

# HOUSE OF LEAVES

PILOT

by

A solid black horizontal bar used to redact the author's name.

## NOTE

Camera instructions are suggestions and only included to help clarify the question of P.O.V. intrinsic to this narrative.

Also: All Talking Heads, especially Professors, Readers & Seers, while presented here in the spirit of a traditional documentary, will in future episodes begin to interact with various characters not to mention become subject themselves to the curious properties of the [house](#).

For the purpose of this draft, Location To Come will be noted as LTK.

**TEASER****INT. CAR. DASHBOARD. PRESENT DAY – NIGHT**

TRUMP (O.C.)

A great plan!

Woman's HAND with orange fingernails changes the channel.

NPR (O.C.)

Tonight the literary world also suffered an upset when a much hallowed book was revealed a fraud.

**KTAL NEWS. HOLLYWOOD. PRESENT DAY – NIGHT**

KTAL REPORTER

For nearly two decades, author Mark Z. Danielewski (pronounced daniel-loose-ski) maintained the work was his.

In the background, a Hollywood apartment. A small crowd waits by the gate. Phones out. Rectangles of blue hoping to catch someone. Something.

**EXT. AUTHOR'S HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT. PRESENT DAY – NIGHT**

TZM REPORTER

Sir-, Mr- (chasing) Hey! How do you respond to these allegations?!

MARK Z. DANIELEWSKI, in hoodie and straw fedora with stingy brim, runs through an overgrown courtyard. We never see his face.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK. PRESENT DAY – DAY**

READER #1

Man, he even won like what how many awards? And like translations in how many countries? Like if that's not real when it's not even real, like, man, like what is this world coming to, right?

**FACEBOOK AND ASSORTED SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS.**Images of **HOUSE OF LEAVES** stamped with **BULLSHIT!**Rapid cuts of numerous online POSTS with numerous translations of the book all stamped with the same meme (in respective languages, of course): **BULLSHIT!**

**BBC NEWS. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

BBC REPORTER

The novel had gained a cult following substantial enough to land it on the curricula of universities throughout the world.

Turning to PROFESSOR #1.

PROFESSOR #1

I've taught it for years. I've overseen dissertations written by students. Tenure applicants proudly point to their work on *House of Leaves*. There've been symposiums. Books on books written on it.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #2

Really, it's staggering.

**EXT. UNIVERSITY CAMPUS. NEWS CLIP — NIGHT**

STUDENTS surround a GARBAGE CAN.

STUDENT #1

(tossing in his paper)

I can't believe I wrote my masters on that book.

STUDENT #2

Fuck that book!

Copies of *HOUSE OF LEAVES* are thrown in too.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

READER #2

(jaded & wry)

Is it that surprising? I mean publishing these days? Literature? Whatever that means. I mean people knew. At least here in L.A. they knew. Guess not in New York. Gullifuckable. Now look at them, sellers of fake fiction.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

READER #3

(nearing tears)

Why man? How could he, you, like just lie, like just make it up . . . and like you didn't even have to?

**EXT. RANDOM HOUSE. SIDEWALK — DAY**

NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER

The ed—? Are you, were you, *the editor* of *House of Leaves*? Excuse me?

EDITOR

(turning)

Unless you have definitive proof that I am who you say I am, I do not grant you permission to use my voice let alone my likeness.

The EDITOR's face is pixellated and his (or her?) voice anonymized.

**EXT. AUTHOR'S HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT. PRESENT DAY — NIGHT**

MARK Z. DANIELEWSKI makes it to the end of the courtyard and escapes down a stairwell. The camera finds only shadows. Maybe something stirs there. An afterthought. Something else.

VARIETY REPORTER

You're done! They found you out. They found the—

**FOX NEWS REPORTER. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

FOX NEWS REPORTER

An organization calling themselves the Vaticinal Echt Mission is taking credit for locating a trove of—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #2

But this is so unlike the usual upheaval concerning textual veracity. Say *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey. Or *Wilkomirski's Fragments*. Or JT LeRoy's *Sarah*. In those cases, the claims were always that what was presented was

## PROFESSOR #2 (CONT'D)

true. This author did something else. He claimed that what was presented *wasn't* true. In fact, he only ever indirectly presented anything. I know his dodges well. Did you know he played the Artful Dodger once? When he was a kid. I've taught *House* many times. I met him once. Kind of. And by the way his name's pronounced Daniel-lef-ski. But really, what's the most disturbing part of these, what?, revelations, what's still too early to understand fully, really, is why hide the truth?

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

## PROFESSOR #3

It's obvious isn't it? Daniel-loose-ski loves books. He loves the illuminated word. He came across this, whatever you want to call it, record? and like any ambitious artist applied his medium of choice and pulled it off. Or *nearly* pulled it off.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

## PROFESSOR #4

Oh, it's not that complicated. His father was a director. He was in conflict with the father. He negates the father by negating the director by becoming the author. Why do people overthink these things?

**CNN NEWS REPORTER. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

## CNN REPORTER

By bringing to light this find, the Vaticinal Echt Mission hopes to "rectify the misdirection perpetuated by constant textual misguidance." The novel, after all, centers on a film that purportedly does not exist. This discovery, however, proves that the film does in fact . . . exist.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

READER #3

(wiping away tears)

Wait! Whoa! Then does that mean the book  
no longer exists? (tearing up again)

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

READER #2

(still jaded & wry)

Who or what the fuck is a Vagincinal  
Emission?

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #1

Of course, there are consequences! How  
can there not be?

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #2

If this is true, if, and that's a big  
if, well then it's . . . scary, right?  
Literally, very—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #3

—very, very scary.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #4

How can it be anything else? Terrifying.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

READER #1

Sure. Because if the footage is real,  
if they're all there, Johnny, The  
Navidsons, her, then—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

READER #3

—then what's, you know the really chilly  
part, what's gotta be real too is—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

READER #2  
 (not jaded or wry)  
 The **house**.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #1  
 The **house**.

**KTAL REPORTER. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

KTAL REPORTER  
 The **house**.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #2  
 The **house**.

**BBC REPORTER. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

BBC REPORTER  
 The **house**.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #3  
 The **house**.

**NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER  
 The **house**.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY.**

PROFESSOR #4  
 The **house**.

The utterances overlap until they start to echo over images of students pouring GAS in the GARBAGE CAN, lighting a FLARE, tossing the flare into the can, all the papers and copies of **HOUSE OF LEAVES** exploding into flame. Sounds continue to collide, grow more distant, stranger, as we close in on the fire, on the black, where we focus, moving still closer and closer, until there's nothing left but black . . .

**END OF TEASER**

**TITLES**

B&W grainy photos. Color Polaroids. Over saturated 8mm and 16mm clips. Distorted Hi8 tapes. Appallingly clear slomo in the highest definition. And all these bits and clips of one thing. What's to come. For Johnny. For the Navidsons. For all of them. For all viewers. And for you. Especially you. In that [house](#). Beyond that doorway. Down that hallway. What the [house](#) has always dared only the bravest to explore.

One thing.

Darkness.

**ACT I****BLACK.****SUPER: Where it all started . . .**

JOHNNY TRUANT (V.O.)  
I still get nightmares.

**EXT. HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING. FRANKLIN & WHITLEY - NIGHT****SUPER:**

**January ■, 1997.  
A little after 3 am.**

JOHNNY TRUANT arrives out of the bleak on a fixie. Oxford shirt, horn-rimmed glasses, carb-happy face, eyes just happy, even if he has no clue how to ride a fixie. Wobbles all over the place.

LUDE  
(to Camera Operator)  
Does this even count if it's a second  
take? And he's riding your bike?

LUDE is a lesson in contrast. Black Docs, wallet chain, smoking a cigarette. Easy swagger and beautiful hair. All of him: beautiful.

JOHNNY  
I still can't believe you called her  
first.  
(stumbling off bike)  
What kind of bike has no gears? Or  
brakes?

LUDE  
Hoss, I always call the girl first.  
(beat) She's ahead of her time. (smiles  
at Camera Operator)

Note about this Camera Operator: we're not going to see whoever she is for quite a few episodes nor learn her name. So for the time being, let's just call her WHOEVER SHE IS or WSI.

JOHNNY  
I don't want to see a body.

LUDE  
I don't believe you. (winks at WSI) She  
does. A camera always wants a body.

LUDE opens the gates to the apartment building. Just then a HOMELESS MAN shuffles by. It's the same man who will play Zampanò later on. You wouldn't know that. No one will even notice – yet. This exchange is fast too. The focus on really just about getting through the gates.

HOMELESS MAN

Change?

LUDE

Go home!

HOMELESS MAN

I am home.

LUDE

Move it, man!

JOHNNY digs in his pocket and gives what change he has, catching up to LUDE who's already closing the gates (hinges quiet), motioning for the camera to follow him through the vaulted entranceway, starting his tour.

LUDE

Two peculiar things, hoss.

They reach the OVERGROWN COURTYARD, which suddenly grows misty, lights haloed in a rising fog. Multiple angles. Various films stocks. Even different times. This is a mythical place.

LUDE (O.C.)

The cats loved the old man. Dozens. They would come up to him all the time, just to rub against his leg. And him like a clock too, every morning, every night, taking his laps around the weeds. That's how I knew something was up.

WSI is back in charge of the camera. Not that she couldn't have grabbed the previous shots. As a rule, WSI constantly wants to get outside of the cage of first-person which we'll see gets particularly troubled soon enough.

JOHNNY

I don't see any cats now.

LUDE

(nodding)

The first peculiar thing. I saw one with its head ripped off and another with its guts strewn all over the sidewalk. Mostly though, the cats just vanished.

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING — A LITTLE LATER**

Moving down a hallway. A long, long hallway. Dim too. All doors closed. Except for one. About midway. WSI can't resist a glimpse.

A room stuffed with futons and beanbags, walls covered with band posters, corner lamps subdued under fabrics of dark reds and browns, A COVEN OF MUSICIANS, rocking their heads to their demo, passing around a bong.

LUDE

The second peculiar thing you're about to see for yourself. Right next to the body. The cops, though, let it go.

We approach the last DOOR on the left. It's not an unusual door but it's a big deal. Not as big a deal as what waits on the other side but doors in general, and hallways — especially hallways — will always be a big deal.

Close on LUDE digging out more keys. There are a lot of KEYS on this ring. LUDE hunts for the right one. The BLUE KEY. Turning back the first deadbolt. Does the door shift somehow? The door frame?

WSI (O.C.)

Johnny?

The camera moves away from all the locks. Away from the DOOR. Away from LUDE. Back to the hallway. JOHNNY's nowhere near. He's still frozen in front of the only open door. Still staring at the musicians.

A flurry of photographs follows. Of the MUSICIANS. We're taking them more seriously now. They weren't somebody then but they became somebody. Song starts to rise. Almost recognizable. But not yet.

JOHNNY turns back to the camera. Smiles sheepishly. Something about this music makes him (briefly) very happy. And then he takes a step toward the camera and that happiness fades away. The loss wobbles him. He stops. Slow zoom on his face.

This is the closest we've got to him yet. Boy is he, well, boyish. Almost rosy cheeked. Even if that broken front tooth hints at another story.

**INT. OLDER JOHNNY'S HOLLYWOOD HOTEL ROOM (FLASH FORWARD) — NIGHT**

**SUPER: A year-and-a-half later. October 31, 1998.**

Where the hell are we? Older Johnny's here if not in sight. Not that seeing him would help orient us much. The camera's upside down. Darkness is our floor, our ceiling is a floor covered with Polaroids of black, used tea bags, hundreds of burnt matches looking a lot like petrified baby serpents. Maybe not that petrified. Soup boils on a hot plate. And on a small bed, guns.

OLDER JOHNNY (O.C.)  
 I should have turned around right then.  
 I should have sensed the consequences  
 lingering in the air.

OLDER JOHNNY comes into frame, pacing back and forth. Because he's at the far end of the room, he's hard to see. Though he shouldn't be this hard to see. It's a tiny room. Something about the light. In the background, we now and then hear a muffled scream.

And then suddenly a better glimpse of OLDER JOHNNY. For one thing, he's limping. For another, he's lost a lot of weight. A lot. Goodbye boyish looks. Seems scarier too. Why is he clutching both his elbows like that?

OLDER JOHNNY  
 Ever see yourself doing something in the past and no matter how many times you remember it you still want to scream stop, somehow redirect the action, reorder the present?

JOHNNY mimics these wishes in the way he paces. And when (finally) he does move closer, it's too close to really see his face. We can see his jeans though. They look bad. Torn, dirty and freshly stained. Stained with something dark.

**BACK TO FRANKLIN & WHITLEY APARTMENT HALLWAY. CAMERA IS STILL UPSIDE DOWN.**

WSI (O.C.)  
 Johnny? You coming?

JOHNNY  
 Nah!

JOHNNY suddenly waves good-bye and skips away down the hall. Happy music. THE END (right-side up) scrolls into view.

JUMP CUT:

JOHNNY  
 (to musicians)  
 I can't sing but I sure as heck can learn!

JOHNNY disappears into the musicians' room. THAT'S ALL SHE WROTE FOLKS! (right-side up) scrolls into view.

JUMP CUT:

JOHNNY

Je n'irais ni en avant, ni en arrière,  
ni de côté. Je resterais ici jusqu'à ce  
que la poussière m'emporte.

SUPER translation: I will go neither forward nor backward nor sideways. I will remain here until dust takes me.

JOHNNY doesn't move. FIN (right-side up) scrolls into view.

JUMP CUT:

JOHNNY

(in full lotus)

Om.

JOHNNY's even levitating. Why not? This is all bullshit anyway. The hallway luminously pulses. OM (right-side up; Sanskrit) rotates into view.

And now the camera rotates too, right side up, back on our boyish JOHNNY, back to the only thing that happened that night, in that hallway.

WSI (O.C.)

(again)

Johnny?

JOHNNY

(sheepish)

Sorry!

JOHNNY pads forward to join LUDE who's unlocked the last deadbolt and is now about to open the door.

FLAZE

Lude!

Meet FLAZE. At the other end of that long hallway. Part Hispanic, part Samoan. 245 lbs. easy. At 6'4" he shouldn't fear anything. And he doesn't. Except what lies beyond the door Lude is about to open.

FLAZE (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

LUDE

Giving a tour. Hi Flaze.

FLAZE

Don't go in there.

LUDE

Okay.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

**SUPER: Building Manager**

FLAZE

I told them not to go in. Why? I don't know. Yeah. Sure. No one was claiming that stuff. Except Goodwill. I'd called Goodwill. They were coming over the next day. Nothing in there worth more than \$300. Basically, up for grabs. So why did I tell Lude not to go in? I liked him.

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING – CONTINUING**

Back to FLAZE at the end of that hallway.

FLAZE

I mean it, Lude.

LUDE

You got it buddy.

FLAZE nods and walks away.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY**

FLAZE

(answering an O.C. question)

You mean a feeling about what was in there and the old man? Yeah, sure. Even the paramedics when they finally came were spooked. And they'd just been in some Hollywood hotel room, cleaning up some, uh, prostitute who'd been cut up, you know dismembered, her body parts used to paint all the walls, even the ceiling red.

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING – CONTINUING**

Back to that hallway. That last door on the left.

WSI (O.C.)

Let Johnny do it!

JOHNNY'S HAND reaches for the doorknob.

JOHNNY

I'm not opening it. (withdrawing his hand) I told you: I don't want to see a body.

LUDE

Come on scaredy cat!

**EXT. HOLLYWOOD RESERVOIR (FLASHBACK) — DAY**

**SUPER: A month earlier**

What a relief. To be out in the bright sun. Lots of green too. The water of the reservoir. Even if we can only see that blue through a chain-link fence. JOHNNY looks even more boyish and way more relaxed.

JOHNNY

(flirty)

I'm not a scaredy cat.

WSI (O.C.)

Then say yes!

JOHNNY

To *film* me? Make a movie out of me. Why?  
The story of a guy looking for a place  
to live?

WSI (O.C.)

Let's try. Tell me a story. How you  
just got evicted. You are a good story  
teller.

JOHNNY

Story for a story.

WSI (O.C.)

Deal!

JOHNNY

My landlord, one recent early morning,  
I mean before noon, stood banging at  
my front door, demanding I vacate. I  
hadn't paid my rent in months. But see  
he was also in a costume. Dressed like  
a general. Only old school. Something  
had gone wrong in his head. He told me

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

he was Charles de Gaulle. I told him I wasn't buying it. I was still waking up. It was the best I could do. This really isn't that good a story. I told him that in my humble estimation he didn't resemble an airport at all though I wasn't against a 757 landing on him.

WSI (O.C.)

I don't get it.

JOHNNY

Charles de Gaulle? The Paris Airport?

WSI (O.C.)

How do you know about Paris?

JOHNNY

He didn't get it either.

WSI (O.C.)

Maybe it's not a good story.

JOHNNY

I told you.

The next part is accompanied with B&W stills of the apartment building Johnny was just talking about, a man dressed as Charles de Gaulle, fire engines, smoke.

JOHNNY (V.O) (CONT'D)

Weird. I felt bad for him. He wasn't just having fun. He really thought he was someone else. He really thought we were in a war. He really thought we were in a war he was losing. I needed an excuse to ditch that place anyway. Good thing too. A week later Chuckie de Gaulle burnt the place to the ground.

WSI (O.C.)

Wow!

JOHNNY

Right? And you know what he told the police? That a 757 crashed into it.

WSI (O.C.)

Ha!

JOHNNY

The weirdest part. I felt kinda guilty.  
Like a bad joke had somehow still  
planted the seed to do something bad.  
Like what we make out of words can  
fashion a world. (beat) Now you tell me  
a story.

**EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING JOHNNY WAS JUST TALKING ABOUT (FLASHBACK) — DAY**

In color. No sign of a fire let alone any damage. Here's the LANDLORD too. Though in shorts and sandals. Nothing remotely crazy about him.

LANDLORD

Yeah. I remember him. Always paid his rent on time. Wannabe filmmaker, right? Pretty quiet. I don't think he could stand the noise. We had quite a few parties. (something asked O.C.) What? Costumes? Maybe on Halloween. Sure. I dress up too. I always go as General Patton.

**EXT. BEACHWOOD CANYON (FLASHBACK) — DAY**

HOLLYWOOD SIGN is partially visible in back. In fact just HOL.

JOHNNY

(shrugging; laughing)

But I didn't lie. You wanted a story.

WSI (O.C.)

The story I told you was true.

JOHNNY

So you say. Why don't you film that, you know you doing you?

WSI (O.C.)

I don't want to be in a movie.

JOHNNY

But you're already in this one. You and I going back and forth like this? At least your voice is in it.

WSI (O.C.)  
I'll cut it out. I won't leave a trace.

JOHNNY

Why?

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING — RESUMING**

**SUPER: Back again to when it all started**

That last DOOR on the left. Pushing still closer. LUDE stands aside. JOHNNY, though, puts his hands in his pockets. Camera keeps moving closer. It's WSI's hand that finally reaches out. Orange fingernails. Turning the doorknob. Opening the door. The faintest exhalation, like a sigh. The faintest echo suggesting a terrible hollow, a terrible darkness.

**END OF ACT I**

**ACT II****SUPER: A Teaser and a Trailer****TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S****CRITIC #1**

While enthusiasts and detractors will continue to empty entire dictionaries attempting to describe or deride it, "authenticity" still remains the word most likely to stir debate.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S****CRITIC #2**

In fact, this leading obsession – to validate or invalidate the reels and tapes – invariably brings up a collateral and more general concern: whether or not, with the advent of digital technology, image has forsaken its once unimpeachable hold on the truth.

Images of Elvis alive and well in Florida, the Cottingley Fairies, Kirlian photography, Ted Serios' thoughtography, Alexander Gardner's Union dead. UFOs.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S****CRITIC #3**

Skeptics call the whole effort a hoax but grudgingly admit *The Navidson Record* is a hoax of exceptional quality. Those who stand by its validity believe in UFOs.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S****CRITIC #4**

*The Navidson Record* did not first appear as it does today. What surfaced first was "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" – an optical illusion barely exceeding the abilities of any USC film school graduate. The problem, of course, was th–

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #1 (LEE SINCLAIR)

Remember, dissemination was driven by curiosity alone. VHS copies were passed around by hand, a series of progressively degenerating dubs of a home video revealing a truly bizarre **house** with notably very few details about the owners or for that matter the author of the piece. I personally never saw it. There just weren't that many copies available.

Cut to:

**Black. Super: The Five and a Half Minute Hallway**

Come up on one continuous shot. Voices throughout but no faces. And resolution so bad we're on the edge of incomprehensible. Don't worry: this sequence is revisited in an upcoming episode in much greater detail.

Hold on a DOOR in the north face of the living room wall.

Then the hand-held camera moves to the WINDOW to the right. Hold.

Then we head out the window into the FLOWER BED outside. Camera rotates around to reconsider the WINDOW from an exterior point of view.

There are figures in the LIVING ROOM. Is someone in a wheelchair?

The camera continues right to where the door should be.

But there's nothing there. Just WHITE CLAPBOARD. Hold.

Again the camera continues its inspection, moving right to a SECOND WINDOW. Approaches. Climbs back inside the **house**. A bump. Maybe the camera operator bumped his head? A grunt. Light laughter.

Inside, the camera rotates around to reconsider this SECOND WINDOW from an interior angle. There's a dazzling day out there in the backyard: lush green and welcoming.

Then the camera moves right again, completing this first circle and returning to

that DOOR.

A HAND – it's Will Navidson's – reaches into frame and turning the door knob opens the door to reveal a

DARK HALLWAY.

At least five feet deep, maybe twice that, hard to tell. Regardless, it extends into an impossible darkness — impossible because that's where the yard should be.

Again, the camera circles right, back to and through the first window, lingering on the thickness of the window frame, the wall — not very thick. Then back out into the yard, this time reveling in the bright grass, rose bushes, a muddy dart gun.

Where is that dark place?

Again the camera returns to the exterior of the [house](#), no door, forget a dark hallway, camera moving again, through the second window, again lingering on the thickness of the wall, still not very thick, before returning to the open door and

#### THE HALLWAY

now easily extending ten feet, maybe twenty, could it have changed that much? So hard to see and yet impossible to deny.

KAREN GREEN (O.C.)

Don't you dare go in there again, Navy.

TOM NAVIDSON (O.C.)

Yeah, not such a hot idea.

The camera obeys though a HAND — Navidson's again — still extends across the threshold into that unknowable space, before returning, clenching and unclenching, as if fingers alone could tell the tale.

RESTON (O.C.)

What?

NAVIDSON (O.C.)

It's freezing in there.

Black. The whole thing, you guessed it, coming in at exactly five-and-a-half minutes long.

#### TALKING HEAD. LTK — 1990S

##### CRITIC #2

So simple. So eerie. And finally so upsetting. The fantasy of what was there no doubt fueled by the fact that the more people seeing it were really seeing yet another copy of a copy of a copy and so on until they likely weren't seeing

CRITIC #2 (CONT'D)  
anything at all. Just imagining.  
Imagining the worst, of course.

Cut to:

SNIPPETS of increasingly degraded copies of **The Five and a Half Minute Hallway** until what they resemble most is white noise, voices sounding more and more monstrous.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #3  
The problem, of course, was the accompanying statement that claimed all of it was true.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #4  
And "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" wasn't the end of it.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #1  
"Exploration #4."

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #2  
Or part of "Exploration #4." Surfacing less than a year later.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #3  
Those confident that it was all a fiction pointed out how "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway" and "Exploration #4" act perfectly as a teaser and a trailer.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #4  
A trailer? Give me a break. People's capacity to deny obvious facts is astonishing. Who said that?

Cut to:

Black. Super: **Exploration #4**

MAN's FACE too out of focus to see well. (It's Will Navidson; don't worry we'll see him clearly soon). Right now he's exhausted and pale and very blurry.

NAVIDSON

Days, I think. And, I . . . I don't know. (drinks something) Actually I'd like to burn it down. Can't think clearly enough to do it though. (laughs) And now . . . this.

Long-shot through a few dark rooms. At the end, a well lit room, maybe a kitchen. KAREN GREEN and TOM NAVIDSON arguing (we'll meet them more formally soon). It's hard to hear them.

KAREN GREEN

Go in after him!

We hear that. Then TREES in winter.

BLOOD on the kitchen floor.

A child (DAISY) crying.

Back to NAVIDSON's BLURRY FACE

NAVIDSON

Nothing but this tape which I've seen enough times, it's more like a memory than anything else. And I still don't know: was he right or just out of his mind?

More shots.

Including DARK HALLWAYS like we've never seen before – ashen and featureless.

These will be our first glimpses inside the house.

WINDOWLESS ROOMS – equally ashen and featureless.

Close-up on STAIRS – also ashen and featureless.

Then someone new. Broad shouldered, bearded, with frantic eyes.

## HOLLOWAY ROBERTS

I'm lost. Out of food. Low on water. No sense of direction . . . Oh god . . . Holloway Roberts. Born in Menomonie, Wisconsin. Bachelor's from U. Mass. There's something here. It's following me. No, it's *stalking* me. I've been stalked by it for days but for some reason it's not attacking. (cough? sob?) It's waiting, waiting for something. I don't know for what. Holloway Roberts. Menomonie, Wisconsin. I'm not a—.

Black.

The first three notes (Muss es sein) from the fourth movement of Beethoven's String Quartet No. 16, Op. 135.

## NAVIDSON (V.O.)

All this, don't take it as anything else but this. And if one day you find yourself passing by that **house**, don't stop, don't slow down, just keep going. There's nothing there. Beware.

END OF ACT II

**ACT III**

Black. SUPER: **The Body**

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT — NIGHT**

The camera moves inside. LUDE points the way with a flashlight. JOHNNY tries the light switches. None of them work.

LUDE

Focus! Notice anything . . . strange?

JOHNNY

I don't know. There's a smell. Musty maybe. Nothing rotten. But something.

JOHNNY tries to find where's it coming from. WSI's camera apparently equipped with a small light follows as JOHNNY inspects the tattered furniture, ancient shoes, ceramic bowls, candles (unused), small wood boxes full of rivets, rubber bands, sea shells, a big glass jar filled with buttons — all sizes, kinds, and colors. Plus VCRs, OTHER TAPE PLAYERS, OLD TVs. Plenty of frayed cables.

LUDE

(laughing)

Forget the little stuff! In here!

Camera follows LUDE — our happy guide — into a bedroom. LUDE presents the expected bed. Maybe even the big lump there is to be expected too.

JOHNNY

I told you I didn't want to see that.

LUDE

This isn't just any old corpse.

Before JOHNNY can look away, LUDE rips away the covers. But actually JOHNNY has looked away, in fact darted out of the bedroom, with the camera hurrying after him. A series of shots follow, guessing at what Johnny is seeing: an old tube of chapstick, Zippo lighter, pale books, lamp sockets, and ceiling sockets, all without bulbs. LITTLE TAGS next to stove dials and on other buttons and switches.

LUDE (O.C.)

Come on, hoss. Come back. I'm your fucking friend.

JOHNNY reenters the bedroom. Reconsiders the bed. Lude's flashlight proves there's something there. The addition of the camera's light makes JOHNNY jump again. What is it?

Contorted, burnt red, blurred patches of oily dark. Metallic dark. It's something all right. But not the old man's body.

Close on a large portable SCREEN laid lengthwise with a dark red SUPER 8 projector on a pillow.

LUDE

I confess I hid it here. In case it was valuable. I figured you'd know if it was valuable.

JOHNNY

This is what you wanted me to see?

WSI (O.C.)

Not that valuable. Cool though.

LUDE

(leering at little at the camera)  
Maybe you want it?

WSI (O.C.)

I'm strictly video.

JOHNNY

Don't look at me. I don't know anything about film.

JOHNNY backs away. Maybe embarrassed by his initial alarm, embarrassed that LUDE and WSI witnessed his fright. Though where he's going now is much more frightening. Even in this tiny apartment. Away from the little things to consider the bigger things.

Like why are the windows all sealed up? Why are the ducts sealed up too?

In the little kitchenette, JOHNNY opens the refrigerator. No light goes on. But LUDE's there with his flashlight as is WSI's camera.

The shelves are packed with videos. Old movies, recently hijacked movies. A few look brand new. Most, though, are used and faded.

JOHNNY

Whoa.

WSI (O.C.)  
Quite the stash!

lude  
(with a wink)  
Still not seeing the big picture?

Back in the living room.

JOHNNY  
How do you even have keys to this place?  
You're not the building manager.

LUDE  
Flaze, but don't tell him I said so, he was afraid. When we didn't see the old man in the courtyard doing his laps, he knew what we would find. Though I don't think even Flaze expected this. Look here.

CLOSE-UP on FLOOR. FOUR GOUGES in the hardwood. Hard to imagine they're not CLAW MARKS.

JOHNNY and camera inspect. JOHNNY's FINGERTIPS inspect the wounds. His reward? Splinters.

JOHNNY  
Ow! A little spooky, I guess, but—

Jump cut to:

MINUTES LATER. Still in the old man's apartment. But now the large portable SCREEN has been set up and that dark red SUPER 8 PROJECTOR is running. There's no film but now there's plenty of light.

It turns out Lude is pretty good with his hands. He's putting on a HAND SHADOW SHOW. All sorts of animals come expertly into view. It helps that there's music too, distant but seeping appropriately through the walls. Probably from those musicians down the hall.

LUDE  
(having fun with voices;  
for various creatures)  
"Why are we here?" "Yes! Why did you bring us here?" "I was sleeping!" "Well, let me tell you something!" "Is it a story?" "No. It's not a story. It's much, much more than a story." "Tell us!"

LUDE (CONT'D)

"Tell us!" "I've gathered you all here tonight to tell you about the screen!"  
 "The screen?" "What's a screen?"  
 "Exactly. What is the screen? The screen is what we're on." "What's he saying?"  
 "I have no clue." "Something about something called a screen." "See, we're trapped on the silver. And maybe it's not so bad to be trapped on the silver because it's the only place we can live. But it's not the only place there is."  
 "Whadya mean?!" "Whadya mean?!" "There is something beyond the silver?"

JOHNNY

I can't believe you just cut hair for a living. You're pretty good.

WSI (O.C.)

He is good.

LUDE

Hush audience. "What's an audience?"  
 "Is that a screen too?" Hush creatures.  
 Try if you can to behold for a moment what lives beyond the silver, beyond the screen. "Noooooooooooo!"

That last cry sounding as if all the shadow creatures are dying. And maybe they are. The shadows have become a blurry mess as LUDE moves the screen aside and the projector's light, still violent with a flurry of hand shadows, reaches toward the back of the living room, now rearranged, chairs and tattered sofa off to one side, revealing a blank wall with

SOMETHING BLACK THERE. AND LOW.

Almost like a small doorway if that doorway had fallen over on its side. In fact, maybe it is a hole in the wall. The pale flickering light from the projector makes it hard to say for sure. Is it something? Or is it the absence of something? Or is it both?

WSI (O.C.)

What is that?

JOHNNY

(approaching)

For a second I saw a small doorway. But like a doorway that had fallen over.

LUDE  
A drunk doorway!

JOHNNY  
Or a dead one.

WSI (O.C.)  
(moving forward)  
I'm serious. What is that?

JOHNNY  
I think it's a trunk.

LUDE and JOHNNY haul it away from the wall. It's heavier than either thought. And the closer it gets to the projector light, the less unusual it seems. And yet —

something about its blackness seems off, even the perspective lines, the horizontals, the verticals, the corners too, even the FIVE LATCHES, as if all of its limits are wavering but without moving.

JOHNNY  
Do you know what's inside?

LUDE  
No clue?

JOHNNY  
Bullshit! You didn't open it?!

LUDE  
(all grins)  
Maybe. Just a teensy bit.

JOHNNY  
(figuring a little of it out)  
But it's not for you otherwise we  
wouldn't be here.

LUDE  
A quick study.

JOHNNY  
Is this the strange part?

LUDE  
(with a shrug)  
Strange has got a pretty big floor plan.

**INT. OLDER JOHNNY'S HOLLYWOOD HOTEL ROOM (FLASH FORWARD) — NIGHT**

This time, instead of upside down, the camera is on its side.

This is the closest so far that we've seen OLDER JOHNNY, even if the camera keeps scrambling for focus. What a wreck. What a long way from Oxford shirt and horn-rimmed glasses. Emaciated, teeth browning, eyes so jittery we know finding sense is never gonna happen here. His greasy hair keeps falling into his face, some of which Johnny tries to brush away.

What's wrong with his hand?

## OLDER JOHNNY

Truth be told, I was still having a hard time taking my eyes off the scarred floor. What did I know then? What do I know now? At least some of the horror I took away at four in the morning you now have before you, waiting for you a little like it waited for me that night, only without these few—

**BACK TO THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT**

More angles of the TRUNK. Different resolutions, different stocks. Clearly WSI's taking all sorts of pictures, with all sorts of cameras. Boyish JOHNNY stays close, circling. LUDE stands behind him, arms crossed, always grinning. Okay, maybe LUDE's not always grinning.

## OLDER JOHNNY (V.O.)

One thing's for sure, even without touching it, both of us slowly began to feel its heaviness, sensed something horrifying in its proportions, its silence, its stillness. I think now if someone had said be careful, we would have.

## WSI (O.C.)

Be careful.

## OLDER JOHNNY (V.O.)

I know a moment came when I felt certain its resolute blackness was capable of anything, maybe even of slashing out, tearing up the floor, murdering us, maybe even murdering you.

Bathed in the projector's flickering light, Lude's flashlight, plus the camera light, JOHNNY approaches the TRUNK and this time kneels.

Suddenly, we are high above. For sure higher than this apartment's ceiling would allow. Higher than even that building. And then we're slowly descending in a wide spiral. High resolution. Vivid color.

JOHNNY begins to flip open the FIVE LATCHES. One by one. As we keep spiraling downward, closer and closer, until with the last sweeping rotation we come to a halt behind the trunk, right as JOHNNY lifts the lid.

Yeah, it's that shot. We can't see what's inside. We can only see *how* everyone else is seeing what's inside. JOHNNY clearly doesn't know what he's looking at. At best, he's bewildered. LUDE doesn't care what's inside. He's looking at JOHNNY. We can't see WSI as anything more than a shadow but her CAMERA is clearly focused on what's inside that TRUNK.

Then the projector light shudders. As if the TRUNK had suddenly set free SHADOWS in no need of a hand, maybe in no need of light. Swarming around the room, around everyone, before melting into the dark of the walls. Maybe JOHNNY'S HAIR moves a little. LUDE's too. WSI's CAMERA wobbles. And then we're back to WSI's P.O.V., twisting around to catch sight of what might have just crept up behind them, searching the room, the remaining shadows.

Nothing has changed and yet . . .

JOHNNY  
I don't get it. Films?

Now we start to catch glimpses of what's inside. Film cans, tape boxes, more.

LUDE  
Some of it's not even developed. (to  
WSI) Videos in there too.

JOHNNY  
(also to WSI's camera)  
Yeah, this is more for you.  
(then to Lude; to clarify)  
For her.

WSI (O.C.)  
I'm not an archivist. I'm an  
originalist.

LUDE  
(laughing)  
Who does that work on?

JOHNNY picks up some thin boxes presumably containing film reels.

JOHNNY

Sixteen millimeter? I'm sorry, Lude. I know shit about this stuff. I'm not a filmmaker.

LUDE

(scoffing)

As much a filmmaker as tattoo artist.

JOHNNY ignores the comment, beginning to examine everything more closely.

JOHNNY

(reading labels)

"The Five and Half Minute Hallway"?  
"Exploration Number Four"?

LUDE

See! I knew you'd be curious.

JOHNNY

Navidsons: Day One. Navidsons: Night One. A lot of these are marked THE NAVIDSON RECORD. "Lemonade"?

(to Lude)

You look like the cat that ate the canary.

LUDE

Maybe the cat who found the canary. I'm giving the canary to you.

Loud banging on the door. Startles everyone.

FLAZE (O.C.)

(through the door)

Lude! Goodwill's here.

LUDE

(opening the door)

What are you talking about? It's 4 A.M.

FLAZE

Okay, it's not Goodwill. But you gotta get outta here. Give me back my keys.

LUDE

(digging in his pockets)

Sure but we need help moving this trunk.

FLAZE

You can't have it. You can't have anything.

LUDE

Just the trunk.

FLAZE

Not possible. (to camera) Get that thing outta my face!

WSI (O.C.) mumbles something, hands LUDE something, the kind of something Lude doesn't like to let go of, though he still hands the MONEY to FLAZE.

FLAZE

Three hundred dollars?!

WSI (O.C.)

(camera isn't leaving Flaze)

Declaration on the door says the sum of everything in here is worth *less* than three hundred dollars.

FLAZE

(to Lude)

Who's she?

LUDE

Come on, man. Just help us with the trunk.

FLAZE pockets the CASH, takes a step inside the apartment, spotting at once the TRUNK bathed in that flickering light. It's still just a trunk but something about it keeps telling us it's something more. JOHNNY slowly closes the lid.

FLAZE retreats.

FLAZE

(heading down the hallway)

I promised them everything. By the time they get here, you better be gone.

JOHNNY

How much time do we have?

FLAZE

(yelling)

Their truck's in front.

JOHNNY

Fuck!

LUDE

(grinning)

Suddenly hoss wants what's his!

LUDE lives for these moments. He's happiest when there isn't a chance. And there isn't a chance. FLAZE has reached the end of the hallway where he's motioning for someone in the perpendicular hallway to head his way. The camera and JOHNNY look to LUDE who just shrugs and . . .

Closes the door.

JOHNNY

(whispering)

That's your plan?

LUDE

I never said I had a plan.

JOHNNY

Just closing the door is not a plan. We can't hide here. Where we gonna go?

Through THE DOOR we hear footsteps in the hallway. Voices. Is that a musician? Yup.

MUSICIAN (O.C.)

(objecting to something)

Hey!

The footsteps get closer. Stop. Right outside the door. Someone's voice. We will hear this voice again.

SOMEONE (O.C.)

Is there a problem?

Grinning at JOHNNY, LUDE slowly lifts into view Flaze's KEYS.

FLAZE

I, uh, shit. I left my keys in my office.  
Wait here.

We hear Flaze's footsteps disappearing again down the hallway. But no one's breathing a sigh of relief. Whoever this Someone is is still on the other side of the old man's door. He's also not alone.

SOMEONE (O.C.)  
There's a sound in there.

JOHNNY, LUDE and WSI's CAMERA look to the dark red SUPER 8 PROJECTOR still running, still casting its pale light.

FLAZE (O.C.)  
(yelling)  
Hey, you guys need to come deal with this. Something about how your truck's parked.

SOMEONE (O.C.)  
(whispering)  
I'm losing my patience with (inaudible). It better not be a cop.

FLAZE (O.C.)  
(yelling)  
It's a cop!

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

**SUPER: Building Manager**

FLAZE  
I can't talk about those guys. Nope.  
Nope. Nope.

**INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE OLD MAN'S APARTMENT — A FEW MINUTES LATER**

FOUR MUSICIANS have joined in to help move the TRUNK. Talk about heavy. Even with SKATEBOARDS underneath. The dark red SUPER 8 PROJECTOR and SCREEN are also stacked on top.

Voices fill the hallway just as they reach their apartment.

**INT. MUSICIANS' APARTMENT**

THEY barely have time to push the TRUNK against a wall and cover it with whatever blankets are handy.

MUSICIAN #1  
(with bong)  
It looks like that Ark of the Covenant except what's, you know, the opposite of the Ark of the Covenant?

LUDE is about to close the door.

JOHNNY  
(hisses)

Leave it!

LUDE obeys and joins JOHNNY already sitting with the circle of MUSICIANS as hurried footsteps fill the hallway. A lot of footsteps.

Through the cracked door we see the rushing blur of at least half a dozen legs. Then nothing. Then one pair of legs returns. Not at all in a hurry. BLACK SHINY WINGTIPS. GRAY SLACKS. As the door opens wide, the camera keeps tilting up about to find a face.

MUSICIAN #2 (O.C.)  
(upset)

What the fu—

We never do see the face of SOMEONE. The tape ends. Black.

**EXT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING — PRE-DAWN**

JOHNNY and the MUSICIANS are loading the TRUNK into the back of a PICKUP. It's a struggle. But they manage. Even if the PICKUP seems to slump. The only one not lending a hand is LUDE.

MUSICIAN #3  
My skateboard! (holding up his  
splintered board) Even the trucks are  
fucked.

MUSICIAN #4  
Mine too!

MUSICIAN #2  
Look, my wheel warped!

MUSICIAN #1  
(over to the camera)  
You better be getting us new boards too!

LUDE  
(leering at the camera)  
I don't think I want to know what else  
you promised them in return.

WSI (O.C.)  
Who was that guy? I can't believe my  
tape ran out.

LUDE

Okay, I lied. I do want to know. (winks)  
What did you promise them? Money?  
Seriously, are you rich? That's kinda  
hot.

WSI (O.C.)

I'm not rich.

LUDE

You're still kinda hot.

WSI (O.C.)

I promised to make them a music video.

JOHNNY

(yelling)

Lude!

LUDE

Whatever you say, honey.

LUDE runs to catch his ride, the camera running after him, both jumping in the back of the PICKUP already pulling into traffic. JOHNNY helps them get situated. Even if he keeps one arm on the TRUNK. Like now it's too much to let go of. Even for a moment.

OLDER JOHNNY (V.O.)

Wonder and the way the unimaginable is sometimes suggested by the inanimate suddenly faded. The thing became only a thing. So I took it home.

Back of the PICKUP (moving).

LUDE

(now the one asking)  
Do you know who that guy was?

JOHNNY

No idea.

LUDE

He gave you his card.

WSI (O.C.)

Why did he give you his card?

JOHNNY  
(shrugs; pulling something  
out of his pocket)

Huh.

LUDE  
What does it say?

JOHNNY  
It doesn't.

JOHNNY hands LUDE the BUSINESS CARD. Thick. And blank. On both sides.

LUDE  
(handing it back)  
That's weird.

WSI (O.C.)  
Yeah, that's weird.

Even a close-up only reveals more pale blankness.

JOHNNY  
(smelling it)  
Lemony.

LUDE  
Mr. Lemon?

JOHNNY  
Why not? Mr. Lemon.

LUDE  
You're not interested?

JOHNNY  
Sure. Though that's the wrong question.

LUDE  
What is? Who that guy with his team of  
"movers" was?

JOHNNY  
(nods)  
First we need to ask the question that  
will make your question relevant.

LUDE  
(disgusted)

You really are up your own ass, you know that? How are we even fucking friends?

JOHNNY  
(laughs)

Because you know I love old stuff,  
abandoned stuff. You knew I'd love this.  
(patting the TRUNK which he still won't  
let go of)

LUDE  
(back to grinning)  
Go on hoss, give it to me, what's  
the question that makes my question  
relevant?

WSI (O.C.)  
Who's the old man?

JOHNNY  
(shakes his head)  
He comes later.

LUDE  
We are no longer fucking friends.

JOHNNY  
Who are the Navidsons?

**END OF ACT III**

**ACT IV**

Black. SUPER: Lemonade. April 1990.

SMPTE Universal Leader Countdown. 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1 . . . From B&W to COLOR. Scratches. Scribbles. Chemical burns. Age. The tick of a projector. The crackle of a bad projector speaker. Then -

Light. Finally. Warm, beautiful light. And what place could be more deserving bathed in warm, beautiful light than the Virginia countryside?

Purple hills. Lush green-blue pastures. Oaks. A horse. Homes with no sight of their inhabitants. A street sign. ASH TREE LANE. Then-

THE HOUSE. This is our first real introduction to the place that will come to haunt them all, haunt us all. Nothing ominous. At all. In fact it's really nice. And welcoming. A small pitched-roof heritage house with a cozy looking porch wrapping around half of it. No white picket fence. But there might as well be one. Spring is here. The gardens starting to bloom. Flowers all the more colorful against the white clapboard siding.

In the driveway, a PICKUP. If we weren't paying close attention, we'd miss that this is the same truck that just hauled off with Johnny, Lude and that trunk in back. A different color but otherwise the same one. Probably better that we're not paying close attention. The point isn't the truck but KAREN GREEN (early 40s) unloading boxes.

No variety of work clothes – even her torn jeans, paint-splattered T-shirt, Converse, blonde hair tucked under a bandanna – will hide her appeal. To say she's on good terms with the camera is an understatement. She knows her best angles, how to move, smile, even if her sparkling eyes also suggest she's not totally forgiving of this intrusion. She's perfectly content to have given up her career as a model in the name of motherhood.

KAREN

(handing the camera a bag)

Here. Take your lemons.

NAVIDSON (O.C.)

I'm working!

KAREN

You're goofing off. (still holding the bag) Zabar's? You know you can get lemons in Virginia?

NAVIDSON (O.C.)

(taking the bag)

I have plans for these.

KAREN

You always have plans. Put the camera  
away and help us!

CHAD

(squealing)

Help us, daddy!

DAISY

(giggling)

Help us, daddy!

KAREN hands each child a box filled with toys. DAISY (5) insists on taking the biggest one. CHAD (8) follows behind her picking up the stuffed animals that fall from her teetering box. Everyone is enjoying the adventure of this big move.

MALLORY, the family cat, sits serenely by the front screen door, while HILLARY, a husky, races around the children's feet.

**INT. THE CHILDREN'S BEDROOM — UPSTAIRS — LATER**

Close-up on DAISY. On her new bed, in her new bedroom. Sun splashed walls. Views of their green backyard through the windows. We've seen a little of this yard before in "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway." And we saw DAISY crying in "Exploration #4."

DAISY

(clutching a stuffed animal)

It's nice here. Even if there's no  
Bloomydales.

NAVIDSON (O.C.)

(laughing lightly)

You miss Bloomingdale's?

DAISY

(shaking her head)

Mommy misses Bloomydales. I miss what  
mommy misses.

**INT. SAME BEDROOM — NIGHT**

Close-up on CHAD. On his new bed (opposite Daisy's). The walls are no longer sun splashed and the windows frame evening. It's bedtime. Something's wrong.

NAVIDSON (O.C.)

What about the sound of crickets?

It's hard to miss the roar of crickets out there in the night.

CHAD

(thinking this over)

It's not the same. I dunno. Sometimes it's just silent. No sound at all.

NAVIDSON (O.C.)

Does that scare you? (Chad nods) Why?

CHAD

It's like something's waiting.

NAVIDSON (O.C.)

(laughing gently)

What?

CHAD

I dunno, Daddy. I just like the sound of traffic.

Not only isn't there the sound of traffic here, but the roar of crickets has suddenly abated. CHAD hears the silence and holds his breath.

#### **TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #5

*The Navidson Record* actually contains two films: the one Navidson made, which everyone remembers, and the one he set out to make.

#### **TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #6

Not once during those initial minutes does Navidson indicate he knows anything about the impending nightmare he and his entire family are about to face. He is wholly innocent, and the nature of the **house**, at least for a little while, lies beyond his imagination let alone suspicions.

Various shots inside the **house** of numerous Hi8s etc. mounted in high corners, or as low as baseboards, in hallways, even inside closets.

NAVIDSON'S HAND tests a motion detector which turns on a camera for a few seconds. A REMOTE operates another set of cameras. Recording equipment is

everywhere. All implements for the capturing of sound and image. Moving and still. Discreetly placed microphones, loaded Arriflexes, bags of 35mm cameras and lenses. Tripods, lights, flashes. Batteries. Films of all sort. Polaroids, an old Bolex, an older Leica. A range of equipment from latest to rare.

We're also getting our first tour of the little home. Rooms are still bare, with the exception of unpacked boxes everywhere. Here a bed frame with no mattress. Over there, just a mattress. A sofa, a chair still under the protection of a blanket. Walls unadorned. As it turns out, stacks of framed photographs wrapped in brown paper are the source of Karen's and Navidson's first disagreement/dispute.

**INT. LIVING ROOM — DOWNSTAIRS — H18 — NIGHT**

NAVIDSON unwraps one FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH. It's a beautiful if bleak B&W picture of a war zone he once covered. He holds it up to a wall. In fact, it's the same part of wall where the doorway and that hallway were in "The Five and a Half Minute Hallway", framed by two windows, except here there's nothing but white paint.

KAREN

Nope. Maybe in the basement. But not in my living room.

NAVIDSON

This *house* doesn't have a basement.  
(examining the picture) And look,  
despite the circumstances of when I  
took this, the Blue Nile *is* a beautiful  
place.

NAVIDSON puts the photograph down and tries another. This one's bigger and still wrapped in brown paper. It's also his most valued photograph but we won't see it or discover its importance in this episode.

KAREN

What did we say about *this* beautiful place?

NAVIDSON

Fine. Yes. A new start, fresh page.

KAREN

Right! And a fresh page is a blank page.  
Can we leave the walls alone for a  
little while?

NAVIDSON  
We never agreed to blank walls.

KAREN  
(putting her arms around him)  
Are blank walls that terrifying, my  
brave camera wielding husband?

NAVIDSON  
(laughing)  
Yes! Apparently!

KAREN  
(kissing him)  
Not to me.

NAVIDSON  
My brave camera shunning wife.

#### **TALKING HEAD – LTK – 1990S**

DR. ISAIAH ROSEN  
Navidson's a fraud. From frame one. And  
his early posturing puts the entire work  
at risk . . . bad acting. Staged!

#### **TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

CRITIC #4  
(outraged)  
Rosen's a fraud! Staged?! Give me a  
break. If there's one thing Navidson  
isn't it's a fraud. Prize winning  
photojournalist. Won a Pulitzer for his  
picture of a dying girl in Sudan.

Flurry of Navidson's photographs from numerous conflicts, plus credits,  
pictures of NAVIDSON himself, if his face is mostly hidden behind a camera,  
plus plenty of prize mentions.

#### **EXT. THE HOUSE ON ASH TREE LANE – FILM – DAWN**

NAVIDSON (late 40s) on the front porch. This is the first time we get a  
good look at him. No question he's attractive, rugged, face etched with  
experience if something still bright, young, and untouched keeps flaring in  
his eyes. Despite his movie star looks, his charisma lies in how relaxed he  
can be in even the most dire situations. Though here is hardly dire. Day is  
just coming to light. The shot is beautifully composed.

## NAVIDSON

It's funny. I just want to create a record of how Karen and I bought a small **house** in the country and moved into it with our children. Sort of see how everything turns out. No gunfire, famine, or flies. Just lots of toothpaste, gardening and people stuff. Which is how I got the Guggenheim Fellowship and the NEW Media Arts Grant. Maybe because of my past they're expecting something different, but I just thought it would be nice to see how people move into a place and start to inhabit it. Settle in, maybe put down roots, interact, hopefully understand each other a little better. Personally, I just want to create a cozy little outpost for me and my family. A place to drink lemonade on the porch and watch the sun set.

He's even got that glass of LEMONADE. Reaches for it—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

## CRITIC #3

The only problem is it's dawn. That and—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

## CRITIC #4

After nearly eleven years of constant departures and returns, Karen had finally made it clear that Navidson must either give up his professional habits or lose his family.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

## CRITIC #3

As Donna York pointed out in her *Redbook* piece, in order to make sense of the subtle valences operating between Will and Karen, we must focus on "the way they talk to each other, the way they look after each other, and of course the way they don't."

**INT. THE HOUSE OF ASH TREE LANE – TOP OF THE STAIRS – H18 – DUSK**

NAVIDSON heads into the master bedroom with a BOX full of Karen's things. Partially unpacked boxes here and there. At least, the bed is now made. The walls, though, remain bare.

NAVIDSON sets the BOX on top of a bureau. He almost leaves. Then returns.

Pulls out a JEWELRY BOX with hand-carved horn lid. He opens the lid, removes an inner tray. Whatever he's looking at eludes all cameras (mounted in various corners of the room).

A moment later KAREN enters carrying a BASKET with bedsheets and pillowcases. NAVIDSON has just returned the jewelry box to the box. Now his interest lies with an old HAIRBRUSH.

KAREN

What are you doing?

NAVIDSON tugs loose a clump of Karen's blonde HAIR.

NAVIDSON

(tossing the hair into a wastebasket)  
This is nice.

KAREN

Just you watch, one day I'll go bald,  
then won't you be sorry you threw that  
away.

NAVIDSON

(flirting; embracing her)

No.

Their embrace freezes, reverses, through their separation, reversing back to where Navidson is holding that clump of hair.

CRITIC #3 (V.O.)

It's unnecessary to dwell here on the multiple ways in which these few seconds demonstrate how much Navidson values Karen, except to highlight how despite his sarcasm and apparent disregard for her things the scene represents the exact opposite. Navidson has in effect preserved her hair here, called into question his own behavior and perhaps in some ways contradicted his one closing remark, which as Samuel T. Glade has pointed out could

CRITIC #3 (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
refer to either 'watch' 'bald' or 'sorry'  
or all three.

During all of which the scene plays forward again, slowly, in sync with the commentary, until we're past the embrace, and then no longer in slomo.

KAREN

I thought you were supposed to be making  
a documentary?

NAVIDSON

This is making a documentary. Come  
outside. I made some lemonade.

KAREN

You've been making lemonade all day.

Shots follow of cut lemons, sugar, empty ice trays, flies in the kitchen. MALLORY the cat. HILLARY the husky. A sink full of various glasses and various pitchers. Counters are covered with lemon rinds, glasses still full of lemonades of various hues.

A shot from the kitchen of NAVIDSON out on the porch. This is a different angle of a similar scene we saw earlier. Only it's not the same. It's dark.

NAVIDSON

(repeating; in a slightly  
different way)

Personally, I just want to create a cozy  
little outpost for me and my family. A  
place to drink lemonade on the porch and  
watch the sun set.

Neither Karen nor the children are around. NAVIDSON reaches for the glass. This time he drinks.

Film flares out with an array of overexposures, colors, scratches.

**END OF ACT IV**

**ACT V**

Black. SUPER: **Seven Loves**

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING — DAY LATER**

Now it's brightly lit and bare. Just like the **house** on Ash Tree Lane before the Navidsons moved in. Gone are the old man's tables, carpets, bookcases. Even the coverings on all the windows, the tape on all the ducts — all gone.

Not even those four claw marks on the wooden floor remain.

JOHNNY and LUDE stand in the middle. They barely give the camera/WSI any attention.

LUDE  
(snorts)

Lemonade? That's it?! Figures. Too bad.

JOHNNY  
Right?

LUDE  
Not surprising though. It's like a law.  
The more stuff you hoard, the more boring  
your stuff. I see it all the time.

JOHNNY  
In a salon?

LUDE  
Sure. Holding on to hair. Just gets  
bushy and dumb. But cut some away and  
voila . . . suddenly there's . . .

JOHNNY  
Beauty?

LUDE  
Expression!

JOHNNY  
Huh. That's nice. (beat) Though this  
still wasn't boring.

LUDE  
Moving into a **house**? Unpacking a box?  
I'm intrigued. Oh, wait. No, I'm not.

JOHNNY

I know. But there was something else.

LUDE

You mean in other footage?

JOHNNY

No. So far I've just watched the lemonade bit.

LUDE

Explain please. I'm riveted.

Lude drifts away to investigate just how bare this apartment has been left.

JOHNNY

It was odd. The main, I don't know, sequence?, scene?, is about just kicking back. You know watching the sun set. At least that's what the guy keeps saying. Except it wasn't shot at dusk. At least not the first one.

LUDE

The first one?

JOHNNY

That's what I'm talking about. There were a bunch of takes. And the one that shows him at dusk also has this view of the kitchen. He looks like he's been filming all day long.

LUDE

The Navidson guy?

JOHNNY

Also, he's supposed to be this famous photographer but I couldn't find a shred of anything that proves he's real.

LUDE

(shrugs)

Maybe it's just a name change? Or like a, what?, anniegram?

JOHNNY

Anagram. Maybe. Or the whole thing is made-up. It's weird.

LUDE

(still barely acknowledging the camera)  
What's-her-face here made you take a few  
takes.

JOHNNY

That seems different.

LUDE

Is it?

JOHNNY

Yeah. You're right.

LUDE

You never did guess the strange part  
about the old man.

JOHNNY

I'm looking. I don't see anything.

LUDE

Come on! You're supposed to be the smart  
one.

JOHNNY

Then this is your moment to feel  
smarter.

LUDE

Hah! That's where you smart ones are the  
stupidest. You think thinking is the top  
game.

JOHNNY

(changing the subject)

I'm still hung up on who those guys were  
that cleaned out this place. Did they  
repaint the walls too?

LUDE

I'm sticking with Goodwill.

JOHNNY

Goodwill?! You know that's not true.

Lude really doesn't care.

LUDE

Any video?

LUDE finally spares WSI/Camera a look. Seems he's a lot less flirty in the day. WSI is less responsive too.

LUDE (CONT'D)

(back to Johnny)

Do you know if she even got footage of their black truck?

JOHNNY

I wish.

LUDE

Amazing, isn't it?, about all the camera supposedly gets.

JOHNNY

Whadya mean?

LUDE

It seems like cameras are so much about everything but really they miss so much. I always tell my clients stuck on their headshots that the most important lies aren't in the photograph but in all the lies that a photograph suggests. That's what I do too: suggest.

JOHNNY

That's also nice. (beat) You think Mr. Lemon was after something in particular?

LUDE

Like that trunk? Like now he's gonna come for you? You paranoid, Johnny?

JOHNNY

Sure. (laughs) Except— Huh.

Johnny sees something now. He kneels where the claw marks should be and with a key begins to dig up the putty used to fill the gouges.

LUDE

For the next tenants?

JOHNNY

I'm changing my mind. I think what Mr.  
Lemon wanted most was to leave no trace  
of—

LUDE laughs.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)

What was the old man's name?

LUDE

Z—

FREEZE.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #1

The name!

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #2

The name is such a problem! Especially  
how it originated.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #3

Of course, there's the film which—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK — PRESENT DAY**

PROFESSOR #4

And then there's just the repetition  
of insisting over and over on a  
certain version, a certain name, as if  
repetition alone could come to be the  
truth even if it will never come close,  
except maybe to madness, and Z—

FREEZE again.

? (V.O.)

Which brings up the question you've been  
asking for a while.

Now, who the hell is this talking? Just a Voice Over but apparently with some agency, as all the TALKING HEADS are not only frozen but shrinking, organized into a neat set of rows and columns. And not only the PROFESSORS we were just hearing from but the CRITICS too, and all those we've met, including some we haven't met yet.

? (V.O.) (CONT'D)

No. Not about me. After all this is my first appearance. Some call me the Editor but that's a little bit of an understatement. Think of me more as a Director, even if that's a bit of an understatement too. I'm here to clear some things up now and then. Smooth over a few errant elements. Keep discrepancies in check.

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

BACK on JOHNNY and LUDE still frozen.

LUDE  
(unfreezing)

XXXXXXXXX!

All those x's mean we can't understand a thing except for the starting Z. And the reason for all those Xs is that we are actually hearing hundreds of names starting with Z mashed up into one incoherent mess.

FREEZE. Rewind. Replay again.

LUDE  
XXXXXXXXX!

Slightly more comprehensible.

FREEZE again. Rewind. Replay again. There it is!

LUDE  
Zampanò!

FREEZE on Lude's glee.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)  
Whenever I make an editorial decision like this one, note the flash frame to signal an . . . alteration.

Rewind. Replay. FREEZE ON FLASH FRAME.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)  
Except the old man's name isn't really  
your question, is it? (beat) It's the  
trunk.

We revisit the earlier clip of JOHNNY approaching the TRUNK.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)(CONT'D)  
It's been bothering you. How it was  
shot. Because after all this shot is  
reasonable. So is this one. As are  
these.

We revisit various angles we've already seen of JOHNNY and the TRUNK.  
Angles WSI could have managed.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)(CONT'D)  
But what about this one?

We revisit the one spiraling down on JOHNNY and the TRUNK.

DIRECTOR (V.O.)(CONT'D)  
Now who's shooting that? Not Whoever-  
She-Is behind the camera. Not Lude  
or Johnny. Certainly not that coven  
of a band. They didn't even have any  
camcorders. Though that wouldn't matter.  
Such equipment could hardly produce this  
shot. Is it a re-enactment? It doesn't  
look staged. But if it were staged, how?  
And of course that still leaves the  
question of who was shooting it. And now  
here's the clincher, wait for it, that  
answer I don't have. You're not the only  
one who needs to get to the bottom of  
this . . . story.

**INT. THE FRANKLIN & WHITLEY HOLLYWOOD APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY**

On JOHNNY and LUDE. Where we left off. Unfreezing.

FLASH FRAME.

LUDE  
Zampanò!

A second FLASH FRAME.

JOHNNY  
(repeating)  
Zampanò.

Suddenly JOHNNY's alert. Like the name has somehow triggered a new awareness. He abandons LUDE for the details of the apartment. Who cares about the resurrected claw marks.

Cut to:

Back to when Camera/WSI was following all the things JOHNNY was noticing: VCRs, OTHER TAPE PLAYERS, OLD TVs, CABLES, etc. and especially those LITTLE TAGS.

Cut back to:

The empty apartment in daylight. Sensing something, JOHNNY jerks his gaze toward the window. A CAT now sits outdoors on the sill, blinking slowly. If you've been paying close attention — and let's face it at this point you are — you'll realize that this is MALLORY, the same cat the Navidsons have.

JOHNNY  
(trying to figure it out)  
The old man was . . .

Cut to:

The older footage of Zampanò's dark REFRIGERATOR full of VIDEOS. Not to mention shots of the TRUNK full of FILM, VIDEOS, etc.

Cut back to:

JOHNNY. He still can't figure it out.

JOHNNY  
But that's impossible.

LUDE is grinning. The cat has vanished.

LUDE  
What?

JOHNNY  
(can't believe what he's saying)  
Zampanò was blind?

LUDE applauds.

Cut to:

Back to those LITTLE TAGS on stove dials and assorted buttons and switches. Though closer this time. So we can really see the BRAILLE.

Cut back to:

JOHNNY and LUDE.

JOHNNY (CONT'D)  
That's why you dragged me over here!  
Because, what the fuck right?

LUDE  
What the fuck is right!

JOHNNY  
A blind man watching so many movies?

LUDE shakes his head.

LUDE  
No, my friend. Not just watching so many movies. A blind man *making* a movie!

#### **TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

Note: The SEERS are all women.

SEER #1  
I never met his makers. He called us his seers. We would watch a clip and describe it. I only did that for one movie. *The Third Man*.

#### **TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #2  
I think he was testing me. I think he'd seen the movie before. Seen it many times. Wanted to know how I saw it. How I talked about it.

#### **TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #3  
Sometimes a whole hour would go by just discussing a couple of minutes. It was kinda sad but pretty cool too. He was a pretty cool old dude. Laughed a lot. Creepy? Not at all.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #4  
Eccentric.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #5  
Just old. And blind. Since the 1950s I think. Wanted to know what this movie business was about. I guess. Blind as a bat.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #6  
Bat shit crazy is more like it! I once looked at five minutes of just black! And then there was that family and their—

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #7  
I'd say romantic. One morning I found him in a terrible way. At first I assumed he was drunk, but the old guy never drank, not even a sip of wine. Just really depressed. He started crying and asked me to leave. I fixed him some tea. Tears don't frighten me. Later he told me it was heart trouble. "Just old heart-ache matters," he said. Whoever she was, she must have been really special. He never told me her name.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #1  
Béatrice.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #2  
Gabrielle.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #3  
Anne-Marie.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #4

Dominque.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #5

Eliane.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #6

Isabelle.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #7

Claudine.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #1

Is Béatrice *my* name? No.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – PRESENT DAY.**

SEER #2

No, I'm not Gabrielle.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #3

No, I'm not Anne-Marie.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #4

No, I'm not Dominque.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #5

No, I'm not Eliane.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #6

No, I'm not Isabelle.

**TALKING HEAD. LTK – 1990S**

SEER #7

No, I'm not Claudine. (beat) Whatever it was he could never quite address in himself prevented him from ever settling. Death finally saw to that.

**EXT. ZAMPANÒ'S APARTMENT BUILDING – COURTYARD – DAY**

Black & white. Taken the day before the old man died.

**SUPER: January 5, 1997**

A series of jump cuts fly him around his wild courtyard. Sitting on a bench. Still at the far end. We see cats emerge. Cats disappear. From afar, he's a gaunt silhouette. Closer, his eyes look like black holes.

This is our first look at him. He looks familiar but the quality of the footage and his age make it hard to tell for sure.

**ZAMPANÒ (V.O.)**

Whoever finds and releases this labor shall be entitled to all proceeds. I ask only that my name take its rightful place. Perhaps you will even prosper. If, however, you discover that viewers are less than sympathetic and choose to dismiss this enterprise out of hand, then . . . you truly are prosperous. They say truth stands the test of time. I can think of no greater comfort than knowing this movie failed such a test.

**INT. OLDER JOHNNY'S HOLLYWOOD HOTEL ROOM (FLASH FORWARD) – NIGHT**

**Super: October 31, 1998**

What looks like a black BUBBLE floats slowly up to a shadowy ceiling. Followed by another. And then another. More POOLING on that strange ceiling. Except it's not a ceiling.

The camera slowly rotates and as it does the origin of that strange stream becomes clear: from a hand. From OLDER JOHNNY's HAND.

Not bubbles. Not black either. Dark red. BLOOD. The shot will continue to draw the first frame from ambiguity, pulling back, revealing more of Johnny's HOTEL ROOM.

Like the shot from above the TRUNK, the camera here is liberated and the resolution high.

OLDER JOHNNY (V.O.)

With a little luck, you'll dismiss this labor . . . eat, drink, be merry and most of all sleep well. Then again there's a good chance you won't. This much I'm certain of: it doesn't happen immediately. You'll finish binging and that will be that, until a moment will come, maybe in a month, maybe a year, maybe even several years . . . Out of the blue, beyond any cause you can trace, you'll suddenly realize things are not how you perceived them to be at all. For some reason, you will no longer be the person you believed you once were. You'll detect slow and subtle shifts going on all around you, shifts in you, like a shimmer, a vast shimmer, only dark like a room . . . Old shelters won't protect you anymore . . . You'll discover you no longer trust the very walls you always took for granted . . . You might try then, as I did, to find a sky so full of stars it will blind you again. Only no sky can blind you now . . . Then no matter where you are, you'll watch yourself dismantle every assurance you ever lived by. You'll stand aside as a great complexity intrudes . . . And for better or worse you'll turn, unable to resist . . . to face the thing you most dread, what is now, what will be, what will always come before, the creature you truly are, the creature we all are, buried in the nameless black of a frame. And then the nightmares will begin.

During all of which, OLDER JOHNNY, who we can see very clearly now, a wraith of who he once was, washes his BLOODY HAND in a corner sink, then

tears a pillow case into strips to bind his knuckles and wrist, before stumbling around this tiny hotel room, by his bed, the two guns, but mostly drawn to the center, where we haven't been before, what we haven't seen before.

You know what's there.

The TRUNK.

Again that spectacular overhead shot. Again OLDER JOHNNY kneeling before the TRUNK.

And then banging starts at his DOOR. Loud and strong enough to shake the walls. Or so it seems. There are cries too. And curses.

JOHNNY, terrified, approaches his DOOR. Backs away. The banging stops. And what's more . . . suddenly the door is gone.

JOHNNY returns to the TRUNK. Opens it. Empty except for FIVE LARGE FILM CANISTERS. All labeled ***The Navidson Record I-V***.

JOHNNY gathers them up and crawls out the window.

We return to the trunk, except, like the door, it's gone too.

We return to the hotel room. It's empty. No more guns. Not even the bed.

We return to the window except the window is gone too.

We are trapped in a doorless, windowless, empty room.

And it's slowly getting darker and darker . . .

Pearl Jam's "Not For You."

CREDITS.

**END OF ACT V**