

## **Dust Covers Death Synopsis**

Carl Newhart is writing a journal in the first-person. He states that he is recording the events that occurred in his remote hillside home, Gabriel House, to exonerate his niece of the murders that happened many years ago, for which she took the blame.

Carl begins the story by changing to the omnipresent third person, explaining that the entire story was pieced together through family documents and testimonies. He will return for a first-person epilogue.

The Newhart family arrive in Bitten-on-Sea and drive up to their new home, Gabriel House, high in the hills.

The family consists of Carl Newhart and his wife, Ellen; Michael, Louise and Rachel, the Newhart's teenage children; and Christian Thomas, with his sister, Jeanette.

Christian and Jeanette are Carl's niece and nephew. They are slightly older than the Newhart children. Their parents were recently killed in a car accident which they miraculously survived. They are understandably traumatised and detached from the rest of the family, though everyone is trying very hard. The subject of the Thomas inheritance is neatly glossed over and nobody seems particularly interested in it.

Gabriel House is a beautiful villa with a tragic past. 'Of course!' is the general reaction. Many years ago a husband murdered his wife there and was executed for his crime. Christian, a real book-lover, jokes that no decent author would drop that into the middle of his book. The story is well known in Bitten-on-Sea but is not a particular cause-célèbre.

Christian stores all his precious mementoes of his parents in a small suitcase under his bed. He and Jeanette are very protective of it and both keep its existence under wraps.

Jeanette is completely withdrawn, on sedatives to cope with the trauma of her parent's death, and clings to her brother's company, while not really interacting with him. To bring her out a little, Christian sorts out his book collection and insists that she helps. While he decks out the bookshelves in the library, Jeanette watches. She becomes progressively more interested in a dusty old bible that the previous owners have left in the house.

The presence of the Thomas children is a weight in an otherwise happy house. Jeanette is convinced that their car-crash survival has some meaning and is divinely ordained, whilst Christian is obsessed with drawing out his introverted sister.

The family settles into the town and slowly into their own routines.

Christian takes his sister to shop for second-hand books as they build his library. The book-seller is a miserable old man, Charles Whiteside, who recalls the unpleasant events that unfolded years ago at Gabriel House.

They discover a box of books already in the house. Jeanette finds a journal in the box. Just her luck, it is the journal of the murdered wife, Selina Frye, who details her marriage to Bruce, the sadistic wife-beater. Christian is appalled and directs her back to the Bible.

During this time, Christian's alphabetized books keep being moved around on the bookshelves. It starts out as a mild annoyance but happens so often that Christian starts becoming obsessed with finding the culprit. Everyone in the family is suspected but, one night, he sees Jeanette re-arranging the books. To exact a rather pathetic revenge, Christian takes away Jeanette's Bible and Selina's journal. Being the ultimate book-lover, Christian can't destroy the books, so he hides them in a small cave in the woods above the house.

Jeanette is caught again on a subsequent night, moving the books around once more. Furious, Christian refuses to sleep in the house with her there:

he grabs some bedclothes and retreats to the cave in the woods. When there, he looks over Selina's journal. Unexpectedly, Jeanette shows up. She makes her peace with her brother but Christian is surprised to find that he is disturbed by her presence. It is as if she is impersonating herself, however pleasant she is acting. Christian decides not to let himself sleep and is upset to find that, as she reads the consoling words of the Bible, Jeanette can't stop being distracted by Selina's journal, finally actually stroking it as she recites the holy words from the good book.

In the morning, they return to the house. Christian is super creeped out by his sister, but notices a return to a more 'normal' introverted girl. Christian takes Selina's journal and donates it to the bookshop in town, telling Charles Whiteside that if he doesn't want to sell it, he can burn it.

Jeanette insists that she cannot remember the previous night in the cave and persuades Christian to watch over the library with her that night, in the hope that they will see who is really moving the books around. Even though he knows it's her, Christian agrees in the hope that Jeanette is working through her problems in some way.

That decision made, they have a surprisingly pleasant day. Finally, the Newhart's and the Thomas' come together as a family. Jeanette tells her brother that she is going to stop taking her medication - a huge step.

By the day's end, Christian and Jeanette have to remind themselves of their pact to spy on the library for the night. They resolve to do so, despite being very tired because of their night in the cave. Jeanette tells Christian that, despite the evidence of his own eyes, she wasn't the one moving the books. Christian supports her, though he obviously can't believe her.

That night, they hide away and watch the library. To their amazement, Michael and Louise sneak in and rearrange the books. Christian is astounded that the story does not end with Jeanette. She denies being in on anything with the Newhart children.

Checking the library, Christian finally wonders why the books are being moved. He realises that they are being taken out of alphabetical order to convey a message. Now, on the first shelf, the first letter of the author's surname on each book spells out: '**HELP ME**'.

The next day is a nightmare of enforced normality. Jeanette seems to be as shaken as Christian. That night, they hide out in the library again.

They see their Aunt and Uncle wander into the room and rearrange the books. Jeanette nearly screams out loud. When they check the books, the author's names on the dust jackets spell: '**DEATH**'.

Jeanette seems to be increasing in mental strength in direct proportion to Christian losing it. For him, the only person in the clear is the baby of the family, 13 year-old Rachel.

The next day the Newharts decide to go out of town to wrap up the work surrounding their old home. They are to stay away for three days, taking the children with them. Christian insists that Jeanette goes with them. The Newharts are happy as Jeanette is much less withdrawn and is becoming very much part of the family. Jeanette is unhappy that Christian does not trust her but agrees to leave, to give him some space.

On his first night alone, Christian camps out in the library. He is somewhat terrified, but nothing happens.

The next day is surprisingly pleasant. Christian takes in the beauty of the area, briefly talks to a nice girl in town, and starts to wonder more about her than what the hell is going on up in the family library.

That night, Christian sleeps in his own bed. Peacefully.

The next day, off-guard again, Christian sees a new message on the books. It reads: '**YOUR SUITCASE**'.

He gets the small suitcase from under his bed. Inside, on top of the family mementoes is a bloody kitchen knife and rag. Christian freaks out as anyone would.

That night, he forces the terror down and sleeps. He wakes up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep. He checks the library. There is a new message: **'THE CAVE'**.

Sleep is not an option - the only option is to check the cave in the woods. There, to his horror, Christian finds the dead body of Charles Whiteside: stabbed to death.

The Newharts and Jeanette return the next day. Christian tells his sister everything. She is horrified and too scared to check the body in the cave. Christian insists that he must have committed the crime, though he has no memory of the event. He was alone at the house, after all, and no-one else but Jeanette knew about the suitcase.

They can think of nothing else to do but watch the library again that night. Horrified again, Christian watches Jeanette move to the bookshelf and rearrange the titles. The message reads: **'I KILLED HER'**.

Christian loses it. He wakes the entire house in a frenzy. The deranged boy corrals everyone into the library, where everyone can see Jeanette.

The girl is obviously mentally gone. She stares into space and the whole family are horrified. The pitch of their horror increases as she recites "Get out, get out, get out!" over and over and - suddenly - she snaps back to reality.

Christian is about to confess all to Carl, when Jeanette stops him. She says that she knows a way out and, to convince her hysterical brother, she asks him why the books said **'I KILLED HER'** when the victim was male?

Christian is won over but not convinced. He has no idea who to trust.

The next day, Jeanette convinces the family that she is fine and pulls Christian out for a walk in the woods. Christian is a nervous wreck and is hardly more comfortable with his sister than with the Newharts. The only person who doesn't terrify him is Rachel.

Jeanette takes her brother to the cave. This time it's Christian who can't go in. She goes in to check the bookseller's body for herself and comes out convinced that she now knows the truth.

She says that Selina's ghost has been exorcised from Whiteside's body, by her husband, who inhabited Christian's body for the murder.

Somehow, Whiteside's possession of a book from the library once owned by the Fryes allowed Selina to possess him, as Christian's ownership of the library exposed him to the demonic possession of Bruce Frye.

Jeanette says that if Bruce's murderous spirit is now alone, it must be possible to exact the same fate upon him. Christian instantly notices the flaw in such a plan: the need to kill whoever Bruce possesses.

However, Christian's mental state has deteriorated so much that he puts his fate completely in Jeanette's hands - beginning by accepting her theory of the haunting of Gabriel House. She outlines her plan to make everything right and, horrified by her conviction and fortitude (and mentally exhausted), Christian agrees.

That evening, Christian and Jeanette make sure that everyone in the family receives a dose of her medication, a strong sedative. They do not give it to Rachel, as she is so young that Christian fears the drug may be an overdose: he reasons that, as a child, if she is in any way possessed, she will be easy to overpower. Big mistake, naturally, but Christian is now uncompromisingly protective of the young girl, the only person of whose innocence he is certain.

The Thomas siblings start their dreaded night time watch over the library. As per Jeanette's instructions, Christian takes his dose of sedative. With all the adults sedated, Jeanette is ready to carry out her plan.

As Christian falls into a drug-induced sleep, he begins to panic: his sister is so controlled, so certain, and so iron-willed that she is frightening....the previously introverted girl has now taken control of the destiny of the household. Christian lapses into unconsciousness realising that he has left 13 year-old Rachel, the only member of the family whom seemed innocent in the affair, alone with Jennette - Jeanette, who believes in a murderous ghost.

The narrative now switches back to Carl Newhart's first person narrative.

Carl is woken by young Rachel. She needs to use the toilet but is afraid of the dark and wants her father to escort her. Carl is amazed to find that he is not just tired but barely conscious. It takes all of his effort to walk with his daughter and not fall back to sleep, standing up.

On their way, they hear some commotion from the library. Forcing his incredibly sluggish body into action, Carl goes into the library: he finds Jeanette standing over Christian, with a butcher's knife raised in her hands. Carl grabs her and throws the knife aside, checking that Christian is alright - he is. Jeanette cries out and then collapses in Carl's arms. Carl is so shocked that it takes him a moment to realise the true horror of the moment....Rachel is now stabbing Christian, over and over in a violent frenzy.

Sometime later, Jeanette and Carl put Rachel back to bed. She is peaceful and unaware of anything other than her own tiredness. The other two children and Ellen are soundly asleep in bed, the sedatives having taken full effect.

Jeanette and Carl return to the library, and to Christian's dead body. Jeanette, again, is calm and self possessed, where Carl is beyond himself.

The niece tells the uncle that she believes God has a purpose for her, as He had for her brother: two souls on borrowed time with a mission to complete before they joined their parents. Leaving Rachel susceptible to Bruce's demonic possession was a tragic mis-calculation.

Fine, but what about the body in the library? Jeanette asks Carl to help her take Christian's body to the cave in the woods, where she has more bad news for him. She shows Carl how Charles Whiteside's body is positioned with his thumb and forefinger hooked into his lapel pocket - just as Selina Frye used to do and is pictured as doing in a photograph in her journal. That's how Jeanette made the necessary leap to the supernatural, where Selina has engineered her spirit's release via the violence of her ghostly husband.

Carl, like Christian, surrenders to the young girl's iron determination and conviction. Having seen his own young daughter commit unconscious murder, his critical thinking faculties are shot.

The next day, on a pretext, Carl takes the family back to their old home, making excuses for Christian's no-show and Jeanette staying behind.

Jeanette makes the departure the sweetest and lighthearted of goodbyes. When they leave, she rearranges the books on the bookshelf so that the author's names spell out, **'THE END.'**

At their old home, away from Bitten-on-Sea, The Newharts pass a pleasant evening, ruminating on how lovely it has been to become close to Christian and Jeanette. Carl goes along with the scene, all the while fingering a letter in his pocket while marvelling at how Rachel plays, remembering nothing.

That night, Carl cannot sleep.

The letter has written on its face, *'Open In The Morning.'*



The hours pass slowly, and Carl finally gives in and opens the letter - inside it simply says: *'Call the police to Gabriel House at 8a.m. in the morning. All my love, Jeanette.'* Carl can only wonder at what is going on there right now.

The next morning, the police find Jeanette in the library, dead by a particularly gruesome slashing of her own throat. Carl recounts the wealth of evidence that Jeanette left behind to explain her own suicide and how she killed her brother and the bookseller. She even went so far as to leave voicemails to her mental health professionals.

Carl marvels at her mental strength, to be able to take the blame for such atrocities and then to hold the spirit of such an evil man within her, to overpower that evil to perform the ultimate sacrifice of exorcism. He wonders if, without Christian and Jeanette, would he, his wife, and his children have died at that house?

Carl records all this, many years later, to honour the sacrifice of his niece and nephew and to explain all to his family, who have had to accommodate a frightening lie about their cousins.

Of course, he could be making it all up, to cover crimes he has committed.....but that's quite the cover story.

Carl finally says that he still owns the house but rarely goes back there. He certainly never checks the library, in case he finds a message there: after all, though he hopes that Christian and Jeanette are at peace, what's to say that they have not just taken the place of the previous spirits and are still up there? Just waiting for the night.

**END**