

# QLH-S02E02: The Haunting

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

eleanor, film, theo, shirley jackson, movie, character, haunting, story, happening, mansion, hear, ambiguity, book, house, creepy, talk, tension, belong, feel, beautiful

## SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers

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**J** Jessi Chartier 00:04  
Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark.

**J** Jen Myers 00:17  
Before we get started, as a reminder, when we talk about movies, we need to talk about everything in the movie. So there will be spoilers involved. If you haven't seen the movie or want to refresh your memory before you listen, you can stop now and do that before coming back.

**J** Jessi Chartier 00:33  
Let's talk about The Haunting.

**J** Jen Myers 00:35  
So The Haunting from 1963 is about Eleanor, a young woman looking to escape her family ties, who accepts an invitation to join a paranormal research project at a supposedly haunted mansion. with three other people. There's the research leader and two others invited along. Also real quick, we want to make sure this is about the 1963 movie, not the 1999 remake, which is not good, so bad, like this movie, which is very good. And they're very different stories, like they change a lot of stuff in that remake. So yeah, we just want to make it very clear. We're talking about the first one, which follows the novel that it's based on The Haunting of Hill House by Shirley Jackson pretty closely.

**J** Jessi Chartier 01:23

I love this film so much. I'm so glad we decided to finally get to it because it's been on my list for a very long time.

**J** Jen Myers 01:30

Yeah, it's really good. And it really I think, is a good example of what we like to talk about, like this is one of the the columns of our temple. You know, this, this is it.

**J** Jessi Chartier 01:42

I agree. I agree. So let's talk a little bit how this film is a column in our temple for quiet little horrors here. I love this film so much, because it's a psych thriller, but not a psych thriller. You are constantly questioning reality. You're constantly questioning what is perception versus what's not. It's just beautiful.

**J** Jen Myers 02:09

Yeah, definitely. I think that it's you, we can go all the way back to our first episode, we were talking about the witch. And we said, this is a really great example of kind of all of the things we see could be manifestations of psychology and something that's going on inside someone. And but this one did it first. And this one is also an example of that, where there's this really beautiful ambiguity in this film in terms of like, what is actually real and what isn't real. What does it mean? And there's layers, even to that there's possibilities about what a lot of these things can mean. There's so much complexity there.

**J** Jessi Chartier 02:46

Yeah. And there's the one thing that I like about all of the films that we tend to look at not all of them, but most of them is that the the horror that appears, or seems to be manifesting. We never see, God, I love a good suspense, imagination, leveraging story, like I love never seen the evil, the alien, the antagonist, I just, I love that kind of movie, because it just allows your imagination to run a mock. And it can be the most terrifying thing you've ever seen. Because you you get to be able to create what that is. And they do a really nice job of that in this particular film, especially in the 60s, like they did amazing effects. The sound design was just great. But there was, it was never over the top.

**J** Jen Myers 03:40

Right? It was believable. Yeah, this might be one of the best films, doing what you just described this idea of getting across the sense of horror and fear. With never revealing any sort of monster, you never see anything, really. I mean, you may see the results here and there. And there's a couple effects we can talk about later. But yeah, there's no reveal at the end of a monster or a ghost or anything tangible in that way. And I don't know if there are is a film that maybe does it better than this. Honestly, that's a bold statement. I know. But like this really just does nail that.

J Jessi Chartier 04:19

It does, it does. It reminds me like even with *The Babadook*, which is an earlier episode that we had done, there are glimpses of what that potential, quote unquote monster is. We talked about the subtext of that being unresolved grief, but here, I feel like the subtext is even more powerful male, I don't know if it's just because I connect with female characters who really struggle against like the expectations of what is set upon them like you have this character Eleanor, who is just she's just coming off of being a caretaker of her mother who just died for years. And she was the caretaker kind of forced into it. Because she was the sister that wasn't married. She was expected to be the good girl, she was doing all of these things that were good for her. And now she's living with her sister because she doesn't have a place to stay. And they treat her like crap because she's unmarried. And it's not fulfilling the expectation. Like it's all of that kind of domestic horror. And Eleanor just wants to she just wants to out, she's like, I'm done. So much so that she's willing to take their car, leave that life and spend a weekend at a potential haunted house just to get away from normality.

J Jen Myers 05:42

Like she calls it a vacation. She literally in when she's I think she's talking to Dr. Markway, who invites them all there. She was like, I haven't had a vacation in years. It's like, this is a really weird vacation. But okay, cool.

J Jessi Chartier 05:56

Exactly. And I mean, even the the nice thing that I like about what the film does here, and I can't remember if the book tried to do this, but regardless, the film did it and it stuck with me is like you never really know if this experiment was really happening or not? Or was Eleanor really that far gone? That she kind of made this up? In order to get out of the house?

J Jen Myers 06:22

That's interesting. I hadn't I hadn't thought too much about that. You're right, like, because there's definitely ambiguity in terms of like, what's actually happening. I think that comes up as we go along. But I hadn't even gone all the way back and like, whoa, what if she imagined this entire thing? It's certainly possible.

J Jessi Chartier 06:37

Yeah, it might be a little too like *Dallas*, but like I feel like with when Shirley Jackson wrote it, and you know, with so many of her other beautiful pieces, like it just you do call into question a lot of reality. I love the subtext of it all. It's like, I need to get away from reality, so much so that I'm going to go put myself in this extreme vacation in order to get away from it. All.

J

Jen Myers 07:05

Right, and it's not like she is something I mean, honestly, if I got that, I'd be like, yeah, that's rad. Let's do that. But I'm weird. And Eleanor is is not like you mentioned that. Well, I guess she is in some ways, but you know, she's, she's a pretty quiet, you know, not super, outspoken, type young woman. And so this isn't something that she would probably need to really go do on her own. But this opportunity presents itself and she's like, yes, we're going to do this. And she does. I think she sees it as kind of like a restart. And kind of like, she's on the journey, looking for a place where she can belong. I think that that is something I really like about her characters. I think she is literally she's looking for a home. She really wants to find someplace where she can belong. And just like yeah, you know, her family is a disappointment to her. And I guess vice versa. But you know, she's not close to her family. Even when her mother was alive. It didn't sound like they were particularly close, it sounded like her mother kind of put her through the wringer in terms of the caretaking and all of that. And so, you know, she, she wants to get out of here, and she wants to find a place where she can really belong. And she gets to this huge, weird, creepy mansion. And for some reason, feels like she really belongs there. I think like from the beginning, she really does have this feeling of this place is great. And I like it. And it may be that she's just away from the her her awful family in the awful place that she hates. But in any case, she does seem to feel like she's at home when she comes into this mansion.

J

Jessi Chartier 08:45

And I think that there's something really truthful there that you talked about, where when you see her how her sister, brother in law, treat her and you hear the stories about her mother treat her. You know, you talk about wanting that sense of place of belonging. And I think she also really wants to be longed for, I think that she is looking for something that wants her presence wants her there. And when you look at all of the dynamics of the characters that surround her, you have this father figure like character who she becomes super fixated on unhealthily. So then you have Theo who is pursuing her in a different way. We'll talk a little bit about that too. And then you have Luke, who just as your typical guy, stereotype who there's potential there too, but then there's also the house and it's almost like Eleanor is surrounded by choice of what she wants. And the house she here she feels the house calling for her wanting her, which is a it's just so good because there's this sense of dread and longing. At the same time, which creates great tension.

J

Jen Myers 10:03

Yes, it tension is such a great word for this film, like in a real deep, sincere way. It's there's this tension like a taut thread the whole time. And it is, I think it is kind of interesting to be in this place, which they're like they're all brought there. Because this place is supposed to be haunted. And then there's the caretaker, there's the man and his wife, and the wife is super creepy, and basically straight up saying, Hey, I don't stay here overnight, and we can't hear you in the town. So good luck. She almost literally says that.

J

Jessi Chartier 10:38

I was so waiting for like Mel Brooks to pop out at some point in time when she's giving her lines

because it was so Young Frankenstein, like it was just,

**J** Jen Myers 10:47

it was over the top. And like, I was kind of joking and what I said, but that's almost verbatim what she says, I think she might say, literally, nobody can hear you in the town.

**J** Jessi Chartier 10:58

And then there's lightning in the background.

**J** Jen Myers 11:01

Candle over off to her face. But you know, it's not that much removed from that. So like, this is an objectively creepy house. And then there's the fact that like, they lose their way getting to different rooms and things like that. So this is a huge, creepy, supposedly haunted house. And then Dr. Markway tells him the story about the family that that built it, and all these horrible deaths that happen there and suicides and things of that nature. So the fact that on top of all of this, it's not like, you know, this houses, maybe a little creepy, and Eleanor just kind of likes it. Now she comes into this place that everybody is falling all over themselves to tell her is, is really evil, or at the very least, very scary. And she likes it anyway, which is also kind of interesting. So I it kind of goes back to us talking about that tension is that you got some things working on clearly different different levels right off the bat.

**J** Jessi Chartier 11:55

And I liked this version of it too, because they weren't afraid to lean a little bit into the character development of the supporting roles, you know, you have, everyone comes to the table, I guess a little bit not broken, but with depth. You know, they're not just structured characters. Theo is, you know, struggling, not struggling, but she's fighting in a society that does not approve of her sexuality. Luke is there if I remember, right, Luke, like, had his own backstory of something treacherous, like he was gambling or had, like, he had his own past that was haunting him. And Dr. Markway, was fighting against the norms of his own industry. So it was like everyone was there, fighting against a standard of in some way, shape, or form. You know, I really wish I remember what Luke was fighting against. But I do remember that he was fighting against something. And

**J** Jen Myers 12:53

I think it was mostly I don't remember exactly. I think he just he's kind of in the movie. He's kind of portrayed as, you know, young dude, not particularly bright. He's gonna inherit this house eventually. And so he basically sees it all as potential future profit for him. And he kind of sees everything, as you know, what, what can I make off of it? And I think that that I don't know if they get too much of in the film. And I think behind that, it's just implied that he just hasn't been reckless in the past.

J

Jessi Chartier 13:22

Mm hmm. Yeah, exactly. But it's just it's, it's like a beautiful menagerie of off kilter humans rattling around in this house, you know, and it's told from the perspective of Eleanor, who, who's a mental state is already so fragile, and just so glasslike that anything can shatter it at any moment. It's just a beautiful way to talk about it. Let's talk a little bit about Theo for a moment because I think that Theo's character is just such an interesting character. And I don't remember much about her from the book. But I do remember that Theo is supposed to possess, really either empathetic powers or high levels of compassion, or even to the extreme of being able to connect with the supernatural. And I feel like in this movie, they did a really nice job of kind of painting that picture but so much so that it just was so stitched together that you were just like, okay, yeah. But you never questioned it. You were just like, Cool, all right. Because it wasn't over the top. It was ever so subtle, subtle, but it was present, you know, and they weren't afraid to go down that route.

J

Jen Myers 14:35

Definitely. And I think Theo too, as a character is just her character is that she is a pretty self assured woman. And so I think that that helps you kind of just also, you know, accept that she belongs there and that she might have these powers as they're revealed, or the sensitivity to be more accurate as it goes along because she just has that sort of character, which is also an interesting counterpoint to Eleanor, she is actually kind of the opposite of Eleanor in a lot of ways who is, you know, a lot shyer, a lot more timid. And Theo is a lot bolder, a lot more outspoken in the movie she shows up, you know, kind of kind of kind of beatnik-y a little bit. She's got the turtleneck on, I think and long jewelry and stuff like that. And I do, I just found this out in our research about this. And I didn't quite realize that in the book. She's never explicitly named lesbian. It's hinted, but the movie tends to, like, go there. And I think maybe because I had that, in my mind, I didn't realize that the book does not even explicitly say, Hey, she's gay. But she is. And apparently there was even a scene in the movie that got cut that was like Theo's leaving to go to the mansion was with like, in the aftermath of a breakup with her girlfriend. And apparently they cut that, and I'm not sure if it was for time or because they were worried that it was a little scandalous. Yeah, because actually, if you don't mind, I want to throw this in. I did get a line from Wikipedia. That said that Julie Harris, who plays owner said that the film censors demanded that Theo never be shown to touch Eleanor in order to keep the lesbianism less obvious. Which I just thought that was funny. So I do appreciate that the film. Yeah, the filmmakers, the people making the film were obviously like, yeah, Theo's a lesbian. And that's part of the story. And the tension between her and Eleanor has this element of it. And that's totally a thing that the filmmakers were thinking and doing. Totally. And it's actually surprising that they given that that the sensors were after him, it's actually kind of surprising. They've got as much of it through as they did in 1963.

J

Jessi Chartier 16:45

Yeah, I suppose I can still get angry about the fact that they wanted to censor that but, but I totally, I think that there's, there's just a beautiful, you know, what, here's what I really like about the character and sambal, about this whole story is that they are beautiful foils for each other, like this, the crafting of this, even the main character against all the others, but the

others against themselves, has just this beautiful foil to everybody, it really is an ensemble cast, like this is not a movie that you can hand off to a single powerhouse actor to play Eleanor and assume that she will carry the rest of them, they have to be so strong, because it's if you if you I mean, there's so much metaphor around like the Fall of the House of Usher like this reminds me so much of that of this. The metaphor is around houses, being people and being the bloodlines, to history and like a lot of these other things, that Jackson just did such a beautiful job in the story of creating all the facets of a person within these characters. And so I think that one of the reasons this film in particular works really well, especially over the more recent one, from the 90s is that they recognized that and they they leaned into that, and they really made sure that it was a strong cast. Do you know what I mean? Oh, definitely.

**J** Jen Myers 18:15

Yeah. And I think that also goes back to we're talking about tension is that there's all these tension between the characters, and in a really good dramatic way that it's like it formed us web. So like, they they have these threads that get pulled between all these different characters. And you're right, that it's exactly kind of the the complements or the provocation that they need from the other character to to grow or not as the case may be, or to at least have something happening.

**J** Jessi Chartier 18:42

Yeah, for sure. For sure. I just think it was so good.

**J** Jen Myers 18:46

In the very beginning, we talked about the fact that there's a lot of ambiguity in this movie that you're not entirely sure what's real and what's not. Like, we can pull that through to the end and kind of go and talk about like, Well, what happened?

**J** Jessi Chartier 19:01

Oh, yeah, the ending happened then. Yeah. I'm still

**J** Jen Myers 19:04

stuck in so so yeah. And we could also quickly go through the facts. So we kind of set the stage they come here and then. So weird stuffs or topics, pretty scary stuff starts happening, they hear loud noises. There are scenes where the the doors and the walls are bulging in on them, and there's lots of mirrors and things of that nature going on. So Oh, and then a night where Eleanor thought she was clutching Theo's hand all night and then wakes up to find out the Theo was on the opposite side of the room and has no idea what she was talking about. So some stuff is happening and they all get increasingly frayed right Eleanor especially, but they all seem to be like okay, this is this is definitely something is going on and stuff is happening. So

at least as far as we know, though, right? Because again, we can kind of we're still kind of mostly seeing this From Eleanor's point of view. So we get to the end where it kind of all comes to a head. And by comes ahead, it means it kind of pushes Eleanor off the edge.

**J** Jessi Chartier 20:11

Yeah, we should clarify too. If you've never read the book, the way that it's described, we're going to go real spoilery here for a hot second, the way that the book ends with Eleanor is that she's absorbed into the house, that you get the impression that she is part of the house now. Because they cannot find her. They walk around the house and they're like, Eleanor, where are you? We can't find you. And she's like, I'm and she talks about, like how she's hiding. At least that's how I think it ends, right.

**J** Jen Myers 20:41

I think more or less, I think that's at least the impression that you're given. That's the impression

**J** Jessi Chartier 20:45

that you're supposed to be given. And that's really hard to do in film. So the film version of it is that she has those inner monologues do you do hear that? Well, Jen, you talk about the ending of the movie.

**J** Jen Myers 21:00

Yeah, I mean, you definitely there's definitely a sense of well, in Eleanor because she has kind of kind of gone off gone a cliff and it started to really affect her. She's had some, some moments of like actually being unsafe. I think that also was it. Dr. Markway's wife shows up and she disappears. And so basically, they decide Eleanor needs to leave because it's affecting her too much. And so that's when I think it triggers all these thoughts that kind of you were describing is like, you know, I can't leave I belong here. But literally, what happens at the end of the movie is that as she is, I think being driven away, I don't think she's actually driving. She reaches the the tree at the end of the drive, which is at the very beginning, we told that the first I think mistress of the mansion, was killed by a runaway horse. And I think she sees a flash of somebody go by, which I think is supposed to be her, although is also maybe Mrs. Markway. And the car goes off the road and crashes in the tree and Eleanor dies. And then we see kind of an epilogue with the other characters. And then you know, it really in the film, it really does seem to come around to wow, Eleanor had just there was so much in Eleanor's mind that was probably causing all of this and she just, this is how it ended. So yeah, I don't know. It's it is there's still kind of a, it's strange to have that final scene without Eleanor's perspective. And I think that that throws me off a little bit in terms of me trying to describe it almost. Because I'm kind of like, well, I don't I don't know what happened in the movie anymore. I think you still do. I think after that you do hear what you had described. If you hear a loners voice, there's some some narration about mom, now she is now she didn't leave she stayed there. And how literal that is, I guess is up to your own interpretation.



J Jessi Chartier 23:13

They did a really nice job of taking care of with the ending. You know, I feel like really good filmmakers who are converting from one medium to another is really hard to do number one, so kudos to anyone who can. But I feel like the the whole production team here, we're just really good stewards of Jackson's vision. And, and goal for the story itself. Because although it's very, I mean, it has to be different. Because it's a different medium, you only have two and a half hours versus the ability or however long it is not even that to be able to build character and really connect and tell backstory and all those other things. But I just felt like they were really good stewards of it. I think that that's the best way I can say it because it was a film that is so true to the essence of the book.

J Jen Myers 24:06

I agree with that. They like we said before, they really did get it right. And I think it is that kind of central commitment to this idea that you don't have it you don't have to see everything clearly. And it doesn't have to be spelled out clearly. Like they're they they managed to preserve the ambiguity at the heart of the story. And that I think that keeps the depth in it and it keeps the power in it. Honestly, just the fact that yes, you you have this sense that there are these levels working but you're never given one particular answer. You're never told that this is what it is or this is what you have to believe. They managed to preserve a little bit of that mystery and I think that's what makes it work.

J Jessi Chartier 24:50

Yeah, Agreed. Agreed. Just a beautiful film. Well, if if you liked this, Jen, what should people go watch next?

J Jen Myers 25:00

Well, you what you should not watch, as we mentioned is the 1999 remake of this movie, which does not everything that I just said it does the opposite of that. So don't do that. I would also mention something I just wanted to throw in there in terms, especially in talking about remakes is Netflix did a series called The Haunting of Hill House a couple years ago, I guess. Did you watch that Jessi?

J Jessi Chartier 25:23

I did. And here's what I really liked it, because it focused on the family unit and the characters. So all the characters are still there. But it's a different telling of a different story. So it's a very different story. It's a very different story. So you've got Eleanor, Luke, and Theo are the children. They're all brothers and sisters. And then you have two parents. And the story structure, the telling of it is actually quite interesting. So if you if you liked The Haunting of Hill House, or the haunting, the new Netflix series is not the Shirley Jackson story. So first off, you

got to let go of that. But the other piece that's really good about it is that everything revolves around the quote, unquote, the night of something happening, where the dad and the kids had to escape. And every episode is told from one of those characters points of view, until you get to the very end, where you see what actually happened. And it's, it's just a really well told story. That is very creepy. But it is not at all. I mean, there's very, very little connection to Shirley Jackson's storyline. So just take that with a grain of salt.

**J** Jen Myers 26:46

Although interestingly, and one of the reasons I wanted to bring it up is that it does have some connections to this film, particularly like things like, it's been a little it's been a minute since I did see the series, but like, in *The Haunting*, there is the scene where all they're being terrorized by loud, regular, consistent noises. And they actually take that in *The Haunting of Hill House* series and build a storyline around that. And that's not I don't think I mean, it is a little bit in the, in the original book, but I feel like the impact of that comes a lot more from how it is done in the film. Like, I don't think that it would have that same impact if they didn't have that moment in the film. So anyway, yeah, I agree. It mean it is absolutely it's not even a matter of agreeing. It's, it's not *The Haunting of Hill House* story. But it takes a lot of elements. And I think that it takes elements that were really highlighted in this film, particularly, and does some interesting things with them. I like it, too. It's just it's a very different story. It's kind of it's almost like a weird fanfiction, in a way where it takes it because there's even elements like like, there's a character called Shirley. Yes, yes. You know, that doesn't that's, you know, it is. So it's almost like Shirley Jackson fanfiction in a way where it takes a lot of these elements and kind of stuff from the original books in this movie and throws it in there. But yeah, I think it's kind of interesting to look at if you're a fan. I would also just say like, if you for some reason, just saw the haunting this movie and you haven't read the original book or anything else. Shirley Jackson wrote, go do that. She's really good. If you like *The Haunting*, you'll probably like everything Shirley Jackson wrote. So I would recommend that

**J** Jessi Chartier 28:23

wholeheartedly agree. Well, I love this movie. I think this is gonna kick us off to a really good season. I'm looking forward to our next film. So make sure you tune back in so that you can keep on listening. Make sure you subscribe to all of our podcasts. Jen, where can people find us?

**J** Jen Myers 28:41

Well, you can find us any podcast place that you like first of all, but you can also go to [quietlittlehorrors.com](http://quietlittlehorrors.com) you can listen to episodes there and get links to other things. You can find us at Twitter at [quiethorrors](https://twitter.com/quiethorrors) and on Instagram at [quietlittlehorrors](https://www.instagram.com/quietlittlehorrors). And you can also send us email we're at [hello@quietlittlehorrors.com](mailto:hello@quietlittlehorrors.com) so if you have any feedback, comments or suggestions for the future, you can let us know

**J** Jessi Chartier 29:09

That's awesome. Thanks for listening. Everyone go watch *The Haunting*. We look forward to

That's awesome. Thanks for listening. Everyone go watch the training. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and we will see you next time.