

Over black: A sharp intake of breath. Glottal stop.

FADE IN:

INT. NORMANHURST HOUSE, VICTORIAN ENGLAND - NIGHT

A twelve-year-old GIRL in a nightdress stands on a shadowy landing holding her breath.

This is MABEL. She's at the threshold of womanhood, but doesn't yet know what that means. Mabel is thoughtful and curious. Right now she's wondering what it's like to have no more air in her lungs, like a sail that's gone flat.

Mabel exhales. Her hot breath fogs the frosty pane. She wipes her sleeve across the glass and peers outside.

The sound of thundering hoofbeats leads us to

EXT. NORMANHURST HOUSE - NIGHT

Four black horses fight for each flying step as they pull a coach up a dark, snowy lane leading to an imposing country manor.

The coach halts in front and two DOCTORS, each clutching a medical bag, tumble out.

A door CHIME cuts the air as

INT. NORMANHURST HOUSE - NIGHT

An aging butler, PEARSON, candle in hand, staggers backward as wind and snow propel the doctors inside, immediately snuffing out the candle.

The men shut the door against the gale and are plunged into darkness. A match strikes. The candle is lit again.

From upstairs comes the rasping, chilling, unimaginable cry of a CHILD who is dying.

WOMAN'S VOICE (O.C.)
Pearson! They must hurry!

PEARSON
(To the doctors)
This way.

The men race past Mabel up the stairs. She is obviously not the dying child in question.

A whinny turns Mabel's attention outside. The horses paw dark streaks across the frozen ground. A foreboding scrawl.

Another languished cry from upstairs. Mabel rushes after the doctors to a

CHILD'S BEDROOM

With Mabel, our view is limited to what she sees through the partially-closed door.

It's a chaotic, bewildering scene. At first glance, it appears that snow has fallen indoors. A closer look reveals not snow, but feathers, the contents of a down pillow.

Mabel's mother, LADY ANNA BRASSEY (late 30s), wearing an elegant evening gown, tends to a writhing CHILD delirious with fever. Distress does not diminish Anna's poise and breeding.

Anna blocks our view. We cannot see the child's face.

LORD (CAPTAIN) THOMAS BRASSEY (early 40s), in formal white tie, bids the doctors enter.

THOMAS
Dr. North. Hughes.

The doctors descend on the child. Fingers feel for pulse. Ear presses to chest. A hand reaches for a bottle of dark liquid. A few drops dissolve into a glass of water. Stir.

The child's breath rattles.

ANNA
She seems so discomfited! Is there nothing you can do for her?

The mutton-chopped Doctor North looks at Anna as though he's just noticed she's there. In a tone draped with authority:

DOCTOR NORTH
Lady Anna, this is no scene for a woman. If you would be so kind as to remove yourself so we might proceed unimpeded.

He motions to the butler. Anna waves Pearson away. A flush rises to her cheeks, but her voice is calm and even.

ANNA
I am acutely aware, sir, of the danger my daughter is in.

ANNA (CONT'D)

Yet I shall not set one foot from
this chamber until I've seen her
through the worst of it.

Doctor North seeks an ally in Thomas. Thomas places a
supportive hand on his wife's shoulder.

DOCTOR NORTH

As you wish.

Doctor North opens a case revealing several glass globes. He
lights a match and places it in the globe, trapping the smoke
inside.

DOCTOR HUGHES

You're not going to cup her,
certainly?

DOCTOR NORTH

It is the only true course of
treatment.

DOCTOR HUGHES

Not a bit of it! Not a bit of it!
What this child requires is
tincture of arsenic and bleeding.

The diminutive Dr. Hughes pushes past Dr. North with a bottle
wriggling with black leeches. Mabel recoils.

Our attention returns to the child as she arches her back,
gasping for air. She's drowning in her own fluids.

ANNA

Thomas, do something!

THOMAS

Gentlemen!

DOCTOR NORTH

Quickly! Sit her up.

Thomas and the doctors prop pillows behind the child, as she
takes her final breath.

Mabel is frozen in place, uncertain what comes next.

The pale light of dawn streams through the window and we have
our first clear view of the child.

Golden curls. Dimpled chin. Cherubic. Her name is SUNBEAM.

DISSOLVE TO: