overtime.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Eleanor awakens the next day, amazed that the first good night's sleep she's had in years came to her in Hill House. Anxiously, her mind returns to the prior night as she wonders if she made a fool of herself. She feels she has given herself away by acting so grateful to be included in the company of her new friends. Telling herself she is a silly baby, Eleanor resolves to behave more reservedly. She hears splashing in the bathroom that adjoins her room and Theo's. She calls out to Theo, who answers cheerily, letting Eleanor know the bathroom will soon be free. Eleanor looks around at the bright sunshine and finds Hill House charming in the morning light.

Theo exits the bathroom and advises Eleanor to dress like a sunbeam. Mrs. Dudley had informed them the night before that she sets out breakfast promptly at nine o'clock a.m. and clears it away at ten o'clock. The two ladies giggle to think how disappointed Mrs. Dudley will be to see that they have survived the night. Eleanor readies, surprised at how much she enjoys pampering herself. She comes out and finds Theo, dressed brightly and suspects that Theo enjoys everything she ever does, from bathing to eating to moving and sleeping.

Theodora insists they get going, as it may take them a while to find the dining room again. When Theo tells Eleanor that Luke and the doctor have been up for hours, talking to Theo at her window, Eleanor feels a stab of jealousy that they started without her. The women promptly get lost in the big house and are forced to shout to attract the men's attention. The doctor and Luke rescue them. Moments before, the men had opened all the doorways to light the passage to the dining room for the women. However, all the doors had mysteriously swung shut right before the men's eyes, leaving the women to navigate the darkened hallways.

Despite this oddity, the party of four is cheerful in the morning light, all of them are glad to have survived the night. They settle into easy familiarity over breakfast. The doctor tells them he had read until three, but all had been quiet. Theo and Eleanor discover they both dreamt about the wicked younger Crain sister. Eleanor voices her fear and the others change the subject to brighter topics. Eleanor begins to see that she is the voice and the representative of all their fears and that by quieting her, they quiet their own fears. She becomes somewhat cross with her new friends.

The doctor changes the conversation from discussion of superstitious fears to a more rational approach to the house. He explains that the floor plan of Hill House is laid out in concentric circles. The parlor in which the group had gathered the night before lies at the very center. It is surrounded by a ring of rooms with no windows leading to the outside, because this ring is surrounded by another ring of exterior rooms. The exterior rooms have windows, which do open onto the outdoors and consist of the drawing room, the library and the conservatory. The exterior veranda, explains Dr. Montague,



runs all the way around the house. Theo insults the house just as Mrs. Dudley enters the dining room. Mrs. Dudley informs them she clears off the breakfast table at ten and refuses to allow them to linger over their coffee. Mrs. Dudley explains, rather eerily, that the dishes must be back on their shelves; the dishes belong on the shelves, she repeats. Theodora says they must be a lot of trouble for Mrs. Dudley; Mrs. Dudley merely stares at her silently.

The group leaves the dining room and begins to open doors. First they prop open the dining room door with an overstuffed armchair. They find and explore the game room, which does not look like a fun place to spend time, especially with the dead, staring, deer head and violent portraits of animal hunts on the walls. They prop the door open and abandon the game room. Eleanor remarks to Theodora that she can't stop thinking of the poor village companion, wandering these rooms all alone. The group gratefully escapes out the front door into fresh air.

Dr. Montague points out a small door, recessed in an alcove by the front door. It leads to the library, which is in the tower. As he opens the door, Eleanor gets a whiff of a cold, moldy, earthy smell, which somehow reminds her of her dead mother. She refuses to enter and remains outside alone as the others enter the library. Inside the doorway, Eleanor can see that the library contains a rickety, ancient spiral staircase of black metal. Dr. Montague informs them it leads up to the tower balcony, where the companion supposedly hanged herself. The others return to the bright sunlit veranda, where Eleanor waits. Dr. Montague is intrigued that Eleanor has noticed a smell, because none of the others can smell it.

Theodora asks the doctor if there are two front doors; she is surprised because when she looks up, she cannot see her bedroom window and yet her bedroom window overlooks the front of the house. Dr. Montague claps his hands together with delight at Theodora's comprehension and begins to lecture them about the structural peculiarities of Hill House. He explains that the reason they've all had such trouble finding their way around is because Hugh Crain designed every angle in Hill House to be slightly off kilter. Every doorway and stairway is canted slightly toward the center of the house. These minor variations add up to large structural variations. Theodora's room is actually fifteen feet to the left, not directly over the front door as she had supposed.

Dr. Montague conjectures that these odd angles are what cause the doors to swing shut by themselves. The group realizes that some of their strange feelings about the house have to do with the fact that they are constantly standing or sitting on an incline, even if they can't see it. With this in mind, the foursome re-enter the house and continue exploring. They investigate the music room and the conservatory before entering the drawing room. They stop short in front of the huge, baroque statue, which fills the drawing room. It is a grotesque mockery of Greco-Roman gods and nymphs, their white marble nudity somehow obscene in the room. Dr. Montague explains that Hugh Crain had this huge, heavy statue specially built for the drawing room, to counterbalance the crazy angles of the house. Montague opens the drawing room curtains, which lead out onto the veranda and the two ladies race each other laughingly out of the room.



Theo and Eleanor stop laughing abruptly when they leave the veranda. The door they have chosen to re-enter the house with leads into the kitchen, where Mrs. Dudley frowns at them silently. Theo asks Mrs. Dudley if they might look over the kitchen; silently Mrs. Dudley exits by the back stairs. They notice that several doors lead out of the kitchen to different parts of the house and joke that Mrs. Dudley likes to have plenty of escape routes. They mock her until Theodora suggests that Mrs. Dudley may be listening at the door to the back stairs. The ladies exit onto the veranda, where they find Luke and the doctor.

Eleanor circles the house, alone, on the veranda. She stops short when she comes to the stone tower, hunched up against the front of the house. She wonders why she had been unable to enter the library with the winding staircase up to the tower. As Eleanor stares at the tower, entranced, Luke arrives and warns her not to fall. Eleanor has been gripping the veranda's handrail and leaning far, far back to look up at the tower. Luke suggests she not trust her balance in Hill House, for she was leaning practically at a ninety-degree angle when he found her. Eleanor feels fine, but to her annoyance, the group treats her solicitously, as if she were extremely fragile. To compound Eleanor's disquiet, inside the house they find that the doors have all swung shut once more, even the ones they had propped open. They choose to blame Mrs. Dudley.

Promptly at one o'clock, the group enjoys Mrs. Dudley's fabulous soufflé. She kicks them out of the dining room at two o'clock. By group consensus, they decide to take naps during daylight hours, beginning today. Afraid to be alone, Eleanor follows Theo into the green bedroom and watches her paint her nails. Theo tells Eleanor that Eleanor doesn't put enough time and effort into dressing herself prettily. As Eleanor dozes lightly, she feels Theo brushing polish onto her toenails. To Eleanor's embarrassment, Theo tells her that her feet are dirty. Eleanor opens her eyes to the awful sight of her dirty feet with glaring red nail polish. Eleanor feels horrible and wicked and laments that her mother would call her a fool. Theo insists that Eleanor's mother would be delighted to see Eleanor's toes painted. Theo tells Eleanor she's got foolishness confused with wickedness somehow and then with a flash of premonition, advises Eleanor to go home. Eleanor says she doesn't want to leave and Theo shakes off her bad feeling. She teases Eleanor about whether the doctor or Luke will notice her toes first.

Later that afternoon, the group gathers in front of the nursery where a cold spot chills them all. The doctor has them all touch the cold spot one at a time. Montague is excited because no skeptical explanation could possibly account for this cold spot. He is also pleased because he believes the degree differential between the cold spot and the ambient air must surely be greater than eleven degrees. Eleven degrees was the temperature drop recorded at the Borley Rectory by Montague's colleagues in the field.

Dr. Montague can taste the success; he feels he's got enough proof with this cold spot to vanquish the skeptics and outshine his colleagues. Luke stands in the cold spot and realizes that the spot is the intersection between the lines of vision of two decorative masks, hung above the nursery entrance, as if the stare of the masks was causing the freeze. Theo jokes about using it to chill their beers.



Eleanor enters the nursery through the cold spot and remarks that the chill feels like a personal attack, rather than just an impartial cold temperature. The nursery is not kept up as well as the rest of the house; the group supposes not even Mrs. Dudley wants to walk through the cold spot more than necessary. They feel the impending darkness pressing on them and decide to quickly leave the room.

The group adjourns to their parlor, where they mix up some pre-dinner cocktails. After dinner, the doctor suggests they take their coffee into the parlor. Mrs. Dudley has gone for the night and the group realizes anew that they are alone in Hill House. As Luke gathers the coffee things on a tray, Eleanor begins clearing up the table. Theodora suggests it is a bad idea for Eleanor to venture into the kitchen after dark by herself. They leave the dishes and head to the parlor where Theo and Luke make light banter about Hill House. Just as Eleanor is thinking that Theo should not say the name, Theo catches her eye and starts chanting *Hill House, Hill House*.

The doctor notices Eleanor's discomfort with the others' irreverent laughter. She tells him she thinks whatever is to happen will happen soon. He takes her seriously and expresses his concerns as to how they will each handle trouble, if it comes. He makes Eleanor promise to leave the house at once if she feels it begin to latch onto her. The men begin their chess game and Eleanor convinces Theo to quit pacing and sit down beside her. Theo misses her home and asks Eleanor if she doesn't miss her apartment, too. Eleanor is impatient with Theo, whom she perceives to be sulking like a baby. The group retires to bed shortly thereafter.

Eleanor wakes up, calling to her mother that she's coming. The voice that answers, however, belongs to Theo and Eleanor recollects herself. A crashing noise resounds through Hill House and Eleanor thinks it sounds like her mother knocking on the wall, as she used to do when Eleanor was taking care of her. Eleanor takes refuge in Theo's room, where they huddle on the bed with all the lights on as the crashing sound continues. The room grows unnaturally cold and silent. Eleanor covers Theo with a blanket and throws Theo's dressing gown over her own shoulders. When they begin to speak, the crashing sound resumes, as if in response to their voices. The crash now sounds against the bedroom door, which rocks in its frame. It has found them, thinks Eleanor. Since she won't open the door and let it in, it will find its own way in. Little patting sounds come from around the doorframe, as if someone was feeling around the edges of the door. The women reassure each other that both of their bedroom doors are locked just as the crashing resumes in a fury. Eleanor tells whatever it is that it can't get in; silence follows her words, then an eerie giggle which sounds insane and gloating. Just like that, the manifestation ends. Luke and Dr. Montague's voices can be heard calling them from the stairs at the end of the hallway.

Theo notices that Eleanor has her robe and Eleanor drops it on the bed. She races back to her room to get her own robe while Theo opens her door to Luke and the doctor. Luke breaks out the brandy bottle and four glasses and they sit around Theo's room discussing what happened. Theo begins calling Eleanor 'Nellie' and teases her about being so scared. Meanwhile the men hadn't even heard the crashing sounds. Luke and the doctor had been chasing a dog which the doctor had seen run past his very door.



They followed it down the hallway and outside into the garden. They lost the dog and returned to the house and had been searching for nearly two hours. Their first hint of a disturbance in the ladies' rooms was the sound of Theo and Eleanor's voices. Dr. Montague tells them that he believes the house deliberately led the men away, to leave the women unprotected. He suggests they take precautions against allowing the house to separate them.

Chapter 4 Analysis

The house is working on Eleanor now, or so it would seem. It has evaluated all its guests and chosen Eleanor as the weakest link. The crashing noises are more frightening for her than for Theo because for Eleanor, they carry personal meaning. It sounds like her mother, banging on the wall for help as she had so often done in the middle of the night. Later, the reader will discover that Eleanor may have intentionally ignored her mother's knocks the night she died. Whether Eleanor killed her mother or merely stayed asleep from sheer exhaustion, the reader can only guess; perhaps Eleanor herself does not know.

Hill House acts as Eleanor's conscience, tormenting her with the sound of her dead mother's cane, coming to find Eleanor. Of course Eleanor does not wish to reveal her potential guilt to the others and so Theo has no other explanation for Eleanor's excessive fright. Eleanor gets her nickname, Nellie, from Theo on this night because she is so nervous. Theo is also rather frightened herself by the knocking and passing off all the fear as Eleanor's is unfair. From now on, Theo has the others calling Eleanor by the nickname Nellie as well. Theo, for all her apparent friendliness, is mocking Eleanor's reputation. A stronger person could stand up for herself, but can Eleanor?

It is not only Theo and Hill House who think Eleanor is the weakest link. Dr. Montague has begun to use Eleanor as a psychic barometer. Her nervousness increases directly in response to Hill House's power and so he pays careful attention to her responses. The doctor reveals his own prescient understanding of how Hill House works by making his assistants promise to leave if they feel the house "catching at" them (pg. 89). For the moment, the house seems to have chosen Eleanor to catch at, but perhaps that is because a part of Eleanor is herself reaching out. The poltergeist-type phenomena of the knocking sounds coincidentally appears the very night Dr. Montague brings up the incident of the stones, Eleanor's prior brush with poltergeist phenomena.

In the previous chapter, Theo establishes her suspicion that Eleanor made the stones fall. It is only a matter of time before Theo becomes suspicious that Eleanor is causing the current phenomena. Hill House seems to be able to read the two women like a book and use this information to create fear and strife. Fear and strife play a huge part in the history of Hill House and so the reader must wonder if the house is manipulating the women, especially when the doctor suggests that the house may be trying to separate them. Could the women be manipulating the house? Could Eleanor, with her subconscious powers of telekinesis, be tapping into the house's dark energy to get Theo's attention?



Eleanor definitely wants something from Theo. Thanks to the scary noises, Eleanor has an excuse to join Theo in her room. When the unnatural cold creeps into the green room, Eleanor strangely tucks Theo into a quilt and puts on Theo's dressing gown. Eleanor hardly seems the type to borrow anything without permission, especially an item as personal as a robe. It would have been more appropriate for her to choose the quilt and wrap Theo in her own gown. This suggests two possibilities. The first is that Eleanor wishes to borrow Theo's identity. By wrapping herself in Theo's robe, Eleanor is trying to become more like her. It is a greedy, grabby desire to take the things Theo has for her own use. The second possibility is that Eleanor is romantically attracted to Theo and wishes to wrap herself in her lover's clothes, just as many women feel comforted by sleeping in a favorite article of clothing belonging to their lover. Both of these possibilities will be touched on in later chapters as the complex relationship between Theo and Eleanor evolves.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

The next morning, Eleanor awakens happily. She realizes that she is, for the first time in her life, actually happy. Theo, too, looks happy, as do the men when they catch up to them. Eleanor thinks it must be the excitement, for they all seem to be thriving in the strangeness of Hill House. Theo teases Luke about his having taken a stocking from her room, making sure her voice is loud enough for Mrs. Dudley to hear. They are all in high spirits, especially the doctor, who believes he has indisputable proof to compete with other reported sightings at such places as Ballechin House, Borley Rectory and Glamis Castle. Their intoxication, however, begins to trouble the doctor, who wonders if their happy glow is not some enchantment caused by Hill House. Luke replies that the previous night's manifestations had comforted him because he never felt in physical danger. The doctor agrees that the house cannot harm them physically, but that it might inspire them to cause harm to themselves or others. Eleanor attempts a teasing response, but her playful attitude worries the doctor that she is too close to the state of mind in which she would welcome the dangers of Hill House.

Dr. Montague looks Eleanor in the eye as he tells the group that, unlike ghosts, poltergeists do affect the physical world. He describes poltergeists as destructive, mindless and lacking will of their own. They are undirected forces and rank lowest on the supernatural social scale. Unreasonably, Eleanor finds laughter bubbling to her lips. She holds in her delight as they discuss the plan for the day. Mrs. Dudley interrupts them to clear the table. Dr. Montague attempts to wheedle fifteen more minutes out of her, but she refuses to wait.

They leave the dining room and return to their little parlor, laughing uncontrollably. When their laughter finally dies down, Dr. Montague announces he wants more coffee and asks Luke to convince Mrs. Dudley to provide them with another pot. Luke jokes that Dr. Montague is sacrificing Luke's life for some coffee and heads out towards the kitchen. Moments later he returns, ashen-faced. The doctor chides himself for breaking his own rule by sending Luke off alone, while Luke motions them into the hallway. Huge chalk letters have been scrawled along the long hall. They read, "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME" (pg. 103).

Wildly, Eleanor begs one of the others to admit that they wrote it to frighten her. She feels singled out, especially when Theo suggests Eleanor wrote it herself, to get attention. Eleanor replies that it is Theo who is the spoiled baby always in need of attention, not Eleanor. The men watch miserably as the women quarrel, until Luke finally tells Eleanor she's said enough. Eleanor, feeling accused by Luke now as well as by Theo, whirls on him. She finds both Luke and Dr. Montague laughing and Eleanor realizes that both men believe Theo only accused Eleanor to make Eleanor mad and get her mind off her fear. Eleanor is ashamed to have been so maneuvered by Theo, but thanks Theo nicely and apologizes for being afraid. Inside, however, Eleanor is



furious that the men are fawning over Theo's neat trick, shocking Eleanor out of her hysteria. Eleanor is aware that Theo was not trying to be nice at all; she intended what she said.

After that, things quiet down at Hill House. Nothing else happens that day or night and the group is gradually lulled into a sense of security. Time moves slowly. The doctor spends the day writing up his notes on the porch, while Theo, Eleanor and Luke explore the property. Dr. Montague's assistants have each written up a careless account of what they've witnessed at Hill House, which the doctor duly includes in his journals.

The three young people discover a little summerhouse and a vegetable garden tended by the Dudleys. They eat wild strawberries on the lawn while the doctor looks on fondly. The following day, the group spends taking measurements of the cold spot outside the nursery. Their measurement process is impeded by the extreme cold, which makes it difficult to hold chalk or the measuring tape for more than a minute before one's hands go numb. Montague is disgusted to learn that the thermometer that they place inside the cold spot refuses to register any change in temperature whatsoever. He roundly curses the statisticians at Borley Rectory, who claimed to have recorded an eleven-degree temperature drop. By lunchtime, Montague's work with the cold spot is complete and the group heads down to the kitchen.

Over lunch, the doctor challenges them to a game of croquet after their afternoon naps and informs them that his wife will be joining their party on Saturday. He assures the others that Mrs. Montague is perfectly prepared to receive any psychic experiences, which the house may present to her. The ladies head upstairs to nap in their rooms. Theodora screams Eleanor's name upon entering her bedroom.

Eleanor rushes in to find Theo's clothes ripped from their hangars and covered in what looks like blood. In large, red letters on the wall are the words, "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME ELEANOR" (pg. 110). Theo accuses Eleanor of planning this surprise for Theo. Eleanor calls for Luke and the doctor and when they rush upstairs, Eleanor is careful to explain that Theo is hysterical because someone or something has gotten red paint all over her clothes. She smiles to herself as the men rush in to check on Theo. When the men see Theo in mid-tantrum and the writing on the wall, Eleanor steels herself to handle the situation. She tells the men to bring Theo into her room and then asks if Theo will be all right. She offers to lend Theo her clothes. Dr. Montague finds it strange that Eleanor is not frightened this time. Eleanor laughs and responds that maybe she is getting used to Theo blaming her for everything. The doctor insists sternly that no one is blaming Eleanor for anything. Irritated, Eleanor remarks that she hopes her clothes will be good enough for Theo. Eleanor volunteers to help the doctor sketch the room the following day; for now, they seal it off. Eleanor returns to her room, where she is overcome with loathing for Theodora. Theo looks up and notices Luke behind Eleanor. She smiles brightly at Eleanor and insists she doesn't really believe Eleanor did it.

Later, in the parlor, Theo is cleaned up and wearing Eleanor's red sweater. Eleanor thinks how much she would love to bash in Theo's head with a stick or batter her with rocks. Theo looks up at Eleanor; she calls her Nellie again and tells Nellie that she is



truly sorry for accusing her. Eleanor thinks how pleasant it would be to watch Theo die, but smiles and accepts her apology. Before they go to bed for the night, Eleanor tries to apologize to the group. She explains that although she hadn't seemed frightened before, she actually had been afraid. The doctor, Luke and Theo all comment that fear is only a matter of being afraid of oneself, or of one's own desires.

Eleanor admits to a fear of being alone and tries to explain to the others how frightening it is to see one's own name written on the wall of Hill House. She speaks incoherently about her fear and when she mentions surrendering to it, Dr. Montague and Luke become alarmed. They exchange glances and Luke says that Eleanor has done this before. With everyone now staring at her, Eleanor begs to know what she has said to cause them to look at her this way. They encourage her to drink her brandy and tease her about wanting to be the center of attention.

That night, crazy laughter and babbling can be heard through the wall of Theo's room. In Eleanor's room, the two women sit up and hold hands across their twin beds. Eleanor grips Theo's hand tightly in the darkness, frightened. The voice becomes, recognizably, a child's voice. Eleanor cannot bear the sounds of a child being hurt. She screams aloud for the house to stop it. In response to her scream, the lights in the bedroom come on and Theo wakes up from a sound sleep. Eleanor stares at Theo and wonders with horror whose hand she has been holding this whole time.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Eleanor has begun to resent Theo for her attention-seeking behavior. However, in this chapter, it begins to appear that Eleanor is the one willing to go to extreme lengths for a little attention. Because the story is told through Eleanor's point of view and because Eleanor is not a reliable narrator, the reader cannot be sure whether Eleanor is responsible for the writing on the wall and the bloody mess on Theodora's clothes. However, Eleanor does seem to benefit from these manifestations. Her resentment of Theo's nice clothes becomes a non-issue now that Theo's clothes are not wearable. And because Theo's room is now uninhabitable, she is forced to share quarters with Eleanor. Eleanor's desire to get closer to Theo is therefore fulfilled.

The third way in which Eleanor benefits from the ghostly manifestations is that they give her an opportunity for one-upmanship. To date, Theo has been treating Eleanor like a hysterical female and coloring the men's opinion of her. Partly because of Theo, both Dr. Montague and Luke believe Eleanor is fragile and nervous tempered. Thus Eleanor's behavior in the aftermath of the wreckage is significant. "This time I am ready," Eleanor tells herself when the men arrive in response to Theo's screams. Eleanor speaks to the men as if Theo is a patient in their care, asking if Theo will be all right and instructing the men to move her into Eleanor's room. It is as if Eleanor wishes to demonstrate that she is the calm, cool, collected one and Theo the hysterical woman.

Unfortunately, Eleanor's uncharacteristic calm only makes her look more suspicious to the others. Now that she has been personally attacked by the manifestations, Theo's



suspicions about Eleanor become full-blown resentment. She flat out accuses Eleanor of destroying her clothes out of jealousy. Interestingly, when Luke is present, Theo sweetly apologizes for her accusations. Both women appear to be manipulating the men's view of the situation, perhaps inspired by the ghosts of Hill House. Later that night, realizing that her lack of fear makes her look suspicious, Eleanor makes a speech to the others in which she attempts to explain that she really had been afraid. Her words strike a wrong chord with the other three and although they are each careful to avoid an outright accusation of Eleanor by speaking in generalities, their responses make it clear that they believe Eleanor is subconsciously causing the manifestations:

"'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. (pg. 113)"

Dr. Montague explains that the party has nothing to fear from Hill House because ghosts cannot affect the physical world. However, he looks Eleanor in the eye and explains that poltergeist phenomena do affect the physical world. This comment crystallizes the group's belief that Eleanor, in the hands of Hill House, is a powerful weapon, one that could be turned against them. Thus, now that the others suspect Eleanor of being responsible for the poltergeist phenomena, they begin to become afraid of her. If Eleanor is responsible for the phenomena, if she is causing it in hopes of gaining attention, her strategy is backfiring because in this chapter the others begin to exclude her, or at least to tread very lightly around her.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Eleanor and Luke sit together in the summerhouse on a hot, sunny afternoon. Eleanor, worried that she will sound foolish, asks Luke to tell her something about himself. In the pause while he considers his answer, she wonders what his answer will tell her. If he says something very personal, she might construe that he cares for her. She is afraid he will reveal that he does not think highly of her. Finally, Luke responds that he never had a mother and was never loved. Eleanor is insulted at this blatant appeal for her sympathy. To her it sounds like a line Luke has used many times before with women. Even as she thinks this, she tells him she understands.

Luke's conversation trails off and Eleanor figures he is either working up the courage to say something intimate, or he is stalling in hopes of ending their conversation. She doesn't wait to find out. Banally, she interjects that, "Journeys end in lovers meeting" (pg. 118). Luke finally tells her he is selfish and that he has always wanted a woman to take charge of him and make him grow up. She asks why he doesn't just grow up by himself. Even as she says this, she wonders how many times Luke has had this same conversation with other women. She realizes that he is indeed selfish and not very interesting.

Luke, who has been browsing the spiritual books in the library, discovers a homemade scrapbook constructed by Hugh Crain. The title is *Memories, for Sophia Anne Lester Crain; A Legacy for Her Education and Enlightenment During Her Lifetime From Her Affectionate and Devoted Father, Hugh Desmond Lester Crain*. It is dated the twenty-first of June, 1881. The first page is headed "Humility," and bears an etching by Goya. The text below the dark etching admonishes Sophia Crain to tread the narrow path of righteousness and to always remain pure, pious and virtuous. Page two is decorated with writhing serpents and speaks of eternal damnation. The subsequent page exhorts the little girl about the torments of everlasting fire and brimstone. A page about Heaven follows, after which, is a listing of the seven deadly sins. Hugh Crain has illustrated the seven deadly sins with his own hand; the group is repulsed by his picture of lust, which they deem highly inappropriate for a little girl. The final page contains Hugh Crain's signature, written in his own blood. Theo curses Hugh Crain as a wicked old man. The group realizes that darkness has begun to fall and they adjourn to their cozy little fireside parlor.

Theo relaxes by the fire. She stares evilly at Eleanor and asks Eleanor mockingly if she will invite Luke over to her house and offer him a drink from her cup of stars. Theo continues to mock Eleanor's desirability until Eleanor, angry beyond fear, leaves the house alone. Theo, feeling guilty, catches up to her on the lawn. The two angry women walk in silence, both determined not to speak first. Eleanor breaks the silence, demanding to know why Theo thinks she has a right to interfere in her affairs. Theo tells Eleanor that Luke is a rake and that he shouldn't be allowed to get away with it. She



also tells her that she is making a fool of herself. Eleanor tells her she'll feel stupid if she's wrong and again demands to know why Theo should care about her and Luke.

A question hovers between them, unspoken. "Do you love me?" (pg. 124) Each is aware of the other's thoughts and they continue silently down the path. The darkness of the path begins to frighten them, but they are somehow unable to stop moving forward, unable to turn back. The path ends at the garden. Theo and Eleanor look into the garden and find that it is bright daylight. They can see and hear children and parents laughing at a picnic. A checked tablecloth is spread gaily over the grass, filled with food. Theodora screams and tells Eleanor to run and not to look back.

Obedying her, Eleanor runs forward, into the picnic, expecting to trip over the tablecloth. But when her feet touch the garden grass, there is nothing there but weeds growing in the darkness. They break through a rusted gate and run all the way back to Hill House. The doctor and Luke have been looking for them for hours. Eleanor rambles about a picnic. Hysterically, Theo admits to Eleanor that she looked behind them.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Two important encounters take place in this chapter. Eleanor, who has been torn by her conflicting desires for Luke and for Theo, spends time privately with each of them, hoping to learn how they both feel about her. In the summerhouse, she encourages Luke to open up to her and share a bit about himself. It takes courage for her to speak to Luke in this way, for Eleanor is afraid that the quality of his answer will reveal his lack of feelings for her. While this is certainly a normal fear for a would-be lover to wonder if the object of her desire desires her, it is ironic in Eleanor's case because the reader can easily tell that she does not actually want Luke.

She has, from the beginning, found him vain, boring and shallow. He confirms this opinion in the summerhouse by giving her a come-on line about his never having had a mother. Despite Eleanor's relative inexperience with men, she is nonetheless a highly perceptive individual and can easily tell that Luke has used this same line on many other women. Eleanor has only been after Luke because she is enamored of the idea that journeys end in lovers meeting. When she arrived at Hill House and found a handsome, young man waiting to greet her, Eleanor's romantic imagination instantly created thoughts of a happily-ever-after future with Luke Sanderson.

Such a romantic ideal is neither realistic nor is it what Eleanor wants. Her subsequent encounter with Theo proves to be highly charged with emotion, which shows the reader that Eleanor's heart lies in this direction. Eleanor demands that Theo explain why Eleanor's relationship (or lack thereof) with Luke is any of Theo's business. This demand is a veiled request for Theo to admit that her true interest lies with Eleanor, not Luke. Once again, perceptive Eleanor can sense that Theo is indeed interested in her. For her part, Theo can also sense that Eleanor cares much more deeply than she does. The notion of any disparity between their feelings for each other does not enter



Eleanor's mind. Eleanor is such a blind romantic that she simply assumes her adventure in Hill House will result in her finding true love. She feels it is predestined.

It doesn't occur to Eleanor that this is only her first opportunity to socialize and date. Eleanor cannot imagine taking such a moderate approach. As far as she is concerned, this is her first, last and only chance. Her desperation is palpable and bound to frighten Theodora away. Theo does care for Eleanor, yet Theo is as much of a rake as Luke. She desires only a summer fling and for this reason she sends Eleanor mixed signals. Theo skirts the issue of her existing relationship, proving she is actually more of a rake than Luke, who is at least single. The encounter in this chapter gives Eleanor false hope and unfortunately for Theo, Eleanor is the type of person who, if given an inch, will take a mile. The repercussions of allowing Eleanor to hope for a true relationship with Theo will come back to haunt Theo in Chapter 8.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

On Saturday afternoon, the day Mrs. Montague is expected at the house, Eleanor sneaks off by herself to sit in the grass and think. She is filled with wild elation and asks herself what she is going to do about it. Meanwhile, Mrs. Montague and her driver, Arthur, make a grand entrance. Mrs. Montague, in a booming voice, immediately begins issuing orders to her husband. She is irritated that he didn't hold dinner for her, even though she is several hours late. She treats Luke like a servant, instructing him to put her bags in the most haunted room of the house. Dr. Montague suggests Luke put Mrs. Montague in the nursery.

Mrs. Montague asks what her husband has accomplished and even before he can answer she is putting him down and minimizing the work he and his group have done. She assures him that now that she's there, she'll put everything right. When she tries to send Luke outside to show Arthur where to park the car, Luke demurs. Dr. Montague tries explaining to his wife that they have a policy against going out at night, but she and Arthur call them cowards. Mrs. Montague reminds her husband how counterproductive fear is when dealing with ghosts. She believes that ghosts only want to be loved and they get upset when the living acts afraid of them. She accuses her husband of upsetting the ghosts in Hill House and causing them to suffer. To calm her down, Dr. Montague leads her into the dining room, where Mrs. Dudley has set extra places for the new guests.

Over dinner, Mrs. Montague informs them all that she will be staying on until Monday afternoon. Arthur is not a chauffeur, after all, but a school headmaster with an interest in the supernatural. Mrs. Montague explains that she and Arthur have worked out a system, as opposed to the haphazard way the others have been going about things. Arthur will patrol the corridors at night, while Mrs. Montague attempts to contact the spirits. She dismisses Theo and Eleanor as lacking the natural psychic intuition most women possess and tells everyone but Arthur they're not invited to the planchette session she intends to hold after dinner. Luke suggests they hold their session in the library. He and Dr. Montague escort the demanding Mrs. Montague and Arthur upstairs, leaving Theo and Eleanor at the table. They joke about the new arrivals and Eleanor teases that Luke is indeed a coward. Deliberately, Theo looks over at Eleanor and says it's because Luke never had a mother. Eleanor bolts from the kitchen, insisting they must find the others. Theo grins at her knowingly.

In the parlor, the women arrive in time to hear Dr. Montague explaining the planchette to Luke. It is a device similar to a ouija board, which creates automatic, or spiritual writing. It is schoolgirl superstition, according to Dr. Montague, though he admits his wife would say differently. Arthur and Mrs. Montague arrive in the parlor later, triumphantly carrying a piece of paper containing the planchette writings. Mrs. Montague shares what the spirits have told her with the group. The planchette has referred several times to a nun.



When the doctor denies knowing anything about a nun haunting Hill House, Mrs. Montague defends the validity of the planchette.

She further reveals that the planchette named a woman, Helen, Helene, or Elena, who warned her and Arthur about a mysterious monk. Helen has also advised Mrs. Montague to dig up the cellar in search of an old well. Dr. Montague puts his foot down, insisting that they are tenants, not vandals. Mrs. Montague relates some minor medical details that the spirits revealed about Arthur's aunt, then she gets to a message about Eleanor. The paper refers to Eleanor, Nellie, Nell, Home and Lost. It also speaks of Mother and Child. Theo irritably wonders why the planchette is picking on Nell. Mrs. Montague is stunned to learn that Theo is not Nell; she had confused the two women during the introductions. When Eleanor asks what the planchette wants with her, Mrs. Montague scoffs, saying she can't imagine since Eleanor so obviously lacks psychic abilities.

As they prepare to retire, Arthur announces that he will headquarter himself in the small room next to the nursery. He informs them all that he has a gun and is an excellent shot. He assures them they can all rest easy while he patrols the halls at night. Mrs. Montague comments that she and Arthur have done this many times and that she is so pleased to have an opportunity to unburden the spirits in this house of their sorrows. Arthur inspects the blue room where Theo and Eleanor are sleeping, then they all see Mrs. Montague to the nursery. She walks through the cold spot and merely asks for extra blankets for the chill.

Dr. Montague hesitates to leave his wife alone in the haunted nursery, but she insists. Mrs. Montague assures everyone that they are in no danger now that she is there. They leave Arthur to his patrol and Mrs. Montague to her nursery and return to their suite of four rooms. As preplanned, the four original investigators meet in Dr. Montague's room and make plans of their own. Luke and Montague will stay up and keep watch. Dr. Montague instructs Theo and Eleanor to stay right there, where they can keep an eye on them. All four of them believe Mrs. Montague and Arthur are going to inadvertently stir up the house and cause some sort of problem. Dr. Montague defends his wife, saying that in most respects she is an excellent woman. He calls her interest in the supernatural her only vice, although Eleanor suggests Mrs. Montague may believe she is helping her husband.

Just then, the crashing sound starts up again in the hallway. The four people in Dr. Montague's room try to look brave. Theo wraps a quilt around herself and Eleanor while Luke stands at the door, listening for the direction of the sound. He assures Montague that the sound is nowhere near the nursery and prevents Montague from opening the door to the hallway. Montague continues to fret, concerned that his wife or Arthur will take it into their heads to do something about the pounding. As the unnatural cold, accompanied by a creepy silence, replaces the pounding, Luke pours them all a drink with his usual joke about his passion for "spirits."

Suddenly the door begins to shake silently, as if someone were pounding it from outside, but without the accompanying sound that it should produce. Theo whispers



over and over that it can't get in, but Eleanor says it knows they are there. The pounding starts again and Eleanor hears the sounds as if they were only in her head. She anticipates when they will change and what the next sound will be; sure enough, the pounding is followed by tiny laughter. The entire house begins to shake and quake as if it is about to fall down around them. They all brace themselves as they hear a crash so loud Eleanor thinks the tower must have fallen down. Eleanor says she will come aloud. She opens her eyes and sees sunlight in the window. Stunned, Eleanor sees that the house is in perfect order; nothing has fallen or broken during the night. The others report that Mrs. Montague and Arthur are safe and sound asleep. Theo takes Eleanor to get dressed for breakfast.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The chapter begins with Eleanor thinking over her two encounters from the previous chapter and coming to a decision. At this point the author does not divulge with whom Eleanor has fallen in love, but Eleanor's wild elation indicates to the reader that she believes she is in love. Given her lukewarm reaction to Luke in the previous chapter, it seems most likely that she has her heart set on Theo. In fact, that would best explain the wild elation. For Eleanor, the idea of loving another woman must seem like a fresh, new possibility. Most likely, given the sheltered environment in which she's lived all her life, the possibility of a lesbian relationship has never before occurred to Eleanor. She has probably never met a woman like Theo and thus the idea of Theo having feelings for Eleanor must feel like a revelation. Here Eleanor has found love where she least thought to look. Her romantic mind would likely leap at such an idea.

Unfortunately, Eleanor is so preoccupied with this new possibility that she does not consider whether Theo returns her feelings to the degree she hopes. How could Theo possibly return such wild, unrealistic feelings? For Eleanor does not truly love Theo; she has known her for less than a week. Eleanor is inexperienced enough to confuse infatuation with love. Actually, calling Eleanor's feelings for Theo infatuation is too generous. Eleanor's nature is dark; she is bitter, angry, resentful and desperate. Her desire to have Theo is more a desire to *be* Theo. Eleanor behaves as if she wishes to possess Theo utterly; behavior likely to drive Theo away. Interestingly enough, Eleanor's possessiveness still extends to Luke, although she does not care for him. She has been deprived of love for so long, she is now greedy for it and unwilling to let go of her ideas about Luke.

In the previous chapter, Theo mocked Eleanor's designs on Luke, partly to protect Eleanor from heartache and partly out of a selfish desire to keep Eleanor for herself. However, the mocking has not been sufficient to dissuade Eleanor and so Theo steps up her campaign to separate Eleanor and Luke. By deliberately dropping Luke's line about not having a mother into her conversation with Eleanor, Theo is proving to her that he has used the same tired line on both women. Theo is also subtly hinting that she and Luke might have something going on between them.



Whether Theo is trying to make Eleanor jealous or drive her away remains unclear, perhaps even to Theo. This lovers' triangle echoes the tragic past of Hill House and it seems that in Theo, Eleanor and Luke, the house has discovered the perfect dynamic for sewing enmity amongst the living. Perhaps this is what Eleanor means when she decrees, upon first seeing the house in Chapter 1, that Hill House is evil. The spirits of the house enjoy exacerbating the existing conflict between the various houseguests. Theo rather enjoys exacerbating the situation as well; she takes such glee from taunting Eleanor about Luke. Theo does not yet realize how deeply this taunting has affected Eleanor, but she will shortly find out.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Montague bulldozes her way into the emotional and spiritual minefield that is Hill House. She demonstrates a complete lack of concern for what is and has been transpiring in the house. Mrs. Montague sees herself as the center of the universe and cannot imagine that the house would have begun haunting the others prior to her illustrious arrival. Her character provides some comic relief to the escalating tensions within the novel. Mrs. Montague has no idea that Hill House has chosen Eleanor as its voice and its weapon. She completely discounts Eleanor, even after the planchette gives her messages about Eleanor.

The doctor's wife thinks the other women lack intuitive perception and therefore overlooks the possibility that the house might be using them to communicate. She is so egocentric that she cannot imagine the house would communicate with any of its inhabitants besides her. Her efforts to communicate with the spirits in the house are amusing because the spirits are active right under her nose and yet she fails to see it. Her selective vision becomes even more apparent in the next chapter, when it is revealed that Mrs. Montague didn't even notice the violent shaking which threatens to tear the house in two at the end of this chapter. This is the most violent of the manifestations to date and represents the growing anger and conflict within Eleanor.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Over breakfast, Theo wonders if anyone informed Mrs. Montague and Arthur that Mrs. Dudley clears the breakfast table so promptly at ten o'clock. Dr. Montague says he didn't have the heart to wake them after such a difficult night. Eleanor tells the others that she can hear them coming. To herself, she adds that she can hear everything in the whole house. Mrs. Montague sweeps in, complaining that no one called them for breakfast. Dr. Montague asks about their night and his wife and Arthur sullenly report that nothing at all unusual happened. Mrs. Montague determines not to give up hope of a supernatural manifestation.

Theo and Eleanor work on their notes for Dr. Montague. Eleanor tells Theo that she has decided to move in with her once they leave Hill House. She tells Theo that she never had anyone to care about before. Theo responds that she is not in the habit of taking in strays and reminds Nell that she has her own home waiting for her. Eleanor insists that she will show up on Theo's doorstep. Theo tells Eleanor that Hill House is just a summer thing. Once the summer is over, they will both go back to their regular lives.

Eleanor insists she will come anyway and Theo asks her if she always goes where she's not wanted. Eleanor explains that she has never been wanted anywhere. Later, in the parlor with Luke, Eleanor continues to pester Theo about living with her. Theo tells her to leave her alone and suggests they go walking down by the brook. Luke invites himself along. He notices that Nell is not paying any attention to him and asks Theo what the matter is. Theo explains how Nell wants to come live with her. Luke laughs and calls Nell silly, repeating her line about journeys ending in lovers meeting.

The three of them step into the fresh air, headed for the brook. To Theo's surprise, Luke tells them he looks forward to owning Hill House. He brings up something Nell said to him in the summerhouse and Eleanor suddenly admits that she feels to blame for her mother's death. Her mother had knocked on the wall and called for Eleanor in the night, but on this one occasion, Eleanor had failed to wake up and take her mother her medicine. Theo tells her to forget it, but Eleanor wonders aloud about what would have happened if she did wake up that night. Had she chosen to ignore her mother's dire need? It would have been so easy, she admits, to simply roll over and go back to sleep.

Theo assures Eleanor she only thinks it was her fault. Eleanor walks ahead of the other two, pleased to have confessed to Theo about her mother. Everything will be all right, after all, she thinks. Eleanor imagines the apartment she will rent, near Theo's home; she expects the two of them will go out shopping for dishes and cats and cups of stars together. Eleanor will no longer be alone. With a smile of joy, Eleanor turns to ask if they are talking about her. Luke and Theo have been, indeed. Eleanor turns away, again imagining she knows what they're both thinking and saying. Eleanor is thrilled to have found her happiness at long last. She will not let Theo go now that she's found her. She



stops and sits in the grass, waiting for them to catch up to her. Eleanor thinks that this moment is the most joyful of her entire life.

Eleanor turns to tell her friends to hurry, but she is alone. Suddenly she hears a voice in her head, calling her name. She thinks madly that it is a call she has waited for all her life; a strong current of air embraces her, holding her like a lover. When the voice fades, she almost calls after it, then regains her senses and runs back to find the others. Frightened by the spirit voice, Eleanor calls desperately for Luke and Theo. She finds them hidden away together in a clump of trees. Theo is angry at being interrupted. Luke looks embarrassed. Theodora says with a wicked grin that they were just about to go looking for Eleanor. Luke grins back at Theo as he agrees.

Over lunch, Dr. Montague invites his wife to take a nap, as the others have become accustomed to doing in the afternoons. Mrs. Montague insists that she is far too busy to do any such thing and implies that her husband is napping on the job. To smooth things over, Theo begins making cordial conversation with Arthur. He basks in her attention, much to Mrs. Montague's annoyance. She admonishes Arthur not to talk shop while on vacation. Mrs. Dudley comes in to clear the table, ending all conversation.

Eleanor hides in the shadows outside the summerhouse, eavesdropping on Theo and Luke. She must know, she tells herself as she listens to their idle chatter. They talk about the others, but don't mention Eleanor. When, she wonders, will they talk about her? Instead, Luke invites Theo to go swimming in the brook. Eleanor listens to the sound of their feet running away together down the path.

At the same time in the house, Arthur is bored and tries to make conversation with Dr. Montague. Montague is working on his notes and irritated by Arthur's chatter. When Arthur asks where everyone is, Montague says Theo and Luke are down by the brook and his wife is in the kitchen talking to Mrs. Dudley. In the kitchen, Mrs. Montague and Mrs. Dudley discuss Theo and Luke as Eleanor eavesdrops. Mrs. Montague is shocked at their conduct, but Mrs. Dudley reminds her that people are only young once. The two women shake their heads together as they finish the dishes, then Mrs. Dudley offers Mrs. Montague a nice cup of tea.

Later in the parlor, Luke mocks Eleanor about journeys ending in lovers meeting. He tells her that her blue dress looks fabulous on Theodora. Theo smiles wickedly at Eleanor, who realizes she is being spiteful. She thinks Luke is ashamed of himself for laughing at her and is trying to be nice, but Theo won't stop mocking her. Theo flirts with Luke, who looks uncomfortably at Eleanor before excusing himself to play chess with the doctor. In a pique, Theo remains by the fire, refusing to speak.

Eleanor, with her newly attuned hearing, listens to the noises inside the house. She can hear the animals rustling through the grass outside; she can even hear the dust motes falling in the attic. The only room closed to her is the library, where Mrs. Montague and Arthur huddle over their planchette. Mrs. Montague strides angrily into the parlor moments later. She is furious because the planchette has refused to speak; she blames the rude skepticism of her husband and his guests. Dr. Montague assures her none of



them would have knowingly interfered, but she is not mollified. Arthur speaks apologetically to Theo about how sensitive Mrs. Montague can be. Eleanor pays little attention to the others. She hears and feels a presence, singing and pacing the length of the parlor floor. She is filled with joy when she realizes that none of the others can hear the childish singsong. When the song fades, the footsteps approach Eleanor and she feels a tiny sigh, like a kiss, against her cheek.

Chapter 8 Analysis

At the outset of Chapter 8, Eleanor has slipped even further into her delusion about her future with Theo. She announces to Theo that she intends to move in with her and completely disregards Theo's negative response. Eleanor will not be dissuaded from her personal fantasy, in which the only obstacle between her and true love with Theo is the truth about her mother's death. Eleanor makes a disturbing confession to Luke and Theodora, which they both find too dark to accept. Eleanor hints that she may have intentionally ignored her mother's cries for help and allowed the old woman to die.

Theo assumes that Eleanor is merely experiencing grief-related guilt over her mother's death and does not take the confession seriously. Theo's words of reassurance feed Eleanor's fantasy. Eleanor now believes that Theo has forgiven her sin, thereby removing the final obstacle between them. Eleanor is ecstatic and mentally plans out her future with Theo. Her grip on reality is slipping more and more. While she sits on the riverbank planning a fantasy future with Theo, Theo and Luke disappear for a few minutes of hanky panky.

Theodora's rendezvous with Luke is a direct response to Eleanor's desire to live with her. Eleanor is being too possessive of Theo and Theo doesn't like it. Theo turns up the heat with Luke to show Eleanor how hopeless her idea of living happily ever after with either Theo or Luke actually is. Both Theo and Luke are on the prowl for sexual conquests; neither one of them is looking for a happily ever after. They admit as much to each other as they lag behind Eleanor on the path. Jokingly, they talk about how neither of them can be trusted with Eleanor and that there's a battle between good and evil for Eleanor's soul. They mean only to say that they both hope to take advantage of her and virtuous little Eleanor would run if she knew what was good for her.

Given the situation at Hill House, however, their phrasing is ironic. For there actually is a battle between good and evil being waged over Eleanor's soul and Hill House is using Theo and Luke to wage it. That night, Theo attempts to wound Eleanor by flirting publicly and brazenly with Luke; she is advertising her and Luke's new, closer relationship. Neither Luke nor Theo come right out and admit to having a tryst together though and Eleanor is tormented with the need to know for certain. Eleanor's bubble has grown so large it will require definite proof to burst it; when it does pop, Eleanor is in for a huge letdown.

Meanwhile, the house becomes Eleanor's third suitor. The first time Eleanor thought the line, journeys end in lovers meeting, was actually when her feet first touched the floor of



Hill House. The line seemed incongruous at the time, as Eleanor had been afraid and repulsed by the feel of touching Hill House for the first time. Now it appears that Hill House has been maneuvering Eleanor into loving the house as a consolation prize. Hill House has both built up and torn down Eleanor's hopes of finding love and now offers itself to her as her true love, the place where she really belongs.

The concepts of love and home are twisted together in Eleanor's mind and she can just as easily accept a house as her true love as another human being. A large part of her interest in Luke was his family's ownership of Hill House and she desires Theo for her beautiful apartment. Eleanor's fantasies about life with Theo focus on the two of them shopping together for items to decorate a home. Twice in this chapter, Hill House's spirits embody themselves enough to embrace and kiss Eleanor like a lover would. Eleanor finds herself pleased to be singled out by Hill House. The house is not making similar advances to anyone else and thus Hill House, more than Theo or Luke, manages to make Eleanor feel loved. Eleanor is desperate enough for love that she gives into the deception.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Late that night, Eleanor tiptoes out of the room she shares with Theo. Noiselessly, she walks barefoot down the hallway, intending to go to the library. She cannot sleep, she explains to herself and so she is going to the library to get a book. It sounds perfectly logical to her. At the library door, she nearly turns back, remembering that she cannot enter there. She smells the odor of decay and calls out to her mother. Her mother's voice answers, telling her to come along. Laughing, Eleanor follows her mother's voice to the nursery door. Eleanor pounds on the door with her fists.

Mrs. Montague answers, inviting the spirits into her room. Mrs. Montague calls out that she is a friend and only wants to hear the spirits' troubles. Eleanor turns and pounds on Arthur's door next. She moves to Theo's door and pounds on it before heading to Luke's and the doctor's doors. She dances wildly down the hallway, laughing to herself. Suddenly Theo, inside her room, starts screaming that Nell is missing. Eleanor suddenly realizes she had forgotten all about Eleanor. Now, she thinks, they will have to open their doors. She flees the hallway quickly, heading downstairs before anyone can catch her.

She slips into the parlor. Finding Theo's scarf inside, she rips it with her teeth until she hears the others coming down the hall towards her, calling her name. She runs lightly into the kitchen, thinking what ponderous fools are traipsing down the halls looking for her. How easily we trick them, she thinks. Eleanor waits in the kitchen; with all its many doors, she can easily escape the others if they come in looking for her. They move closer and she darts out onto the veranda. She re-enters the house through the drawing room, where Hugh Crain's obscene statue stands. She asks him to dance with her and sings the childish singsong she heard earlier in the parlor as she dances through doorways onto the veranda and back into the house. She approaches the front door and enters, announcing her presence to the house. Luke's voice, nearby, calls her name in response. Of everyone, she would least like to be caught by Luke, she thinks, as she escapes into the library.

Inside the library it is not cold, as she expected, but warm and cozy. No stone lions or oleanders for her, she thinks. Eleanor tells herself she has broken the spell of Hill House and that she has finally found herself a home. She begins to climb the winding, iron staircase to the tower. Far below her, on the stone floor, the others shout her name. Eleanor stares down and sees strangers for a moment, before she remembers who they are. Only Theo's name escapes her, though she greets the others by name. Luke begins to climb up the staircase to fetch her. Dr. Montague warns Luke that the staircase has rotted away from the wall. Mrs. Montague chimes in that it will never hold the weight of two people.



Resolutely, Luke climbs on. Eleanor attempts to escape through the little trapdoor leading to the turret, but it will not open. Luke, getting close now, begs her to stand still. Eleanor, feeling trapped, looks down at the stone floor. She recalls Theodora's name suddenly and speaks it. Theo begs Eleanor to come down with Luke. Luke joins Eleanor on the high platform now and instructs her to start down ahead of him. Eleanor bitterly reminds him that the last time he told her to go ahead, he never followed. He insists harshly that she start down the steps. She cautiously begins to feel her way back down. The staircase shudders frighteningly around them as they slowly descend. At last, they make it safely to the bottom. Nell raises her head to meet the others' disgusted stares and tells them she came down to the library to get a book.

Eleanor suffers in humiliation the next morning at breakfast. Everyone is polite to her, but she feels separate, no longer accepted or part of the group. After breakfast, they troop into the parlor together. As soon as they are settled, the doctor announces that Luke will bring Eleanor's car around and that Theo will go up and pack Eleanor's things. Eleanor laughs, saying Theo won't have anything to wear if she does that. Mrs. Montague announces that she has examined Theodora's room and found everything in perfect order. Theo's clothes are neat and clean; there is no evidence of blood or paint or anything. Eleanor just laughs again, explaining that she really can't leave. Luke intones somberly that she is no longer welcome in Hill House as his guest. Mrs. Montague suggests Arthur could drive Nell back, to be sure she gets to her apartment safely. Laughing joyfully, feeling beautiful, Eleanor explains to the others that she lied about the apartment. Actually, she sleeps on a cot in her baby niece's bedroom. She has no home to return to, she insists, smiling, especially since she stole her sister's car. All of her worldly possessions are in a box in the back seat. Eleanor stares at their frightened faces and insists they let her stay at Hill House.

Mrs. Montague announces that she has already taken the liberty of calling Eleanor's sister. She says the sister is a vulgar person who had been more worried about the car than Eleanor. However, continues Mrs. Montague, Eleanor is expected to return today, because her sister needs the car for her vacation plans. Dr. Montague advises that Eleanor should leave on her own. He thinks it will be safer for Eleanor to forget all of them as quickly as possible. Prolonging their association could be dangerous to her mindset, he warns. Theo jumps up to pack Eleanor's bag and Luke goes out to bring the car around.

Outside, they stand in a line, forming a firm wall to prevent Eleanor from getting back in the house. Eleanor explains to them that the house wants her to stay. It only cares about her. The doctor is firm with her. He tells her to go home, unwilling to speak a kind word in case she takes that as an invitation to stay. Eleanor tries to explain that she is happy now, not afraid. The doctor tells her they cannot take any more chances with her safety. She recalls the old woman who had promised to pray for her and tells the others about it, thinking that might help her case.

The doctor apologizes for bringing her to Hill House. Eleanor says that the week at Hill House has been the only time in her life anything has happened to her. The doctor will not relent. Laughing, Eleanor turns to Luke and thanks him for saving her. He replies



that it's good that she's leaving because he would never muster the courage to do such a thing twice. The men lead her to her car; Luke has left the motor running for her. None of them extend friendship to her; Luke merely tells her to drive carefully. Eleanor appeals to Theo, who runs to her to say goodbye. Theo begs her to be happy and suggests that one day, in the future, they might write each other and visit. Theo touches her cheek and Eleanor calls out her final goodbyes to the assembled.

Eleanor slides into the car and lets the car move slowly down the drive. The others wave dutifully at her. Journeys end in lovers meeting, she tells herself. Eleanor laughs out loud and thinks that they can't actually make her leave because "*they don't make the rules around here*" (pg. 173). Thinking herself clever, Eleanor presses her foot down hard against the accelerator. She wonders who will notice first as she steers the car towards the big tree at the bend in the driveway. She imagines it will be Luke, of course, who notices first. Proudly, she thinks to herself that she is doing it, she is really doing it, all by herself. As the tree looms before her now-speeding car, she suddenly wonders *why* she's doing this. Her final thought before the car crashes into the tree is to wonder why they don't stop her.

Luke's aunt, Mrs. Sanderson, is relieved that Dr. Montague's party chooses to vacate Hill House after the accident. Theodora returns to her girlfriend, who is thrilled to have her back sooner than expected. Luke heads off to Paris, where his aunt hopes he will stay for a while. Meanwhile Dr. Montague's scientific analysis of the psychic phenomena at Hill House is received with scorn by his colleagues and he retires from academia. Hill House continues to stand against the hills as it has for eighty years. Now, whatever walks in the darkness within the house, walks alone.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Eleanor gives into the house with a lover's abandon. Her late night romp has the feel of a midnight rendezvous with the ghosts of Hill House. Eleanor makes up a plausible excuse in case she is caught, then responds to the call of the house. She runs and dances joyfully. With the author's characteristic ambiguity, Eleanor's thoughts at this point are indicative of either madness or possession. She thinks of herself in the third person and uses the adjective "we" to characterize herself.

The most dangerous room in the house, the one room that the sane or the real Eleanor had heretofore avoided, is the very room to where she now heads. First, she leads the others on a merry chase; merry for Eleanor, that is. The other guests are genuinely concerned for her safety, but Eleanor is playing an attention-getting game. She behaves rather like a runaway child; she wishes to be stopped from running away, but not before the others prove to her the depth of their love. It is as if the house has taken advantage of Eleanor's desire to feel special and loved, just as both Luke and Theodora had tried to take advantage of her. Eleanor has surrendered the battle for her soul, giving into the false elation provided by Hill House.



By making Eleanor the narrator, the reader is left somewhat in the dark. In her disconnected state, she does not realize how strangely she is acting. Only through the reactions of the others can the reader guess that Eleanor is behaving inappropriately. Her behavior puts Luke at risk, as he is forced to ascend the perilous stairway to rescue her. In Eleanor's mind, all is well. She clings to her delusion even after the others kick her out of Hill House.

Dr. Montague and his guests can all sense that Eleanor would misread even the slightest kindness as an invitation to stay on and therefore they each give her the cold shoulder as she leaves. Only Theo dares to bid Eleanor an affectionate goodbye, thus revealing that her feelings for Eleanor are stronger than anyone else's. The house's feelings are strongest of all, however and now that the house has Eleanor, it will not let her go. The evil in Hill House acts through the negative emotions already present in the houseguests and thus its subtle evil remains undefined, even to the very end. Is Hill House evil, or is Eleanor merely unstable?

The author shows that Hill House is the source of evil by Eleanor's choice to crash her car into the same tree at the turn of the drive, which has claimed the lives of at least two of Hill House's former inhabitants. Her final thought is lucid and panicked; she shakes off the possession just in time to witness her own death by her own hand. Yet this sort of evil is not definable in a scientific way and in fact a skeptic could claim that Eleanor chose that tree because she had heard the stories about the previous deaths. Dr. Montague is left with no proof of Hill House's power. His experiment has been a failure, having produced nothing but tragic memories for the surviving participants.



Characters

Eleanor Vance

Eleanor Vance is a fascinating character study. She wins the reader's empathy right away when the author reveals that Eleanor has sacrificed her youth to care for her sick mother. Her mother's prolonged illness and subsequent death has left Eleanor an old maid at thirty-two, with no money, no home and no prospects for employment. Eleanor never ventures an opinion about her mother, but some of the facts she volunteers about her make it clear to the reader and to the other guests at Hill House that Eleanor's mother was a jealous, paranoid, ill-tempered woman. Poor Eleanor has spent eleven years cooped up with this demanding harridan, forced to cater to her every whim out of a daughter's loyal sense of duty.

Eleanor is thus portrayed as a victim. Dr. Montague's offer of employment at Hill House appears to be the adventure Eleanor so desperately seeks. When she takes the family car without permission in order to have her adventure, the reader is led to believe that Eleanor is taking bold steps to overcome her status as victim and forge a new life for herself. Eleanor's long drive to Hill House reinforces this belief, as she engages in magical, whimsical dreams about what her life would be like if she lived in one of the picturesque cottages she passes along the way. It appears that Eleanor's vivacious imagination, long stifled, is at last being allowed to bloom.

Initially Eleanor is presented as a sympathetic character, yet as the narrative progresses, the reader is compelled to question her motives. Even as early as her journey to Hill House, the author drops dark hints about Eleanor's submerged feelings of resentment. Resentment, however, is perfectly natural under the circumstances and the reader is initially prepared to overlook this flaw in Eleanor's character. Even when she arrives at Hill House and begins lying to the other guests about where she lives, the reader still empathizes with this poor woman's desire to recreate her personal history.

Hill House provides Eleanor with an opportunity to meet people outside of her late mother's immediate social sphere and one can sympathize with her feelings of inadequacy and worries about fitting in with the others. The first real hint as to the dangerous power of Eleanor's anger comes when Dr. Montague tells the group about the rain of stones which pelted Eleanor's house when she was twelve. Eleanor's confused and defensive reaction immediately leads the ever-perceptive Theodora to conclude that Eleanor herself caused the rain of stones. Theo, like the reader, is prepared to be understanding of this event as well, since it happened when Eleanor was a child. Twelve-year-old children commonly have trouble managing their frustration and one can imagine that being raised by Eleanor's mother would cause any child a great deal of frustration.

Unfortunately, as history begins to repeat itself and Eleanor is once again suspected of causing poltergeist phenomena, the reader and the other characters begin to realize



that Eleanor's emotional growth may have been permanently stunted by her childhood. Her lack of insight into her own character gives the reader a distorted view of events at Hill House, making it difficult to guess whether she truly is responsible for the psychic attacks on Theo's belongings. Because the story is presented from Eleanor's point of view and because she is such an unreliable narrator, the reader must often seek the truth by studying the reactions the other characters' display towards Eleanor's behavior. Theo's anger and the overly solicitous attitudes of the men reveal the group's burgeoning suspicions about Eleanor. Eleanor herself remains convinced that she is an innocent victim. However, victims often become victimizers, or are re-victimized again and again, if they cannot move past their traumas. The reader's sympathy for Eleanor begins to evaporate as she continues to play the victim, time and again.

The manifestly evil presence of Hill House, however, complicates the reader's evaluation of Eleanor's character. Rather than completely discount her as a bitter, victim-type like her mother, the reader, as well as the other guests in the house, must reevaluate Eleanor's behavior in light of Hill House's history. Much of what Eleanor says, does and feels eerily echoes the personal dynamics of the original inhabitants of Hill House, the Crain women.

It is never made clear by the author whether Eleanor's dark side is caused by the spirits of the dead. The most likely possibility is that the evil in the house recognizes a kindred spirit in Eleanor and uses her dark side to manipulate her behavior. Eleanor feels special to have been chosen by the house, as she believes she has been, yet the fact that the house chooses to pick on her is actually another indictment of her character. The malevolence of Hill House works by influencing the emotions harbored deep within the houseguests. Eleanor's refusal to understand or deal with her suppressed emotions provides the evil spirits with an opening into her psyche. The house uses her psychic sensitivities much as Dr. Montague does, but for a darker purpose.

Theodora

Theodora embodies everything Eleanor wishes she could be. They are, perhaps, sisters of the soul who have been shaped by their vastly different experiences into extremely different women. Theodora is carefree, confident and independent, as Eleanor longs to be. She is not only beautiful, but she has the money and time to lavish on her appearance. Eleanor's jealousy is an internal flaw, for which Theo is not responsible, but Theo's behavior does aggravate the situation.

Theodora is a woman used to getting what she wants and she takes a Marie Antoinette, let-them-eat-cake attitude towards Eleanor's financial privations. Theo simply cannot conceive of such hardship as the kind Eleanor has suffered from and impatiently urges Eleanor to shake off her limitations. Under different circumstances, Theo might have been a wonderful influence on Eleanor. As the story begins, Theo's radiance inspires Eleanor to come out of her shell. She encourages Eleanor to dress brightly and to pamper herself with niceties such as red toenail polish, something Eleanor's mother



taught her was sinful. Theo's ability to laugh off her mother's restrictive viewpoint is liberating for Eleanor.

All the sisterly support, however, which Theo provides comes with a hidden agenda. Her attempts to help Eleanor blossom into her femininity are actually subtle attempts to seduce her. Theo's liberation extends to her sexuality. She is equally comfortable having a tryst with Luke as she is seducing Eleanor. Theo knowingly takes advantage of Eleanor's innocence, a quality both Theo and Luke find appealing, but only because they share a desire to corrupt her innocence. As the story progresses, Theodora's highly manipulative nature is revealed. She perversely pursues Luke in order to keep Eleanor away from him and all to herself. Theo is selfish and enjoys being the center of attention. Yet the more Eleanor resents these qualities in Theo, the more these same qualities become apparent in her. The two women do have a great deal in common under the surface, but Theodora's mind proves to be stronger than the fragile Eleanor's in the end.

Luke Sanderson

Luke is referred to as a thief, a liar and a rake. The first two adjectives come from his rich aunt, whose low opinion of Luke is not borne out by the facts of the story. Perhaps it is from his aunt that Luke gets his low opinion of himself. He calls himself a coward and mocks his lack of bravery and yet each time brave action is called for, he rises to the occasion. First, he agrees to look after the family interests at Hill House, a brave act in and of itself, considering his familiarity with its frightening reputation.

Once he's arrived, Luke shows himself to be a willing and eager assistant to Dr. Montague. As the future lord of the manor, Luke might expect to be treated with deference; instead, he carries luggage, pours drinks and moves furniture, all with good-natured humility. Luke never complains when Dr. Montague prevails upon him for help in the middle of the night. Luke rises to the occasion to help Montague search for mysterious dogs or assist damsels in distress regardless of the hour. Not once does he complain about anything other than Mrs. Dudley's sour demeanor. At no point does the reader see any indication of thievery in Luke, as his aunt fears. He does have a couple of notable weaknesses, but they are not extreme in nature and Luke's many good qualities far outweigh them.

Most notably, Luke's two weaknesses are "women and wine," although he actually prefers the hard stuff to wine. Luke may rely a bit too heavily on liquid courage, but his fondness for alcoholic spirits is not out of line with the vacation-like setting or the social standards of the era in which the book is set. Given the bizarre, paranormal events taking place at Hill House, one can hardly blame him for calming his nerves with a stiff drink. His other weakness causes him quite a bit more trouble at Hill House.

Luke is indeed a rake, as Theo accuses him of being. His aunt believes him to be a liar, yet he does not lie habitually. His lies are merely garden-variety exaggerations designed to pick up women. One can imagine that Luke has broken many hearts in the past and



yet it's likely that his past conquests all went into the relationship with their eyes open. Luke's outrageously flirtatious manner and lack of depth where relationships are concerned should be enough to tip off most women to his shallow intentions. Most likely he's broken the hearts of a few hardy souls who thought they were up to the task of changing Luke. However, his treatment of Eleanor reveals him at his worst. He cannot be unaware of how innocent and naïve Eleanor is, yet instead of treating her with the respect that such innocence deserves, he sees her as easy prey for a casual summer fling. Had he limited his ministrations to the worldly Theodora, he might've had a pleasant fling with no strings and no hard feelings. However, by pursuing Eleanor, Luke learns a hard lesson about the power of a woman scorned when Eleanor turns her uncanny powers against him.

Dr. John Montague

Dr. John Montague is a doctor of philosophy with an undergraduate degree in anthropology, yet he is hardly the typical academic. Dr. Montague's true passion lies in the study of the paranormal. He takes a scientific approach to his studies, hoping to lend credibility to his theories about the supernatural. Montague wishes to be the pioneer in his field. He wants to make the definitive breakthrough, which proves once and for all the existence of a spiritual realm. Montague may have an unrealistic dream, but he is not oblivious to the criticism and censure to which his published work may be exposed. In fact, he is painfully aware of this possibility. His behavior is at times defensive, especially when any of his own assistants make light of his studies. He tolerates no ghost stories, although he obviously enjoys them. He feels it is necessary to cultivate a rational, objective approach to the study of Hill House and goes to great pains to document his research as well as the events that transpire in the house.

He treats Eleanor and Theodora like scientific instruments designed to gauge the supernatural energy in the house. Eleanor, especially, becomes his barometer. He frequently observes her reactions hoping to predict, through her sensitivities, the next supernatural occurrence. His approach is too heavy-handed, as he belatedly realizes. Dr. Montague is willing to risk Eleanor's safety at first because he believes he can control the situation at Hill House with his scientific approach. This scientific hubris is ironic in a man so enthralled with the supernatural.

Montague realizes too late that bringing Eleanor to Hill House is the scientific equivalent of combining an unknown chemical with a one known for its volatility. Eleanor is the x factor in the equation and Dr. Montague finds himself unprepared for the violent explosion that her presence induces in Hill House. By the time Montague realizes the extent of the danger that Hill House poses to Eleanor and which Eleanor now poses to the others in the party, it is already too late. He attempts to do the right thing, but underestimates Hill House yet again. Eleanor's tragic death, followed by the chilly reception of his published paper, eliminates Dr. Montague's last lingering hopes of transforming the paranormal into a normal field of study.



Mrs. Montague

Mrs. Montague is an unintentionally hilarious woman. Her tongue is capable of castrating any man and yet she seems serenely unaware of the damage she leaves in her verbal wake. She appears at Hill House several days into her husband's studies and attempts to take over. She does not ask about the working methods already put in place by her husband, nor does it occur to her to ask if he and his party have yet documented any psychic phenomena. She is of the opinion that no ghost would dare haunt the house until she has arrived to meet it. On the rare occasion she does ask her husband a question, she does not wait to hear the answer before discounting it.

Mrs. Montague displays a blatant lack of respect for her husband and yet she is so wrapped up in her own point of view that it would never occur to her that she is disrespectful in the slightest. After all, she has come to help and where would her poor, hapless husband be without her assistance? She is equally acerbic towards Eleanor, Theodora and Luke. Having exchanged less than two sentences with Luke, Mrs. Montague deems him a coward. She writes off Eleanor and Theodora just as quickly, insisting that they lack the feminine intuition so necessary for psychic work. The hilarity of this situation multiplies when the ghosts of Hill House manifest for all to see, but Mrs. Montague and her assistant, Arthur, somehow miss the whole thing. Having so thoroughly discounted the opinions of the other four investigators, no one bothers to enlighten Mrs. Montague on what she has missed.

The only individual at Hill House whom Mrs. Montague befriends is the dour Mrs. Dudley, whom no one else can stand. However it is through this friendship that the reader first comes to see Mrs. Montague's value. Her take-charge attitude gets results from Mrs. Dudley, who has heretofore categorically denied every single request made by Dr. Montague and his party. In addition she also handles the delicate situation with Eleanor's sister. When Dr. Montague insists that Eleanor leave Hill House, Mrs. Montague calls the sister and arranges everything before Eleanor can even protest that she is no longer welcome in her sister's house. Thanks to Mrs. Montague's efforts, Eleanor has her home back, or would have, if she had lived. Thus, although Mrs. Montague frequently treads on the feelings of others, her powerful attitude has its benefits. She is a strong woman unacquainted with fear and in many ways the perfect helpmate for a ghost-hunter like Dr. Montague. Although she belittles his results unfairly, her own work with the planchette does yield good results; she is even able to duplicate the message written on the walls of Hill House with her spiritual writing technique.

If Mrs. Montague were to accord her husband the same respect she accords herself and her own work, she might realize that they are a perfect team. Instead she belittles her husband and, apparently, cuckolds him with her friend, Arthur. Arthur is hen-pecked by Mrs. Montague, but it doesn't seem to bother him. He obeys her every wish without question, always siding with her point of view, whatever it may be. Dr. Montague makes no attempt to separate his wife from Arthur. Dr. Montague may not be afraid of much, but he is afraid to challenge his wife on any issue, even that of Arthur.



Ironically, Mrs. Montague complains constantly about her husband's lack of respect for *her*. She passes off her offensive behavior as if she were defending herself from him. Perceptive Eleanor believes that Mrs. Montague wishes to be included in her husband's work and to have her contribution respected. Unfortunately, Dr. Montague does not welcome her help because she lacks respect for him and his methods and so she only winds up getting in his way. She is unwilling to relinquish control of any conversation long enough to hear what Dr. Montague is actually trying to say to her. If she did take the time to entertain her husband's ideas, she might learn that he is a man worthy of her respect and admiration. In fairness to Mrs. Montague, her husband could just as easily stand up to her and demand she hear him out; such a strong approach would likely gain him her respect, however grudgingly.

Arthur

Arthur is a school headmaster and, like Mrs. Montague, an enthusiast of the paranormal. This shared interest forms the basis of their relationship. The two old friends act more like an old married couple. It appears that Arthur may have replaced Dr. Montague in Mrs. Montague's affections and perhaps even in her bed. In any case, she treats him with the same imperious manner in which she treats her hen-pecked husband. When Mrs. Montague arrives at Hill House with Arthur in tow, she introduces him as her driver. Arthur does not seem to mind being treated like a servant by Mrs. Montague, which may explain why she prefers his company to her husband's.

Mrs. Sanderson

Mrs. Sanderson is Luke's wealthy aunt and the current owner of Hill House. Most of the negative things the reader learns about Luke Sanderson originate from his aunt, who has an extremely low opinion of her nephew.

Hugh Crain

The original patriarch of Hill House, Hugh Crain originally built the manor house for his young wife and two little girls. Little is known about this man who would be widowed three times before his own untimely death. However, based on the books in the library, which Luke Sanderson finds, Hugh Crain appears to have been interested in the occult. His books range from peaceful Sufism to gory executioner's tales.

Hill House was constructed to Crain's specifications and thus he was responsible for the strange concentric configuration of the rooms, as well as for the fact that every angle in the house is at a slight tilt. This odd construction, anchored by a heavy grotesque statue in the parlor, indicates that Hugh Crain's mind may also have been slightly tilted. The most revealing piece of evidence to indicate Crain's mindset is the darkly disturbing, hand-drawn memory book he left behind for his daughter. The book exhorts his little girl to follow a virtuous path in life, or else suffer the torments of eternal damnation. These



potential torments are drawn in lurid detail by his own hand and the book is signed with Hugh Crain's blood.

Mrs. Dudley

Mrs. Dudley, along with her husband, takes care of Hill House. She is decidedly put out by the arrival of Dr. Montague and his guests because she is expected to cook for them and clean up after them, in addition to her regular household cleaning duties.

Fortunately for Dr. Montague and his guests, Mrs. Dudley's cooking is much better than her attitude. Like her husband, she takes vicious pleasure in frightening the guests. As each guest arrives, she delivers a little speech informing them that she and her husband leave well before dark and that no one will be around to hear the guests screaming for help in the night.

Perhaps the dark forces of Hill House feed Mrs. Dudley's hostility, or perhaps she is merely a bitter local woman who resents the rich outsiders visiting Hill House. In either case, she is very set in her ways. Mrs. Dudley announces in advance the precise time each meal will be set out and cleared away and she refuses to budge an inch if the guests wish to linger over their meal for a few extra minutes when it's time for her to clear away. Again, this inflexibility may be a character flaw, or it may have to do with Hill House itself, since Mrs. Dudley informs the guests in a rather odd tone that the dishes belong on the shelves in the kitchen; from statements such as this, the reader can infer that Hill House likes itself to be kept in proper order at all times. In this way, Mrs. Dudley is the voice of Hill House.

Mrs. Dudley refuses to go out of her way for Dr. Montague or his guests. On the single occasion in which Luke, at Dr. Montague's behest, requests a second pot of coffee from Mrs. Dudley, he is sent away empty-handed. Amusingly, the only person who hits it off with Mrs. Dudley is the outrageous Mrs. Montague. Mrs. Montague is a demanding, imperious woman and when she insists on having a glass of milk delivered to her room at night, not even Mrs. Dudley dares refuse. Yet it does not seem that Mrs. Dudley obeys Mrs. Montague out of deference. The two women chat pleasantly in the kitchen together and they appear to see eye to eye with regard to their opinions of Dr. Montague and his guests. For Mrs. Montague, Mrs. Dudley actually volunteers to make extra coffee and a pot of tea, despite the fact that it is not Mrs. Dudley's set time to serve the beverages. Mrs. Montague's friendly relationship with Mrs. Dudley makes the housekeeper seem friendlier and warmly human than one would think given her treatment of the rest of the guests.

Dudley

Dudley is the caretaker of Hill House. He lives in the nearby village of Hillsdale with his wife and refuses to remain at Hill House after dark. Dudley's position at Hill House gives him an exaggerated sense of his own authority; when Eleanor first arrives, Dudley

nearly turns her away, even though she is expected. He takes pleasure in frightening all the new arrivals with his dark insinuations about Hill House.



Objects/Places

The Magic Oleander Square

On her drive to Hill House, Eleanor passes an empty grass square, surrounded by majestic oleander trees. It captures her imagination as she wonders what building had been planned and never built in the center of the square. She decides, whimsically, that the square contains an invisible castle. Eleanor thinks that she might break the spell on the castle if she were to walk inside the square. Unwilling to test her theory, Eleanor drives away without allowing herself to walk in this magical space.

The Planchette

Similar to the ouija board, the planchette is a method of communicating with spirits from beyond through the process of automatic writing. A pencil is attached to the triangular or heart-shaped wooden planchette and participants place their fingers on the planchette as they ask questions of the spirits. The planchette has little wheels and glides over a piece of paper, creating spirit writings on the paper. Whether the planchette is guided by supernatural forces or by the hopeful people holding it, Dr. Montague refuses to say.

The Tower

The stone tower at the front of Hill House is the reputed sight of the village companion's suicide. Eleanor, the most psychically sensitive of the guests, refuses to go anywhere near the tower at first. Later, when the house has corrupted her mind, she dances up the precarious staircase leading to the tower in an apparent suicide attempt, which is thwarted by the other guests.

The Library

The library contains within it the spiral staircase leading up to the tower. Eleanor initially refuses to set foot in the library because her sensitive nose perceives the odor of decay, although none of the other guests can smell it. Luke spends a great deal of time alone in the library, reading the largely gruesome books about spirituality and executions. This is also the room where Mrs. Montague and Arthur prefer to use their planchette.

The Nursery

Perhaps the most haunted room in Hill House, the nursery entrance is guarded by a cold spot. Not even Mrs. Dudley dares venture into the nursery very often. Mrs. Montague, on the other hand, insists on sleeping in this room, in hopes of making contact with the spirits of Hill House.



The Parlor

At the very heart of Hill House lies the parlor. It has a fireplace and is by far the coziest room in the house, although it retains the general chill of Hill House. Dr. Montague selects this room as headquarters for himself and his assistants and they spend all of their evenings together by the fire.

The Summerhouse

The summerhouse is a little building outside on the main grounds of Hill House, which Luke, Theo and Eleanor discover one day. It is the sight of secret lovers' meetings, where Luke tries to woo the women of Hill House. Eleanor spends an hour with him in the summerhouse one day, but feels afterward that she has wasted an hour with an insufferable fool. Later, Eleanor eavesdrops jealously on Theo and Luke, who spend a very pleasant afternoon together, closeted in the summerhouse.

The Veranda

The veranda surrounds Hill House like a tight belt. It can be reached from any of the rooms that open to the outside.

The Green Room

Named for the color of its décor, this bedroom is assigned to Theo by Mrs. Dudley. The room is desecrated with bloody writing one day, forcing Theo to move into the blue room with Eleanor.

The Blue Room

Eleanor's bedroom is called the blue room, because it is decorated all in blue. Theo shares the room with Eleanor after her own room is vandalized.

The Memory Book

Put together by Hugh Crain himself, this horrid little book had been a gift to one of his daughters. In the book, Hugh draws hideous pictures representing the seven deadly sins and exhorts his daughter not to condemn herself to eternal damnation by committing any one of these sins. He signs the book in his own blood, as a pact to bind his daughter to the righteous path recommended by its pages.



The Spiral Staircase

Several stories high, this metal, spiral staircase leads from the stone floor of the library up to the top of the tower. Over the years, the anchorings have rotted away and the spiral staircase now hangs precariously from the ceiling, high above the stone floor. In a psychic daze, Eleanor runs up the tower steps one night, intending to climb through the trap door to the tower balcony. When the others arrive to rescue her, Eleanor carefully picks her way back down the precarious stairway, wondering why she'd been foolish enough to run on the way up to the top.

Eleanor's Red Sweater

Eleanor purchases this sweater and some matching red sandals specifically for her stay at Hill House. Accustomed to dressing drably, Eleanor feels lovely and daring in the red sweater. When Theo's clothes are destroyed and she is forced to borrow Eleanor's, Eleanor becomes jealous because the sweater looks like it was made for Theo.



Social Sensitivity

Through a downright frightening revitalization of the old Gothic haunted house story, Jackson develops in this novel her interests in humanity's troubled inner life and her critique of some of the negative sides of human group behavior.

Characteristically, Jackson's main emphasis is on how evil forces bear down on one individual — in this novel, this victim is Eleanor Vance, the protagonist. The premise of the novel is so arranged that all the evils and deprivations of Eleanor's life come to her through haunted Hill House, with the terrible process culminating in her suicide. Eleanor, very sensitive and very repressed as the action of the novel opens, is an extremely isolated, mother-dominated woman in her early thirties, a victim of her environment in many ways. When Dr. Montague, an anthropologist ghost-hunter, rents a summer house and recruits a party to live there and look for spirit manifestations, Eleanor volunteers, as do Theodora, a flamboyant New York interior decorator, and Luke Sanderson, a young and irresponsible relative of the property owner. The plot develops as the haunted house works on each of them and as they work on each other — all finally to the deadly detriment of Eleanor Vance.



Techniques

Jackson employs chillingly effective Gothic ghost story writing skills. Using the central symbol and setting of Hill House, she has its supernatural presences work on all the characters, with the most sensitive suffering the most.

Readers encounter poundings, scratchings, odd presences — all the paraphernalia of the ghost story, and a few others not so typical, depicted with freshness and the right touch to frighten. The house, for example, after a while seems to focus its negative energies on Eleanor. Mysterious writing such as HELP ELEANOR COME HOME appears on the walls; as the novel progresses and the whole party undergoes one harrowing event after another, Eleanor begins to identify with the house, suddenly feeling warm and comfortable as she grows increasingly suicidal.



Themes

Romantic Triangles

Shirley Jackson creates an intriguing trio of would-be lovers in her novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*. Given the social proprieties of the era in which the novel is set, much of this lovers' triangle is revealed through subtle inference and innuendo. By the time Eleanor arrives at Hill House, the reader has been made to understand that Eleanor is romantically past her prime. She has given up her youth to care for an ungrateful, ailing mother and finds herself, at thirty-two, bitter and desperate for a little happiness. Despite her years, Eleanor lacks romantic experience and has the romantic aspirations of a young teenager. Eleanor never consciously mentions or thinks about looking for love, but it is her fondest wish and most desperate hope, as indicated by her oft-repeated refrain, "journeys end in lovers meeting." When she first lays eyes on Luke that refrain echoes through her mind. Although she instantly finds Luke boring, silly and selfish, Eleanor is still intent on turning him into her prince charming. Caught up in her romantic dreams, Eleanor refuses to recognize that Luke is a wolf, looking only for a meaningless summer romance.

Theodora's radiant presence complicates Eleanor's goal to snare Luke, for Theodora is an independent, experienced woman who has no objection to sharing a casual tryst with the lucky Luke. Theodora never specifically reveals that her primary sexual attraction is to other women, but the author makes certain implications about the nature of Theo's relationship with her female roommate at home. Unfortunately for Eleanor, who cares more about being loved than about the gender of her lover, Theo is as much of a wolf as Luke is.

Theo is horrified by the way Luke trifles with Eleanor's affections and yet Theo winds up doing the same thing. She seduces Eleanor, hoping only for a summer romance. However, Eleanor finds herself falling in love with Theo, or at least she believes she is in love. When Eleanor declares her desire to move in with Theo once they leave Hill House, Theo explains that she is only looking for a summer fling. Eleanor is unaware of Theo's roommate and stubbornly plans out her future with Theodora. To put a stop to Eleanor's needy grab for her love, Theo allows Luke to seduce her. Initially, when Eleanor spies on the two of them jealously, the reader is uncertain whether Eleanor is jealous of Luke or of Theo. Eventually, Eleanor's choice becomes clear and the formerly confusing tension and game-playing between her and Theo is placed in an understandable context.

Despite Theo's attraction to Eleanor, she is not prepared to give her the lifelong commitment that she so desperately seeks. Given that the events of the novel take place over the course of a single week, Eleanor's hopes are completely out of line with reality. Yet the strength of Eleanor's desire elicits the reader's sympathy when she is rejected by both of her would-be lovers in the end. This triangle echoes another tragic triangle in Hill House's past. The two Crain sisters apparently feuded over a man, just as



Eleanor and Theo feud over Luke. After the elder sister loses the battle, she retires to seclusion in Hill House. Hill House thus carries the stain of lost love and rejection. As Eleanor is so susceptible to Hill House, one must wonder which of her current emotions are actually hers and which are merely psychic echoes from the past.

A more subtle lovers' triangle plays out in the background when Mrs. Montague arrives with her friend, Arthur. Dr. Montague displays a total lack of suspicion or jealousy about his wife's undefined relationship with Arthur, yet the intimacy between Arthur and Mrs. Montague makes them act like an old married couple. Such intimacy is absent between Dr. and Mrs. Montague. She scolds him like a child and treats Arthur as her peer. Dr. Montague is clearly embarrassed by her behavior, but insists that in most respects she is a wonderful woman and wife. Eleanor is perceptive when she suggests that Mrs. Montague may be trying to get closer to her husband by joining him in his work. Nonetheless, Mrs. Montague's jealousy is aroused when Theo begins to charm Arthur. Later, in the summerhouse, when Eleanor is eavesdropping on Theo and Luke, she hears Luke chide Theo for attempting to seduce Arthur. Theo's morals would not prevent her from sharing a tryst with Arthur; she apparently chooses Luke because Luke is more handsome and because she hopes to put an end to Eleanor's feelings for Luke.

Home

Eleanor's main priority throughout the novel is to find herself a home. This is not explicitly revealed to the reader until the very end. Her desperation does not become clear to the other guests of Hill House either, until Eleanor admits that she has stolen her sister's car and will no longer be welcome in her sister's home. Certainly the reader had been aware that Eleanor feels marginalized in her sister's home, but the desultory nature of her lodgings is not made clear until she reveals that she sleeps on a cot and that all of her worldly possessions fit into a box in the back seat of the stolen car. Suddenly her theft of the car seems a direr act than initially perceived.

In Chapter 1, Eleanor argues that she owns half the car and has a right to it. In that light, her taking the car seems like a family squabble or rebellion more than a desperate act of running away forever. One imagines that the money she earns at Hill House might allow Eleanor to rent an apartment and start a new life. She envisions herself living in several of the houses she passes on the way to Hill House and the reader can easily envision this, too. However Eleanor's desperation runs deeper than she is willing to admit. She feels she has never truly had a home, a place where she could be loved and accepted. She has never felt welcome anywhere.

Hill House seems to recognize Eleanor's deepest secret fears and uses them against her. Or perhaps it is not the house, but Eleanor herself who subconsciously creates psychic disturbances designed to reveal her housing problem. On the very evening when Dr. Montague tells everyone Eleanor was involved in poltergeist phenomena as a child, writing appears on the walls of Hill House, which begs for help with Eleanor's particular problem. "HELP ELEANOR COME HOME," reads the tall, chalk lettering in the hallway (Chapter 5, pg. 103).



The group does not discuss the content of the message, but the words are vague and suggestive of several possibilities. Could the house be calling for Eleanor's help? Does the house want her to stay? Is it perhaps the ghost of her mother who begs Eleanor to return to her? In hindsight, the message is crystal clear. If she is responsible for the writing, which seems quite likely, she is begging for help in finding a home. This puts her interest in Theo in a slightly different light, as well. Perhaps it is not Theo that Eleanor wants so desperately, but only Theo's home. Eleanor insists on moving in with Theo after they leave Hill House. When Theo refuses her request, the psychic disturbances in the house increase. Eleanor's desperation to find a home makes her an easy target for the forces in Hill House. Once spurned by Theo, Eleanor decides that Hill House would make a lovely home. Her intent to stay there forever is fulfilled in the end when she chooses to kill herself rather than leave Hill House. In this tragic fashion, Eleanor has found her home.

Science vs. the Paranormal

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Dr. John Montague sets himself an unlikely task; he intends to scientifically prove that Hill House is haunted. He hearkens to the tradition of the nineteenth-century Spiritualist movement. In that emerging age of rationality, characterized by a deep division between science and spirituality, science began to emerge as the dominant force. The scientific, rational approach eventually came to rule over academia. In today's modern world, science is taught as fact and spirituality as pleasant illusion. The Spiritualist societies in the nineteenth century endeavored to close this rift by using science to prove the existence of a spiritual afterlife. They were largely laughed out of academia, just as Dr. Montague's paper about Hill House is greeted with scorn by his colleagues at the end of the novel.

Initially, Montague hopes to pick up where the Spiritualists left off in proving the existence of unseen spirits. Aware of the rift between science and the supernatural, the doctor leans heavily on his academic credentials to lend his project credibility. He sternly insists that the others use precise terminology when referring to their experiences at Hill House, hoping to preserve the integrity of his study. He is quite defensive when Theodora teases him about telling ghost stories, insisting that he has carefully verified the facts surrounding Hill House's past. Montague is thrilled when he finds what he believes to be irrefutable evidence of the supernatural, the cold spot outside the nursery. But when he drops a thermometer into the cold spot, it registers no change in temperature, even though everyone can clearly feel the chill. Unfortunately for Dr. Montague, the supernatural forces in Hill House, if there are any, refuse to be quantified scientifically.

Modern technology could have the potential to eventually prove the existence of the supernatural. Had his experiment taken place in modern-day America, Dr. Montague might have employed better technology in his effort to prove the existence of unseen forces. Many experiments are conducted today in laboratories such as the one Theo's character visited, but today's labs contain more updated equipment. Current physics theories suggest the possibility of multiple dimensions coinciding side by side and



modern day medicine could likely have tested Dr. Montague's body temperature before and after he stood in the cold spot. Yet these modern methods and theories are considered suggestive rather than definitive. In other words, the debate over science and the paranormal has not disappeared, although society's bias still leans heavily towards the rationalist camp. Science retains its favored status, as society does not accept anything that cannot be scientifically proven.

One of the finest modern ghost stories in the Gothic genre, *The Haunting of Hill House* is Jackson's most complex novel, with the haunted house functioning as a unifying and enriching device that carries meaning on several levels. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Jackson finds an excellent vehicle for all the dark, interior matters of the psycho-supernatural that she elaborates throughout her fictional canon.

The novel is an almost analytic description of the way the collective imagination or darker unconscious within humanity, and beyond humanity, works on different sensibilities. It is a warning to dabblers in the exploration of the paranormal and supernatural, by showing what happens to Eleanor, who is psychic. It is a social allegory, since Hill House has an evil past that reveals too-repressive Puritanical forces. It is a good psychological novel, portraying with Eleanor a mother-complex that leads, with the stimulus of supernatural forces, to a breakdown of personality. And it is a fine ghost story, leaving a number of major events unexplained, fostering a reverence that is nothing less than religious in relation to spiritual matters beyond the scope of humanity.



Style

Point of View

The Haunting of Hill House is told in the third person, by an omniscient narrator. However, the point of view throughout the novel is almost exclusively Eleanor's. Her mindset is unstable, making her point of view extremely unreliable. Her progression from fragile lucidity to complete insanity is gradual enough to take the reader along for the ride. The author's subtle machinations suck Eleanor into the madness of Hill House. As the narrator undergoes her transformation, the point of view becomes increasingly surreal because Eleanor's thoughts get mixed up with the ghosts of Hill House. The house's point of view is expressed through Eleanor, yet the author never explicitly defines which ghosts Hill House represents and so the reader never knows who is speaking through Eleanor.

Is it the spurned elder Crain sister who possesses Eleanor's mind, or the lonely village companion? Perhaps the younger sister is the one who haunts Hill House. Maybe all these ghosts together have crowded into Eleanor's wide-open mind, or maybe the evil is intrinsic to Hill House. Perhaps the ghosts are merely tragic victims hoping to communicate with Eleanor, as Mrs. Montague believes. The most disturbing possibility is that Eleanor possesses telekinetic powers and is completely out of touch with her emotions, which is a dangerous combination. The other characters come to believe that Eleanor is subconsciously manifesting the supernatural phenomena as a result of her submerged rage, frustration and fear; yet the reader must glean this from the others' reactions to Eleanor, because she herself refuses to acknowledge the possibility that she is causing the phenomena.

In any case, the phenomena are initially targeted personally at Eleanor. The knocking sound on the walls at night means nothing to the others, but Eleanor recognizes it as the sound her mother's cane used to make when she would knock for Eleanor's help in the night. On the night her mother died, Eleanor had not responded to that knock. Eleanor may be manifesting the ghost of her dead mother in order to punish herself for her role in her mother's death. Yet the manifestations don't stop there.

After attacking Eleanor, they next attack Theo, with whom Eleanor is angry. Nonetheless, Eleanor denies having anything to do with these phenomena. Whether she is victim or victimizer is a central question raised by the unreliability of her point of view. She has likely been victimized by her mother throughout her life, although she doesn't even *consciously* realize that her mother's attitude was wrong or negative. Growing up with such an influence and having no social interaction outside of her mother's narrow sphere, Eleanor may well have grown up to become a victimizer, too. Eleanor never quite admits to having killed her mother intentionally, but why else would she be so afraid that her mother's ghost will come back to haunt her? The manifestations in Hill House represent Eleanor's conscience. Her psychic abilities, combined with the power of Hill House, allow her to recreate her mother's spectre to



torment herself. It is Eleanor's indirect way of confessing her grave sin. Only towards the end of the novel, when Eleanor hints more directly at such a confession, does the reader truly realize that her mental instability began long before she came to Hill House.

Setting

The novel relies utterly on its setting to create the mood and drive the action. A haunted house story cannot, of course, succeed without its haunted house. Eighty-year-old Hill House plays a memorable role in the novel. The house inspires fear long before any unusual events actually occur. Because the house's builder, Hugh Crain, chose to make every single angle irregular, each room in the house lists to one side. Although these deformities are not visible, the result for the house guests is a feeling rather like seasickness. The house is often described as dark and, indeed, seems to extinguish any light or life attempting to enter its dark environs.

Inside Hill House, doors swing shut by themselves, shadows appear to move in one's peripheral vision and loud, banging ghosts haunt the corridors at night. Even in broad daylight, a cold spot lingers perpetually outside the door of the nursery. The grotesque Greco-Roman statue, which Hugh Crain had specially made for the house sits in the drawing room and acts as an anchor or counter-weight to prevent the house from being pulled apart by the oddities in its geometry.

The tower is an important setting, although none of the houseguests set foot inside it. It is rumored to be the setting of a former suicide and, in the climactic scene, Eleanor attempts to reach the tower in what may well be a suicide attempt of her own. The only part of the house made of stone, Eleanor thinks the tower will stand forever, even if the rest of the house should fall. The tower can be reached from the wide veranda, which encircles Hill House completely. Doors from many of the interior rooms open onto the veranda, making it a perfect setting for sneaking in or out of the house undetected. The veranda's many doors allow for the possibility that the strange noises heard in Hill House might be caused by intruders rather than ghosts.

The other critical aspect regarding the novel's setting is the time period in which it is set. An American novel published in 1959, prior to the Women's Liberation movement of the 1960's, *The Haunting of Hill House* explores the morality and social issues of the pre-feminist era. Its main character, Eleanor Vance, would likely not feel so desperate about her future in today's modern age. However, in 1959, an unmarried woman of thirty-two was considered a spinster, financially dependent on family or low-paying, low-status employment and most likely beyond her childbearing years. This last fact is doubly important because society's primary goal for women at that time was marriage and family.

Having sacrificed the possibility of marriage and family in order to care for her ailing mother, Eleanor feels that life has passed her by. She believes her adventure in Hill House is her first, last and only chance to find happiness. Her plight is moving to modern American women as well, because even with all the new options that have



opened up for women over the past forty years, the concept of a biological clock has certainly not disappeared. Yet in Eleanor's day, there were few options for a woman to seek fulfillment if she was not a wife and mother. Many "spinsters" were condemned to the social shelf, to live out their remaining years in dullness and boredom. This is indicated in the novel by the way Eleanor's sister's treats her. Eleanor is expected to sleep on a cot in the baby's room, help around the house and generally make herself as invisible as possible. Her creativity and love of adventure make this socially imposed lifestyle unbearable to her, but she lacks any female role models to show her the possibility of a brighter, more independent future. Thus Eleanor's desperation and resulting susceptibility to Hill House, are very much products of the time period in which she lives.

Language and Meaning

The language in *The Haunting of Hill House* gives the novel a surreal feel. The author uses a stream-of-consciousness writing style, which contributes to the dreamy quality of the narrative. This style is characterized by long, whimsical, run-on sentences that are frequently interrupted by the random thoughts of the various characters. The language is old-fashioned, which reinforces the setting of an old-fashioned, Victorian-era ghost story. Although the book is set in the late 1950's, Hill House itself is much older and the old-fashioned language structure helps give the book a timeless, classic feel. The narrative's surreal style contributes to the fear and confusion, which the author intends to create for the reader.

The Haunting of Hill House is designed to give the reader the feeling of being enmeshed in a spooky nightmare. The author develops confusion in the narrative by refusing to name the fearful phantoms that surround the main characters. The real issues and fears are talked around, rather than directly addressed. This minimalist descriptive style lends the appropriate spookiness to the scenes dealing with supernatural manifestations. At the end of Chapter 6, for example, a ghostly picnic scene is described through Eleanor's eyes. However, Theo has apparently seen something else, something even more frightening. She begs Eleanor not to look back. When the women arrive safely at the house, Theo, shaken, admits to having looked back. Yet the author never states what it is that Theo might have seen.

This deliberate obfuscation is characteristic of the scenes involving the lovers' triangle as well. Much of what transpires between Eleanor, Theo and Luke remains unwritten. The reader must read between the lines and the author cleverly provides sufficient, if vague, clues to allow the reader to do so. In the era in which the story is set, sexuality was not discussed as frankly as it is today. Theo's lesbianism is alluded to, but never openly stated. The tryst between Theo and Luke is revealed only through euphemism and innuendo. This appears to be a deliberate, stylistic choice made by the author, because the author's style echoes the earlier age in which Hill House was built. In the nineteenth century, Dr. Montague explains when telling the story of the eldest Crain sister, a single woman of a certain age was said to have been crossed in love. This euphemism was considered a delicate way of explaining why she had no husband. The



author mimics this verbal delicacy in her exposition of the lovers' triangle, catching the reader's imagination and inspiring one to fully ponder the complicated interrelationships of the three would-be lovers.

Structure

The Haunting of Hill House is divided into nine chapters. The story is a chronological unfolding of the events at Hill House, beginning with an introduction of Dr. Montague and his audacious goal to become the first man to scientifically prove the existence of the spiritual realm. Hill House is first introduced as the embodiment of his dream. Eleanor, Theodora and Luke are initially introduced as candidates handpicked by Dr. Montague to assist him with his psychic researches. Once this foundation has been laid, the author suddenly switches the focus to Eleanor's character and the story becomes a personal drama with her at the center. In mid-stream, Chapter 1 ceases to be expository groundwork about Dr. Montague's experiment and abruptly shifts to cover Eleanor's journey to Hill House. This is structurally important, because it is the only chapter that takes place outside Hill House. Eleanor thus becomes the only character to be shown away from the house, in the context of her everyday life.

From this point on, the novel is structured around Eleanor's experiences. Rarely does the author include a scene in which she is not present. Her increasingly confused thought process causes the narrative to seem timeless, yet it retains its chronological structure. The gaps in Eleanor's recall make it appear as if the narrative skips around in time and yet this is not the case. It comes as a surprise at the end to discover that only a week has passed and that everything that was related was indeed chronological, with no gaps. Eleanor's delusional dreams are inserted into the linear structure, making time pass deceptively slowly. As she demonstrates in the first chapter, she has the imaginative capacity to live an entire fantasy life in the space of a few seconds. The narrative continues to follow Eleanor until she meets her untimely demise. The story ends abruptly with her death. All of the loose ends are wrapped up with a brief paragraph, which mimics the detached narrative style of the novel's opening.



Quotes

"He had been looking for an honestly haunted house all his life. When he heard of Hill House he had been at first doubtful, then hopeful, then indefatigable; he was not the man to let go of Hill House once he had found it." Chapter 1, pg. 5

"He combed the records of the psychic societies, the back files of sensational newspapers, the reports of parapsychologists and assembled a list of names of people who had, in one way or another, at one time or another, no matter how briefly or dubiously, been involved in abnormal events. From his list he first eliminated the names of people who were dead. When he had then crossed off the names of those who seemed to him publicity seekers, of subnormal intelligence, or unsuitable because of a clear tendency to take the center of the stage, he had a list of perhaps a dozen names." Chapter 1, pg. 6

"Theodora's world was one of delight and soft colors; she had come onto Dr. Montague's list because-going laughing into the laboratory, bringing with her a rush of floral perfume-she had somehow been able, amused and excited over her own incredible skill, to identify correctly eighteen cards out of twenty, fifteen cards out of twenty, nineteen cards out of twenty, held up by an assistant out of sight and hearing. The name of Theodora shone in the records of the laboratory and so came inevitably to Dr. Montague's attention." Chapter 1, pp. 8-9

"Luke Sanderson was a liar. He was also a thief. His aunt, who was the owner of Hill House, was fond of pointing out that her nephew had the best education, the best clothes, the best taste and the worst companions of anyone she had ever known; she would have leaped at any chance to put him safely away for a few weeks." Chapter 1, pg. 9

"She had taken to wondering lately, during these swift-counted years, what had been done with all those wasted summer days; how could she have spent them so wantonly?" Chapter 1, pg. 13

"It was an act of moral strength to lift her foot and set it on the bottom step and she thought that her deep unwillingness to touch Hill House for the first time came directly from the vivid feeling that it was waiting for her, evil, but patient." Chapter 2, pg. 27

"Theodora laughed and gave Luke that quick, understanding glance she had earlier given Eleanor. Eleanor, watching, thought wryly that it might sometimes be oppressive to be for long around one so immediately in tune, so perceptive, as Theodora." Chapter 3, pg. 44

"I first heard about Hill House a year ago, from a former tenant. He began by assuring me that he had left Hill House because his family objected to living so far out in the country and ended by saying that in his opinion the house ought to be burned down and the ground sowed with salt." Chapter 3, pg. 51



"Then, awakening completely, she shook her head and sighed. You are a very silly baby, Eleanor, she told herself as she did every morning." Chapter 4, pg. 67

"In either corner of the hall, over the nursery doorway, two grinning heads were set; meant, apparently, as gay decorations for the nursery entrance, they were no more jolly or carefree than the animals inside. Their separate stares, captured forever in distorted laughter, met and locked at the point of the hall where the vicious cold centered. 'When you stand where they can look at you,' Luke explained, 'they freeze you.'" Chapter 4, pg. 86

"'I could say,' Eleanor put in smiling, 'All three of you are in my imagination; none of this is real.'

'If I thought you could really believe that,' the doctor said gravely, 'I would turn you out of Hill House this morning. You would be venturing far too close to the state of mind which would welcome the perils of Hill House with a kind of sisterly embrace.'" Chapter 5, pp. 99-100

"Then he looked at her briefly and smiled what she was coming to know as his self-deprecatory smile; did Theodora, she wondered and the thought was unwelcome, did Theodora know him as well as this?" Chapter 6, pg. 118

"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 actually be *suffering* because they are aware that you are afraid of them.'" Chapter 7, pp. 129-130

"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 confidingly close to Theodora and Mrs. Montague talked.

None of them heard it, she thought with joy; nobody heard it but me." Chapter 8, pg. 160

"'I'm sorry,' he said. 'Good-by.'

'Drive carefully,' Luke said politely.

'You can't just *make* me go,' she said wildly. 'You *brought* me here.'" Chapter 9, pg. 172

"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?" Chapter 9, pg. 174

Adaptations

The film *The Haunting of Hill House*, starring Julie Harris and Claire Bloom, premiered in 1963, and it now is often rerun on cable or network television.

The Hill House of the movie was Ettington Hall, in England, a house quite close to the architecture of the house in the novel. Jackson was quite pleased with the movie, itself a commercial success — and the movie does adhere much more closely to the story line and effects of the novel than do most movie adaptations.

Ray Miller, Jr.



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the differences in the methods Dr. and Mrs. Montague use to study the paranormal. Which approach, if any, do you believe is most successful? Why?

Do you believe Eleanor was justified in feeling resentful towards the others for treating her like a hysterical female? Or do you believe the others in the party saw something in Eleanor that alarmed them? Justify your position with examples from the story.

Did Eleanor intentionally let her mother die, or is she merely suffering from bereavement and a mistaken feeling of guilt? Cite examples from the story that support your point of view.

Why does Mrs. Montague believe that a loving attitude is more effective in a haunted house than a fearful one? Would it have changed anything if Eleanor had shared her belief? Why or why not?

What changes in behavior or speech occur in Luke's character after spending time in Hill House? What do they signify?

Eleanor's mother, out of her own paranoia and jealousy, blamed supposedly jealous neighbors for the rain of stones phenomenon. To what extent does Eleanor mirror her mother's jealousy and paranoia? How does this become Eleanor's fatal flaw?

Describe the source of the conflict between Theo and Eleanor. Give examples to support the theory that the house is responsible for the growing enmity between the women. Alternatively, support the position that their enmity is a natural result of Theo and Eleanor's character flaws, again using examples from the story.

Literary Precedents

The wealth of previous examples of Gothic ghost stories to which Jackson adds her novel reaches back to at least Roman times. Works such as *The Castle of Otranto* (Walpole; 1765), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (Radcliffe; 1794), to some degree *Frankenstein* (Shelley; 1818) and *Dracula* (Stoker; 1897), and scores of others form the long tradition in which Jackson is writing.

As Carol Cleveland has perceptively shown, Jackson can be seen to be reversing the contemporary formula Gothic novel: in the formula Gothic, a beautiful heroine encounters a haunted mansion, but the mystery or the ghost is unveiled and the story ends with her in the arms of a handsome rescuer.

Here, a relatively plain-appearing victim loses out to the haunted mansion, with it becoming her "lover" at the end of the tale.



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