

Sthenos: Defining Insanity

First Cinematic following "start": Intro Cinematic

INT: ELIZABETH'S CHILDHOOD HOME - EVENING - 4 YEARS AGO

FADE IN on suburban middle-class living room, warm interior, TV is on, casting shadows. Sounds of suburban night can be heard in background: dog, crickets, AC, etc. A sink is running somewhere offscreen. TV NEWS ANCHOR narrates:

NEWS ANCHOR

-ier this week, resulting in two injuries, one casualty, and over \$500,000 in property damage. Witnesses to the incident claim that Mrs. Jones had been uncharacteristically irritable and hostile all morning. Several of Mrs. Jones coworkers report she never showed signs of a *sthenos* throughout her decades of tenure in company HR. Indeed, the company is known for its *sthenos* screening practices and security measures, which only adds to the disturbing and unpredictable nature of sudden *sthenos* manifestations across the country. A man claiming to have worked closely alongside Mrs. Jones for the past five years said quote, "She never seemed off or anything. Our job has ups and downs, just like anyone else's, but she always came to work with a smile on her face and a kind word to say. I never imagined she would be capable of something so terrible. You really can't trust people..."

Camera zooms out, revealing more of the room from position on couch. Upstairs is faintly lit, and flashes from the TV disrupt the cozy atmosphere. One photo on the wall is askew, as are the blankets on the couch's back.

A disembodied voice from the adjoining room (Elizabeth's father, ROBERT) grumbles incoherently:

ROBERT
Damn bastard... thinks he can... inta
my house... *MY* family...!

Washing at sink continues. The shadows from the banister
shiver. The rustling of dry tree branches, flapping wings
and other ominous noises begin to stir.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)
Authorities are unsure exactly what
caused Mrs. Jones violent outburst,
but warn the public to remain
vigilant. They urge everyone to
report any individuals who have
sthenos or are suspected of having
a sthenos. Remember, it's incidents
like these that remind us how
imperative it is for these
individuals be apprehended and
quarantined as early as possible.
Even if you suspect your loved
ones, it is not only for our own
safety, but theirs as well. If you
know or suspect any individuals of
having a sthenos, call the number
below—

News report slowly quiets and becomes muffled. TV comes
into sharper focus, showing wreckage of tall office
building with entire side blown out. Ambulances,
onlookers, etc.

NEWS ANCHOR (CONTIN'D)
—footage of the scene. Viewer
discretion is advised, as the
following footage may contain
graphic or disturbing content not
suitable for all audiences.

On TV screen: cellphone footage of incident plays, a
businesswoman (Mrs. Jones) is talking on phone near a
window; boss comes over and she puts call on hold. The
video's dialogue is inaudible.

Robert can still be heard in other room. From upstairs:
footsteps. Elizabeth's mother (MIRABEL) begins to descend
the stairs, then cries out in shock.

MIRABEL (out of frame)
(accent thick with fear) ¡Ai, Dios
mio! What happened?!

On TV screen: Mrs. Jones is rubbing side of her head in pain and exasperation. Boss touches woman's side.

MIRABEL (out of frame)
(we see her shoes as she rushes
down the stairs) Robert, what have
you done?!

On TV screen: Mrs. Jones pushes boss away angrily. She's shaking and her eyes are glowing, but he reaches again, and a sudden explosion emanates from the Jones. The wall and Mrs. Jones are shunted through the blast opening and outside.

The view from the couch pans down slightly to reveal bottle of brandy and ring of sweat left on the coffee table. Some alcohol is spilled on the table and drips. The drinking glass is on the floor, stained with a single stripe of blood.

[sink water shuts off]

TV flashes. Beyond the banister, knots in the wood panel walls begin to slide almost imperceptibly out of place and into disturbing faces.

On TV screen: Smoke and confusion, muffled screaming. When the video angle rightens, all that can be seen is a destroyed office and an open view of city through a demolished wall.

MIRABEL (out of frame)
(near hysterical) Oh my god, so
much blood... Robert... Robert, the
police! We have to call the police,
an ambulance!

View pans to behind and beside the couch, down at the limp hand of a body (NEIGHBOR) and a pool of blood that are revealed just behind the coffee table. One of the fingers twitch.

NEIGHBOR
[shuddering intake of breath]

MIRABEL (out of frame)
The phone... the phone...!

Three beeps, followed by ringing and the incomprehensible answer of the 911 OPERATOR other line.

MIRABEL (out of frame)
Hello? There's been an murder— um...
acci... [sobs]there's...

ROBERT (out of frame)
(voice dangerously low and slurred)
Mirabel...

MIRABEL (out of frame)
There's been an, um... Someone is
hurt... they might be dead. [pause]
Ah, yes [a sigh of relief as 911
OPERATOR responds on other side of
line], XXX west X street! Please
hurry.

View of scene pans to the side, showing backdoor to house.
Through its window: the neighbor's house on a little hill beyond
the backyard fence. Fence gate is open.

The disembodied voice of a young girl (BLUE) speaks over the
commotion, and the sound from the TV is all but inaudible.

BLUE (voiceover)
(voice is wistful, unsure) Hey,
Elizabeth...

Mirabel paces partway into view, hands fluttering, and Robert,
follows close behind. We can see up to their waists.

MIRABEL
(to the phone) I don't know what to
do, there's so much blood!

ROBERT
(getting louder, firm) Mirabel!
Hang up the phone.

911 OPERATOR (on phone)
Alright ma'am, deep breath. An
ambulance is on the way, but I'm
going to need you to stay on the
line with me and give me more
information.

BLUE (CONT'D)
(unperturbed) Are you awake?

View settles closer to the ground next to the body, we see the scene from Neighbor's body's point of view.

Mirabel sidesteps Robert and comes closer to inspect 'us', the bleeding body. We see her face for the first time.

MIRABEL
(too afraid to touch Neighbor,
trembling) Oh, god!

911 OPERATOR (on phone)
Ma'am? Can you tell me your name?
Is everything alright?

As Mirabel leans close, we see Robert advance from beyond her shoulder. The music dips, seemingly preparing for a crescendo.

ROBERT
(irate) Mirabel! I said, hang up
the damn phone! You fucking call
the police on me? ME?

911 OPERATOR (CONT'D)
Ma'am? The ambulance will be there
in ten minutes. Police have also
been dispatched to your location.
Can you tell me what's going on?

The atmosphere dims and vignettes. There's a singular and loud thump of a heartbeat.

[BA-THUMP]

BLUE (CONT'D)
(whispering wistfully) Have you
ever wondered—

911 OPERATOR (CONT'D)
Are you safe?

The sound of crickets, rustling leaves, wind and night come to forefront. Mirabel turns to see Robert and fearfully stands.

[BA-THUMP]

The bloodstain on the carpet continues to grow, but now the edges are luminescent and create fractals. The carpet fibers grow and bloom into deep-red spider lilies.

The shadows on the banister sway and writhe, crackling like trees, colors begin to morph, and the faces on the wall skitter.

[BA-THUMP!]

Music swells and devolves in kind, becoming a disjointed cacophony of instruments that sets nerves on edge. Robert and Mirabel's voices are nothing but warbled noise of argument, and the music reaches fever pitch.

The backdoor to the house is flung open, and another figure (MRS. PRATT) enters the scene. Robert stops accosting Mirabel, but the newcomer halts after taking several steps inside and absorbing the scene.

[BA-THUMP!]

BLUE (CONT'D)
-what it is people mean by
"insanity"?

A muffled exclamation, and Robert moves, intent to intercept Mrs. Pratt. Mrs. Pratt and Robert grapple, fight, stumbling offscreen, and Mirabel is in shock, frozen.

Music swells and crashes, sound of kitchen knife drawn from wrack, Mirabel screams and dashes to finally intervene. All other sounds fade; music transitions into main opening theme.

CUE TITLE

Carpet fibers continue to sway, flowers twitch/grow/wilt, hand remains, but more dreamlike and translucent than before. The rest of the scene darkens and fades.

INT: ELIZABETH'S CHILDHOOD BEDROOM - SATURDAY MORNING

FADE IN rest of scene: carpet, flowers, hand, and banister shadows shimmer like mirages over composition of new scene.

This hand is smaller, belonging to young Elizabeth (YOUNG EL). The pool of spider lilies blows in invisible wind, Young El's finger twitches.

Birds chirp, far away kids are playing outside, cars on the way to work; typical suburban morning noise.

[alarm clock blares]

Illusions of flowers, blood, carpet, etc. shatter like weightless glass.

YOUNG EL

[gasps] (shoots upright in bed,
falling off halfway) Huh?! What?
(pause, looks around) Hijo de...
[groans] (buries head under covers)
Why?! It's Saturday for god's sake!

Young El turns off phone alarm and chunks it across the room. She tosses and turns for several moments, then with a heavy sigh she rolls over and swings her feet out of bed, giving up on sleep. Camera settles on third person behind Young El.

YOUNG EL

Why do I feel like I had a real
shitty dream?

END SCENE: TUTORIAL BEGINS