

SCARE ME TO DEATH

Written by

Stan Evans

Stanevans822@gmail.com
(818) 333-6622

FADE IN:

EXT. CHICAGO - JITTERS COFFEE SHOP - NIGHT

A GOTH BARISTA (22) fresh off her shift, pulls off her apron, stuffs it in her purse, and escapes onto the streets. Her eyes are dark, her expression, blank. Life's not worth living. Everything sucks.

She starts to check her phone and then decides there's nothing to see and parks it in her purse. She walks casually through the neighborhood decay. The HOMELESS are everywhere. ADDICTS shoot up in doorways. A mugging occurs in the distance.

The Goth Barista passes a bar and notices a SHADOWY FIGURE behind her. When the Figure passes a street light, he appears tall, thin, menacing. She increases her pace. The Figure follows.

Lighting a smoke, the Goth Barista stops; turns to face her stalker, still a ways away from her.

GOTH BARISTA
Are you part of the thing?

The Figure also stops but doesn't say anything. The Goth Barista smiles, even giggles a little before moving on.

GOTH BARISTA (CONT'D)
Well, let's get it on.

The girl reaches her bus stop just as the bus arrives. She turns around. Her Stalker is right behind her. Now it's clear he's an OLD MAN. Creepy, leering. She climbs inside. The Stalker makes a kissing sound as he follows her.

GOTH BARISTA (CONT'D)
Get away from me, you old pervert.

INT. BUS - NIGHT

Sitting in the very back, the Goth Barista checks Instagram on her phone with a bored expression. When she looks up, she notices the bus is filled with creepy OLD MEN.

GOTH BARISTA
Grandpa express.

The Girl returns to Instagram. When she looks up again, the creepy Old Men are all naked.

Their decrepit bodies are covered in brittle, white, wrinkly skin full of sores and moles. Their faces are lustful, eyes dark with evil intent. Drool falls out of the mouth of a few.

GOTH BARISTA (CONT'D)
WHAT THE HELL?

The Goth Girl gets up and pulls the stop wire. The BUS DRIVER looks back at her. He too, is a naked, old man with a sickening expression on his face.

OLD MAN
You're so pretty!

The Old Men's faces become more menacing, mouths twisting, eyes bulging. Their skin pops with puss from sores. They get up and slowly surround the Girl.

She kicks at the door in a panic. Finally, it springs open and she leaps from the moving bus, crashing onto the sidewalk.

EXT. CITY STREETS - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Bus screeches to a halt. The Old Men pile out.

GOTH BARISTA
Ow! Shit!

When the Goth Girl looks behind her she sees the geriatric Stalkers have now sprung horns, tails and wings-- a complete transformation into demons. She gets up and runs.

GOTH BARISTA (CONT'D)
No, no, no!

She races down the street. The twenty or so Demons follow close behind. She makes a detour through an abandoned lot, climbing fences and sliding under wooden planks.

After running a few blocks, she stops and looks behind her. Breathing heavily, she notices the Demons aren't chasing her. Then, a sinister LAUGH emits from above. She looks up and sees all the winged Devils flying over her head.

The Goth Girl runs into an alley and hides behind a dumpster. The Demons land and converge into the alley. One rolls away the dumpster. It slams against a car. As they surround her, the Goth Barista put her hands over her face and cries.

DEMON
Come on, make grandpa happy!

GOTH BARISTA
Don't touch me! DON'T TOUCH ME!

She slowly opens her eyes and sees the lusty Demons all eyeing her body and reaching for her. Then she SCREAMS. Her face frozen, she falls onto the ground.

INT. APARTMENT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Even with a cursory glance, it's clear everything in the bedroom has been ordered by someone who's more into function than fashion. The only decoration, framed portraits of a young boy.

A cell rings on the nightstand. Detective CRYSTAL BENNETT (34) answers it. Crystal's black, with a sweet, youthful face but probing eyes that suggest deep thought.

CRYSTAL
Bennett. Yes. Wait. That doesn't
sound like-- Okay. I'm on my way.

INT. DION'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal opens the door to her son's bedroom. DION (14), snoozes in a room filled with basketball and horror movie posters. Due to a growth spurt, his legs shoot out from under the covers and over the bed frame.

Crystal glances for a moment at the frightening images on the posters. Then she closes the door.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Crystal hits a button on her blue tooth.

CRYSTAL
Hey, it's me, Maya. Sorry to call
so late. Could you possibly stay
with... ? I know, it's late. I'll
give you a bonus. Not sure how long
I'll be this time. Thanks.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Crystal wades through the COPS and FORENSICS CREW to her boss, CHIEF WINTERS (55). Winters has a weary, priest-like demeanor, serious but caring.

The body of the Goth Barista lies before them, her eyes locked in a frightful gaze, her mouth still open as if in a silent scream.

CRYSTAL

Could it be Trang? Pale face.
Skinny.

CHIEF WINTERS

Her look is not drug-induced.

COP

Maybe she got some bad news.

Winters dismisses the cop with a look. Crystal bends down to examine closer.

CRYSTAL

Something scared her, Chief. And she went into shock and her heart gave out. Why bring me out in the middle of the night?

CHIEF WINTERS

It's the fourth one this week. All young people. All frozen with fright.

CRYSTAL

Still, not a homicide.

CHIEF WINTERS

I'm not so sure. I was hoping-- being the rational thinker that you are-- well, maybe you could come up with a theory.

CRYSTAL

Please. You have other detectives.

CHIEF WINTERS

But I need you to keep my imagination in check. See, I think maybe there's some ghost out here on the streets, petrifying the post-pubescents.

CRYSTAL

There's no such thing as ghosts.

CHIEF WINTERS

I knew you'd say that. Maybe a demon then. Or demons.

CRYSTAL

Chief, you know, I don't believe in the paranormal. No demons. No hell. No God.

CHIEF WINTERS

You're sure of that, are you, detective?

CRYSTAL

Yes. The only hell is the one we create for ourselves. Like, say, Washington Park. Where I know there are dozens of homicides worth investigating.

Crystal looks down at the girl. Winters pleads with his eyes.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Okay. I'll check out the other victims. See if I can't find a connection.

CHIEF WINTERS

Find me a rational explanation, detective.

INT. HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - NIGHT

Crystal opens files on the police computer. A fellow detective, JAMES AJACKWE (35) black, walks by her desk.

JAMES

What's the Chief got you on now, Bennett?

CRYSTAL

Bunch of kids he claims have been, I don't know, scared to death.

JAMES

Halloween isn't for another month and we already got us some dead trick-or-treaters.

CRYSTAL

Seems like it.

JAMES

Say, uh. I was wondering--

CRYSTAL

If you were wondering how I'd respond when you asked me to spend an evening with you in some loud bar sipping watered down cocktails-- stop. You know I'm dating Archibald.

James registers disappointment. Then he giggles.

JAMES

Oh, Archibald, that's right. He plays the flute or something.

CRYSTAL

He's a world class oboe player and a prominent member of the Chicago Philharmonic.

JAMES

Detective Hoity Toity won't give a brother a chance.

CRYSTAL

Look, we've been through this. I don't date aggressive men. My ex was aggressive. And controlling.

JAMES

You think you're too good for us.

CRYSTAL

If you wish to continue the juvenile prattling, detective, we can do it in Winters' office.

JAMES

Nah. I'm cool. Got a real homicide case to work on, Miss Thing.

James walks away.

ON THE COMPUTER SCREEN: Pics of the four victims. A mixed race twaker riding a skateboard, a college nerd at a science fair, a short Asian kid at a chili cook-off and the Goth Barista at a rave. All in their late teens or early twenties.

CRYSTAL

What links you?

The Goth Girl's name, Samantha Crockett, pops up.

CRYSTAL
Samantha Crockett. Why do I think
you're a victim of abuse?

Crystal punches the keys and a file comes up from child abuse case. She nods, sadly.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

BRYCE (19), chubby, deep, dark eyes sips from a Big Gulp as he gazes blankly at his computer screen while in bed.

ON SCREEN: a repellent horror film flashes images of torture. Bryce flips the laptop closed and grabs his phone.

BRYCE
Hey. Yeah, me. Is the gang still on
for the Underground Horror Fest? I
don't give a shit if they say no.
I'm not missing this. Okay. I'll
see you out front in ten. Bye.

Bryce puts his phone down. He takes another sip of his Big Gulp and then, with some effort, puts on his jacket.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bryce walks down the hallway. At the other end, his parents, NED and JOYCE (50s) can be seen on the couch, in the living room watching Fox News.

NED
Bryce, that you?

BRYCE
Yup.

NED
Where the hell do you think you're
going?

BRYCE
Out.

NED
To do what?

JOYCE
Let him go.

NED

Honey, he sits on his ass all day
watching horror movies and eating
Cheetos, tweaking on energy drinks.
DID YOU LOOK FOR A JOB TODAY?

Ned tosses the remote, obviously frustrated.

JOYCE

There are no jobs, Ned.

BRYCE

I looked, dad. There are no jobs.

JOYCE

Let him go.

NED

Don't be out too late. And don't
expect me to bail you out if--

JOYCE

You know he's not the type, Ned.

NED

Yeah. But his creepy friends.

JOYCE

Have fun, honey.

Bryce sighs and heads for the door.

EXT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

Horror FANS assemble outside the run-down theater for the
film festival. Bryce meets up with his buddy MARCUS (20),
tall, thin, pale and as depressed looking as Bryce.

BRYCE

Hey, Marcus.

They are joined by WENDY, (17), a skinny, plain looking girl,
dark set eyes. And a blank-faced, black kid, ANTOINE, (21).
Antoine's skinny and dressed in too-big shirt and jeans.

MARCUS

Wendy! Antoine. You guys ready to
freak out?

ANTOINE

No movie's too scary for me, yo.

Antoine then spots a statue of a gargoyle set up by the entrance. He examines it with a queasy expression, suspiciously. As if concerned it could move.

BRYCE

Sure.

WENDY

Do I look okay?

Wendy checks her compact mirror and dabs her face to make sure she's presentable.

BRYCE

Okay for what? We're gonna be sitting in the dark.

MARCUS

I checked out some of the reviews. Supposed to be some wicked shit.

BRYCE

I read those, too.

MARCUS

My mom wants me to stop watching horror films. Says it's desensitizing me to violence. I pulled up some studies showing it's totally fine and shut her ass up. Low info bitch.

BRYCE

Horror films are the only thing I like to watch.

WENDY

I know, right?

The group looks at each other for an awkward moment and then lumber to the ticket booth.

INT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

Images of a serial killer cutting up human body parts flicker on the screen. Horrifying but also sad in the banality. The crowd of mostly early twenties FILM FANS watch with a dull kind of stare.

Bryce and Marcus both frown at the screen but watch intently. Wendy appears thrilled but Antoine smirks.

EXT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

The CROWD disperses. The friends linger and look at the movie posters. None wants to go home because there's nothing to go home to.

RONNIE, a darkly attractive woman, (28), long black hair, black leather outfit, hands out fliers. The friends stop when they approach her.

BRYCE
Another festival?

RONNIE
No, a service for the sorrowful.

WENDY
What?

She hands them flyers. They read: "Feel like you've got nothing to live for? If you want to die, go out like a horror show! Underground Euthanasia service. We scare you to death. Office - 4225 Olive Street."

MARCUS
Are you serious?

RONNIE
Dead serious.

BRYCE
Whoa.

ANTOINE
Can't scare me yo.

RONNIE
Better memorize the address.

WENDY
Memorize... ?

The fliers suddenly disintegrate in each of the young people's hands.

MARCUS
Coated with some kind of chemicals.

The friends walk on, some creeped out, some excited.

BRYCE
I didn't get the address.

MARCUS
That's because you're retarded.
It's 4225 Olive Street.

BRYCE
Hey! You got the highest SATs and
you're unemployed just like me!

MARCUS
Because I choose not to work.

WENDY
4225...

ANTOINE
Olive Street.

Ronnie winks at them as they continue on. Wendy and Antoine
break away from Bryce and Marcus.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)
See you fools next time.

WENDY
My mom's picking me up over there.

BRYCE
See ya.

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Denizens of the dark, scuttle in and out of shadows. There's
a moment of quiet between Bryce and Marcus.

BRYCE
You ever thought about... ?

MARCUS
Who hasn't? They call us the doomed
generation, right? I mean, what
else would we think about?

BRYCE
I mean, there isn't much good stuff
going on with me. Not any good
stuff, really.

MARCUS
I know.

BRYCE
And that would be such a sweet way.

MARCUS

It's probably just a promo for a movie.

BRYCE

Ya think?

MARCUS

Yeah. That's the premise of the film. A service that kills you by scaring you to death.

BRYCE

Yeah. But still. She seemed--

MARCUS

Nah. Too fucked up. They couldn't, legally.

BRYCE

My cousin says in Canada, the government will kill you if you can't make your rent.

MARCUS

It's called euthanasia. Used to just be for medical things. But it's getting popular with the sad sacks. They've got these special high tech pods they built. But still. It's not that popular.

BRYCE

Doesn't sound like such a bad idea.

MARCUS

Wouldn't work on me. I got too much to live for.

BRYCE

Everyone I know loves horror films. And most hate their life. Hell, even I could go for--

MARCUS

Don't talk nonsense. You couldn't go through with something like that.

BRYCE

Why not? Thanks to all the climate change shit going on, world's not going to be around anyway.

MARCUS

You just want to be scared.

Bryce looks at Marcus with a mix of desperation and boredom.

BRYCE

It would be nice to feel something.

MARCUS

I go here. See you tomorrow? Last night of the fest. You don't want to miss the debut screening of Sheldon Wilson's masterpiece, "The ReShallowing."

BRYCE

Supposed to be epic gore.

MARCUS

I know, right?

BRYCE

See you.

MARCUS

And forget that flyer. Being scared isn't a fun way to go.

BRYCE

It would be for me.

Marcus waves at Bryce and takes a turn on the city block. As Bryce walks along, his face turns dark.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

Olive Street.

He pulls out his cell and types the address into Google maps.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - DAY

Bryce checks the GPS and stops in front of the building.

The building looks too high tech, too fancy for the service advertised. A blinking red light by the door catches his eye.

Bryce walks to it and pushes the button on the wall. A VOICE comes through a speaker.

VOICE (V.O.)

Hello, are you here for a consultation?

BRYCE

Me?

VOICE (V.O.)

You got the flyer, correct?

BRYCE

Oh yeah. Is this the place?

VOICE (V.O.)

Yes. Come on in.

The large glass door swings open. Bryce walks inside.

INT. FOYER - DAY

A professionally dressed RECEPTIONIST (25) sitting at a desk, greets Bryce.

RECEPTIONIST

You're Bryce Peters, correct?

BRYCE

Yeah, but I never told you my name.

RECEPTIONIST

Through those doors, please.

Bryce hesitates, stares back at the woman who nods at him, then goes through the doors.

INT. MAIN OFFICE - DAY

The "office" is a startling change from the high tech sleekness of the outside of the building and the foyer. In fact, it looks like a drug den.

The wood floor covered by dust is missing planks here and there. There are windows with cracked blinds exposing some sunlight but it's candles set everywhere that are illuminating the room.

Standing before Bryce are three disparate characters: a burly, masked BODYGUARD wearing S & M gear, watches him.

A LAWYER (24) wearing trendy frames, sits at a large desk with a laptop, clipboards, pens and contracts.

In the center of the room, sitting in an expensive, leather chair is a meticulously groomed, blonde-haired, male model type (33), wearing a white suit. His name is CORSON.

BRYCE
So how does this work?

LAWYER
I have a contract I need you to
sign.

Bryce looks over at Corson whose wicked smile chills.

BRYCE
So this is what the flyer was
about?

BODYGUARD
What don't you understand?

BRYCE
Nothing. I mean... I understand.

LAWYER
Then I'll need you to sign this.

The Lawyer stands up, hands him a contract on a clipboard and
a pen. Bryce hesitates.

CORSON
It's okay, Bryce. Just sign it.

BRYCE
Where?

LAWYER
At the bottom.

BRYCE
You don't need it in blood?

LAWYER
No, no. That kind of dramatic
flourish is not necessary.

He hands her back the clipboard.

BRYCE
That it?

BODYGUARD
Now you come to Corson.

Bryce walks to the devastatingly handsome man.

BRYCE
This an interview?

CORSON

Relax, Bryce. I just need to hold
your hand.

Bryce gives it to him.

BRYCE

Cold!

Corson's eyes roll inside his head. His tongue slips out like
a serpent, flitting about. Then a moment of understanding on
his face. A creepy smile. He withdraws Bryce's hand.

LAWYER

Thank you, Bryce. We're all set.

BRYCE

That's it?

LAWYER

Yep.

BRYCE

How... how soon will this happen?

CORSON

How soon do you want it to happen?

Bryce frowns remembering his sad life.

BRYCE

Soon as possible, I guess.

BODYGUARD

You may leave now.

BRYCE

What if I change my mind?

LAWYER

Too late. All sales are final.

BRYCE

Sale? What did I pay with?

CORSON

Everything.

Bryce awkwardly turns around, opens the door and leaves.

INT. 7-11 - DAY

Bryce gets a Big Gulp. Then he loads the counter with candy. Kind of a last supper, junk food feast. The pimply-faced CLERK (21) sneers.

CLERK
The body positive diet.

BRYCE
It's for a going away party.

CLERK
Sure. Like you don't consume this much almost every day you come in.

BRYCE
Whatever, dude. You work at 7-11.

Bryce takes his bag and leaves.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

Bryce tiptoes to his bedroom with his bag of goodies.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Bryce streams horror films while gobbling candy and sipping from his Big Gulp. Eventually, he puts the soda down, closes the laptop and gets dressed.

INT. HALLWAY - NIGHT

Bryce tiptoes down the hallway. Ned and Joyce look up from the couch in the living room.

NED
Where you off to, tonight?

BRYCE
Nowhere.

JOYCE
He's attending that film festival.

BRYCE
Not snuff films, are they?

JOYCE
Ned!

BRYCE

Bye, mom.

Bryce stifles an urge to cry.

EXT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

Bryce stands in front of the movie house, holding his ticket. No one's there. He pulls out his phone and checks for texts.

BRYCE

Where the hell is everybody?

A sinister-looking USHER opens the door.

USHER

Show's beginning.

BRYCE

But there's no audience.

USHER

You don't want to be late.

Bryce shrugs and goes inside.

INT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

Bryce, loaded up with popcorn, candy and soda, finds he's the only one in the theater.

BRYCE

This can't be right.

He looks at the Usher who only stares back coldly. Bryce sits down. The room darkens and a movie begins.

The screen shows images of VICTIMS suffering ghastly tortures. They flick by quickly.

In his seat, Bryce grows uncomfortable. He reaches down into his popcorn and discovers it's turned into a tub of cockroaches. The licorice has become red worms that slither all over his body.

BRYCE (CONT'D)

HEY!

He looks back at the screen and sees a horrific ensemble of WITCHES AND WARLOCKS, all frightful, all in Medieval garb. They look like they're in a torture chamber. They chant his name: 'BRYCE, BRYCE, BRYCE.' Bryce looks around the theater.

BRYCE (CONT'D)
This must be the--

Straps appear around his arms, legs and waist. He's trapped in his seat.

BRYCE (CONT'D)
What the hell!!!!!!

Now Bryce's mother and father, Ned and Joyce, are brought into the Witch's dungeon. They are shackled and tortured with fire, thumb screws, choke pears and other assorted devices.

BRYCE (CONT'D)
No!

He tries to close his eyes but another WITCH appears from behind Bryce and uses her slimy fingers to pull his lids open.

ON SCREEN: Ned is forced onto a table. A hooded EXECUTIONER chops his head off.

The head pops off the screen, bounces on the stage and lands in Bryce's lap. And it's still alive.

NED
Son, have you been looking for a job?

BRYCE
AAAGGGHHHH!!!!!!

His mother is cut in half by the same Executioner. But her two halves race off the screen, waddling toward Bryce, trailing blood and guts.

JOYCE
Are you having fun at your festival, honey?

Bryce screams, full throttle.

EXT. MOVIE HOUSE - NIGHT

Cop cars. An ambulance. Yellow tape. Winters and Crystal watch as Bryce's stiff body is carted out from inside the theater.

Antoine and Wendy walk away, pausing to look back at their friend. Marcus, lingering in a shadow, watches as well.

WINTERS

They know this kid from all the horror festivals. He must've seen something up there that wasn't in the program.

CRYSTAL

There you go again with your fanciful speculation.

Winters smirks.

CRYSTAL

Maybe his heart gave out to a jump scare. He's not in the best of shape.

WINTERS

Obesity could be a factor.

CRYSTAL

Honestly, Winters. I can't keep being assigned these cases. Horror movies and the supernatural just aren't my bag.

WINTERS

Well, they keep popping up and I am a believer. What I need is a rigid rationalist like you to set me straight.

CRYSTAL

Uh, hey there! You! Tall boy!

Marcus tries to hide behind a bush.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Come on over.

MARCUS

I didn't do anything.

WINTERS

You know what happened?

MARCUS

It's like you said, sir. There was nothing in the movies that Bryce couldn't handle. He's an idiot savant when it comes to horror. Can tell you all the names of everybody in the film.

WINTERS

Was something wrong with your friend?

MARCUS

I don't know. He seemed to be in his own world. Walked right by me.

WINTERS

You tried talking to him before the movies started?

MARCUS

Yeah, out front. It was like he was hypnotized. I was kinda pissed because I thought he was blowing me off. But when I came up to him after the movie and he didn't move, I mean, I saw he was dead.

CRYSTAL

And what would your explanation be for his condition?

MARCUS

Beats the shit out of me. None of the movies were even that scary. Not even "The ReShallowing."

CRYSTAL

What about his home life?

MARCUS

Ha. What home life?

WINTERS

Anything out of the ordinary happen to Bryce lately?

MARCUS

Naw. Just the usual gloomy nothingness.

CRYSTAL

Nothing out of the ordinary at all?

Marcus looks around and thinks for a moment.

MARCUS

Wait! Yeah. There was this spooky hot chick handing out flyers last night. Right over here.

WINTERS

For another movie?

MARCUS

No, for... something else. Well, he could've. I mean, I don't think he'd have the guts, but then...

CRYSTAL

What did the flyers say?

MARCUS

They were coated with chemicals that made them disintegrate.

CRYSTAL

Chemicals? Gonna need the lab to come out here. See if there are any traces.

MARCUS

See, Bryce is like a lot of us kids. Fucked up.

CRYSTAL

How is he 'messed up'?

MARCUS

Life sucks for us.

CRYSTAL

I gathered that.

MARCUS

I think that's what's going on with all the victims. At least that's what I read online. They're really disturbed. And hopeless. Like a lot of us.

CRYSTAL

I can understand these are tough times. The job market, the crime, the disease. Things can seem dire for your generation.

MARCUS

So I think Bryce took them up on their offer.

CRYSTAL

What offer?

MARCUS

You know what euthanasia is?

CRYSTAL

Yes, I know what euthanasia is.

MARCUS

That was the service on the flyer.

CRYSTAL

Assisted suicide.

MARCUS

Dudes like Bryce. Hell, even me. We hate life. We're the doomed generation.

CRYSTAL

Look, Marcus. You're an intelligent boy. I can tell that. And there's always an answer to every problem. A scientific answer.

MARCUS

So it said, basically, "Wanna die? We'll scare you to death."

CRYSTAL

It's a euthanasia service that offers to end people's lives by frightening them and stopping their heart or something?

MARCUS

I guess. Death by Blumhouse.

Marcus quietly chuckles at his joke.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Bryce always wanted to be inside a real horror film. It was his ultimate, I don't know, bucket list, death wish.

CRYSTAL

Do you remember a phone number or email?

MARCUS

There was an address.

Crystal raises her eyebrows. Yes?

MARCUS (CONT'D)

But I don't remember. Honest. It's been a few days.

CRYSTAL

I believe you.

Marcus wipes his sweaty hands on his pants.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

I want to thank you, Marcus, for all this information.

MARCUS

Okay.

CRYSTAL

And if you ever feel low or have those kind of thoughts, I want you to reach out and call me. My card.

MARCUS

I'm not that crazy. I like horror films because it's an escape. But I don't want to escape, you know, life. I want to die in peace.

CRYSTAL

Just in case. Seems to be catching. This mind virus or something.

MARCUS

Yeah. But don't tell my dad I talked to you.

CRYSTAL

We didn't plan to.

MARCUS

Because if he hears I was with the cops, he'll smack me upside the head. He doesn't get it.

CRYSTAL

I understand. I had a father who hit me. And he didn't think much of my intelligence either. Remember. No one else can define you. Be your own strength.

MARCUS

Okay. Bye.

Marcus takes off into the shadows of the city streets.

CRYSTAL
More questions than answers, Chief.

MARCUS
Just humor me. Halloween's coming
and I'd like these unexplained
deaths off the front page.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

Crystal enters her apartment to hear Dion sighing audibly at
a table in the dining room.

CRYSTAL
I can hear the frustration already.

DINING ROOM

His teacher LARRY (54), short, bald and flustered, sits next
to Dion.

DION
Algebra Two is kicking my ass.

CRYSTAL
Language, young man!

LARRY
Good afternoon, Crystal. How are
you?

CRYSTAL
Fine, Larry. How's the patient?

LARRY
He shows signs of improvement but
no passion for math.

DION
I don't need to be good at math.
I'm going to play in the NBA. I'm a
baller not a brainer.

LARRY
See?

DION
I mean, I should be at school
practicing with the team. Not here
learning quadratic bullshit!

CRYSTAL
Dion! Don't you dare talk that way!

LARRY

Time's about up anyway.

Crystal hands a check to Larry who nods and leaves. Crystal takes Dion's hand.

CRYSTAL

Honey, I don't want you messing with the rough element. And do you know how many people try out for the NBA? The odds are against you.

DION

Against me if I don't practice! If you don't let me play with the team, I'll just die!

CRYSTAL

We talked about this!

DION

BUT YOU'RE MESSING WITH MY FUTURE!

CRYSTAL

Don't get loud like your father.

DION

Dad would let me play.

CRYSTAL

And your dad would hit you when he got angry. He put your mother into the hospital. You want to be around someone who's abusive like that?

DION

No.

CRYSTAL

Go to your room and finish your homework. We'll table this discussion for now.

DION

Aww shit!

Dion punches the wall. A picture falls down.

CRYSTAL

That's it. No video games for a week.

Dion storms out of the room. A door SLAMS from down the hall.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
It's for your own good!

MAYA (44), Latina maid/babysitter, tall, large frame, you don't want to mess with her, walks by, carrying the trash.

MAYA
Miss Crystal. You want me to stay tonight?

CRYSTAL
Could you? I have a date.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal gets ready for her date. On her makeup table are framed pics of Dion and her parents, MAURICE and GEORGIA (both in their 50s in the pics). Crystal HEARS their voices as she puts on her makeup:

GEORGIA (V.O.)
It wasn't abuse. Your daddy just didn't spare the rod. Thank the good Lord he didn't. You would've turned out even more stubborn.

MAURICE (V.O.)
God says do it, I do it.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)
Never mind that it was abuse.

MAURICE (V.O.)
You know, now that you've graduated from college, you're suddenly a victim. You should be thanking us for raising you right!

CRYSTAL (V.O.)
You've got it all wrong. I got my degree in spite of my upbringing!

Crystal shuts her eyes for a moment and then checks her look in the mirror. She's pleased. She's who she is and nothing's going to stop her.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER - NIGHT

ARCHIBALD (41), English, red-haired with red mustache, precisely put together with stylish glasses, hands Crystal a rose. Dion lounges on the couch, twirling a basketball.

CRYSTAL
Thank you, kind sir.

ARCHIBALD
Of course, m' lady. Now I don't mean to set an anxious tone, but it's late and we should be off.

CRYSTAL
Dion, you listen to Maya.

DION
Where you going?

CRYSTAL
Dinner and a movie.

DION
Horror movie?

ARCHIBALD
Uh, no. We're seeing a Swedish domestic drama.

DION
Figures.

ARCHIBALD
Bye now, Dion.

Crystal and Archibald go out the front door.

MAYA
Mr. Dion. What you planning on doing tonight?

DION
Watching the Bulls play.

MAYA
Don't mope so much. You got a mama who loves you very much.

DION
If she loved me, she'd let me play.

MAYA
She's just worried. Black boys die in this city.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - DAY

Antoine shuffles out of the building. He stops and looks back. Then shrugs.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Taking a left on the city block, Antoine walks into the park and sits on a bench, a weird smile now forming.

ANTOINE
Yo, bring it on.

He's near the center of the park where a bunch of statues of artists are all in various poses. Suddenly, the heads on the statues turn and look at him.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)
Shit!

The Statues slowly come to life, climbing off their pedestals, each with a sinister look. Antoine gets up from the bench and darts out of the park, the statues all following in odd, jerky motion.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Antoine blazes by the PASSERSBY. Then he stops. It's impossible but the Statues have caught up somehow and are close enough to almost grab Antoine.

He tears down the street but when he turns the corner, the Statues are there. Somehow they've gotten ahead of him. Panicked, he does a u-turn and then darts into the first open door of the first building he sees.

INT. BUILDING - DAY

He slams the door shut. Safe. He lets out a sigh of relief. It's over.

Then there's a banging noise. The statues pound on the door.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)
Shit.

Antoine turns to see where he's at. It's a warehouse full of

MANNEQUINS.

ANTOINE (CONT'D)

Oh hell no.

One mannequin turns its head at Antoine. Then the others slowly, awkwardly walk toward him. He runs to the back of the large room.

The statues bust through the door, sending shards of wood everywhere. The mannequins stop, as if silently acknowledging their fellow inanimate monsters. They coalesce into one frightful group and move sporadically toward Antoine.

He tries the back door, but it's locked. He turns to see their evil faces and freezes in total fright.

INT. HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - DAY

Chief Winters confers with Crystal.

CRYSTAL

If a horror movie is really scary, it can activate the threat-response region of the brain. Right after that rush, you get a kind of high.

WINTERS

They're addicts. Fear junkies.

CRYSTAL

And there's the social contagion aspect. The 'cool' factor. Are you brave enough to go out on a scary high? I dare you to scare me to death!

WINTERS

We have to stop this before it grows.

CRYSTAL

But what can we do without an address?

WINTERS

Public service announcements. Warnings?

CRYSTAL

I have another idea.

WINTERS

Listening.

CRYSTAL

I'll join the club.

WINTERS

The club.

CRYSTAL

The depressed late teen, early twenties club. The Gen Z, doomed generation, addicted to images of depravity on movie screens.

WINTERS

Then this mysterious leather-clad woman will hand you a flyer.

CRYSTAL

Right.

WINTERS

Then we get the address and case the operation.

CRYSTAL

No, they're too smart to reveal anything. How about I get a flyer and then go to the euthanasia service and sign up for a fright fest?

WINTERS

No, no. Who knows what they're doing? Could be drug induced. Some kind of psyop.

CRYSTAL

No drugs in any of the victims outside of caffeine, nicotine and pot.

WINTERS

You'd be willing to do that?

CRYSTAL

Chief, I may be young but there isn't anything I haven't seen.

WINTERS

I don't know.

CRYSTAL
To find out their methodology, I'd
have to be a client.

WINTERS
You could request any kind of
backup to follow you. We'll
surveil.

CRYSTAL
Those kids were disturbed. And
their fragile minds weren't as
strong as mine.

Winters pulls out his phone and pulls up an ad.

WINTERS
There's a Halloween convention.

CRYSTAL
Yeah, I saw that. The Department
covers my all-day pass, right?

INT. APARTMENT - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Archibald, in an apron, brings a platter out to Crystal and
Dion. Maya helps with the sides.

ARCHIBALD
Maya dear, sit down. I've got this.

MAYA
Thank you, Mr. Archibald.

DION
What is that junk?

ARCHIBALD
It's salmon with a Maple Dijon
sauce.

DION
I hate fish. Can you make me a
hamburger?

ARCHIBALD
I could. But I'd rather you try out
my dish. I put a lot of tender,
loving care into it.

CRYSTAL
Dion, you eat all that salmon. We
can't always eat hamburgers.

DION
Looks gross.

CRYSTAL
I'm apologize for my uncouth son,
Archibald. He's upset that he's not
playing for the basketball team.

ARCHIBALD
I got the recipe off TikTok.

DION
Like hell you did. I'm heating up a
burrito.

CRYSTAL
Damn it, Dion! You don't talk like
that to my guest!

Dion bolts from the room. Archibald winces and then sits
down.

MAYA
I'll get after him.

Maya leaves. Crystal's phone rings. It's from her parents.
She clicks it over to voicemail.

ARCHIBALD
You never talk about mom and dad.

CRYSTAL
And for good reason. They're kind
of... backwards.

ARCHIBALD
A bit old fashioned, I take it?

CRYSTAL
Like the Old Testament. Fire and
brimstone. You're going to hell if
you do this.

ARCHIBALD
Ah. Well, maybe I can meet them
some time and help educate them.

CRYSTAL
I doubt it, Archibald. Their
fortress is impregnable.

Archibald pats her hand. Crystal sighs in frustration.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal tosses and turns.

BEGIN DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. CRYSTAL'S PARENT'S HOME - DAY

Crystal (12 here) runs from Maurice who holds a paddle. She's headed for the front door.

MAURICE

Girl, if you don't straighten up,
you're going to end up in the Lake
of Fire!

CRYSTAL

There's no such thing as a Lake of
Fire!

MAURICE

There damn sure is. Look!

Maurice points and the front door swings open, revealing a
imposing conflagration. Crystal stops running. There's
nowhere to go.

MAURICE (CONT'D)

Take your lickin' and learn from
it!

Maurice approaches with the paddle.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal wakes up in bed, covered in sweat. She tosses off the
covers and stares at the ceiling.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Crystal eats breakfast with Dion as a small TV plays the
news. A REPORTER interviews STUDENTS.

REPORTER (ON TV)

We asked some Gen Z kids to comment on the rash of deaths where the victims appear to be scared stiff, if you'll excuse the expression.

COLLEGE STUDENT #1

They were into horror flicks. Too into them. It's a sick kind of cosplay, if you ask me.

REPORTER

Horror films are quite popular with the younger set. Why is that?

COLLEGE STUDENT #2

I guess, it makes you feel good to see people who are in worse situations than you are.

COLLEGE STUDENT #3

Yeah, makes your hellish life seem not-so-criinge, dude.

REPORTER

But why die by fright?

COLLEGE STUDENT #2

If you're really, really scared, you don't think about dying, you're too busy being scared.

COLLEGE STUDENT #3

Like when you're on a roller coaster and it's going into that big dip, there's that intense thrill. Then you're dead!

REPORTER

So you're kind of going out on a high?

COLLEGE STUDENT #2

Yeah! Like fentanyl.

The Student giggles.

COLLEGE STUDENT #1

Your average horror fan doesn't want to die. The high for us is knowing it's not real.

COLLEGE STUDENT #3
But this is a cult, man. These
freaks are really wack-a-doo.

Crystal turns off the TV.

DION
Hey!

CRYSTAL
You watch too many horror films.

DION
I don't blame those kids.

They eat in silence.

CRYSTAL
Dion, are you that depressed?

DION
Of course. You're stopping my
career in the NBA.

CRYSTAL
No I'm not.

DION
Then can I play on the team?

CRYSTAL
What about your tutor session?

DION
I ain't gonna be no engineer.

CRYSTAL
Proper English please.

DION
Anyway, teacher isn't coming this
week. His sister is getting
married.

Crystal looks out the window. Sunny. Blue skies.

CRYSTAL
I suppose being locked up in your
room isn't all that healthy.

DION
So?

CRYSTAL
Couldn't you just play close by?
With adult supervision?

DION
Not on the team?

CRYSTAL
I just had to watched a boy get put
into the morgue. He used to play
basketball for your school.

DION
So?

CRYSTAL
It may look like the school is
watching you kids but violence
breaks out in the locker rooms, on
the bus. Many players are in gangs.

DION
I don't believe that.

CRYSTAL
Maybe later, you can play on the
team. Just stay close to home now.

DION
You think it's safer on the streets
than in school gyms?

CRYSTAL
This is a good neighborhood. We
know everyone on the block.

DION
I guess.

CRYSTAL
And Maya can kick serious ass.
She'll watch you and call me
immediately if anything goes down.

DION
But I need to be on the team!!!

CRYSTAL
Come on. Work with me.

DION
If all I got is to play hoops with
Maya watching, I'll take it.

CRYSTAL
Look, let's try this arrangement
out for now. Okay?

DION
But then if it's all cool, I play
for the school?

CRYSTAL
I'm looking into a private school.
That could work.

DION
Okay.

CRYSTAL
See, I'm not as stifling as you
think I am.

DION
No, not as stifling today.

CRYSTAL
Dion.

DION
What?

CRYSTAL
You're all I have in this world.
And there's a lot of danger outside
these doors.

Dion looks out the window and shrugs.

EXT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Crystal checks her tigress makeup in a compact. She's dressed in a tiger stripes jumper. With little, plastic pointed ears and a tail. Her hair is a bit unruly.

HORROR FANS dressed in various Halloween costumes mob the front doors. Crystal joins the crowd as it flows inside.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

Exhibits and concession booths line the floor. The costumes make the scene feel as though it were a living nightmare, albeit with a more friendly atmosphere.

Crystal searches the crowd for someone handing flyers, but there's nothing. Only endless merchandise and autograph signing booths with horror movie STARS.

She spies a group of GOTH GIRLS, all in their early 20s and slinks over to them.

CRYSTAL
You girls getting freaky?

GOTH GIRL #1
You know it, tiger lady.

One of the Girls yanks on her tail. Crystal swats her away.

CRYSTAL
Careful. Kitty has claws!

EXT. CONVENTION CENTER - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The Horror Fans stream out and get into their cars or catch rides. Crystal exits with her new friends, the Goth crew.

CRYSTAL
Well, that was the shit.

GOTH GIRL
I know, right?

CRYSTAL
Wish it didn't have to end.

GOTH GIRL
It doesn't. Come with us, Crystal!
We're partying up the street.

Crystal accidentally bumps into a MAN dressed as the Devil.

DEVIL
Pardon me, mortal.

CRYSTAL
Righteous outfit. Or unrighteous.

DEVIL
You want to sell me your soul?

CRYSTAL
Not today, dude. But try me when
I'm hungover.

Crystal giggles. The others in her group giggle as well.

As the group rounds a corner, Crystal spies Ronnie, the leather clad, dark beauty holding her flyers. Jackpot!

Crystal walks nonchalantly by her. Ronnie hands a flier to one GIRL in the group who appears to be a little more sullen than the rest.

RONNIE
Got something for you.

SAD GIRL
Whatever.

Crystal maneuvers to get a look at the flyer. But the girl stuffs it quickly into her purse.

CRYSTAL
Hey, what is that? A party promo?
Might be fun.

SAD GIRL
I don't know.

CRYSTAL
Can I see?

The Sad Girl acts put upon, but reaches into her purse. As she does, the flyer disintegrates.

SAD GIRL
Sorry.

CRYSTAL
Not your fault. Hey girls! Gotta bounce. See you next time!

GOTH GIRL
Aw, really Crystal?

CRYSTAL
Yeah. Got a text from Big Daddy.
I'll catch up next time.

Crystal turns around and walks behind another group of HORROR FANS in post-apocalyptic gear. Ronnie hands one a flyer.

APOCALYPTIC KID #1
What's that?

APOCALYPTIC KID #2
I don't know. Something about scaring you to death.

APOCALYPTIC KID #1
Must be a haunted house attraction.
What's the address?

Crystal leans in to hear as the Mad Max kid reads the address aloud, but then a van pulls up and the driver hits his HORN. The sound is so piercing, it causes Crystal to put her fingers in her ears. When it stops, the Apocalyptic Kids have already gotten into the van.

Crystal watches more fans leave, waiting for the flyer to be handed out again. One GIRL dressed as a witch is given one and she immediately tosses it on the ground.

Crystal casually descends behind her and picks it up.

As she walks, Crystal examines the flyer but when she tries to read the address, THE NUMBERS ARE ALL BLURRY. She rubs her eyes, squinting at the address but there's no way to read it. Then the flyer crumbles in her hand.

She looks up and makes eye contact with Ronnie who smirks.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - DAY

Wendy, from the original crew of friends, walks out of the building, appearing a bit dazed.

INT. WENDY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Wendy looks at her face in the mirror as puts on dark makeup. Her attractive OLDER SISTER (22) comes in.

OLDER SISTER
What are you doing with my mascara?

WENDY
I like the way they make your
lashes look.

OLDER SISTER
It can't work miracles.

The Older Sister grabs the makeup.

WENDY
That's okay. I'm getting my own
makeup. I gotta go out looking like
a real Scream Queen.

OLDER SISTER
Whatever. Freak.

The Older Sister leaves the room. Wendy pulls out her phone and does a selfie. She posts it on Snapchat.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Wendy strolls through the mall. As she does, the SHOPPERS all look at her with either repugnance or outright horror.

WENDY

What?

Some point at her and run.

WENDY (CONT'D)

Do I have something in my teeth?

INT. CRYSTAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Crystal looks at a print-out of what could be the flyer. It reads: If you're looking to scare yourself to death, come to our studio! Address: 873 N. Orange St.

Winters looks over her shoulder.

WINTERS

Think it's them?

CRYSTAL

I don't know. Found it hanging on a wall at the college. I have to check it out regardless.

WINTERS

You seem a bit more intrigued.

CRYSTAL

This could be the work of a very clever and demented serial killer.

WINTERS

You really have come around.

CRYSTAL

They do feel like orchestrated hits. There's planning. Selection of victims. Who they are and how they do the hits, I do not know.

WINTERS

How are you sleeping these days?
Any nightmares?

CRYSTAL
No. I sleep soundly.

WINTERS
Just the spooky nature of this. The
leather-clad woman, the scary
costumes, the grim sub-culture.

CRYSTAL
You just don't get me, Winters.

The Chief chuckles. Crystal leaves.

EXT. STUDIO - DAY

It's a soundstage in a business district. Crystal checks the flyer she got at the college. It's Orange Street. Then she walks up to the studio. She takes out her gun, just in case.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Wendy continues to walk through the mall. More and more PEOPLE gasp in horror at her face.

WENDY
What is it?

MAN
Halloween ain't until next week!

WENDY
What are you talking about?

Wendy shuffles into a large crowd with a panicky gait.

INT. STUDIO - FOYER - DAY

Crystal enters and hears HOWLING. She darts past the RECEPTIONIST, flashing her badge.

RECEPTIONIST
No, you can't go in there!

INT. SOUNDSTAGE - DAY

Crystal enters a soundstage where a horror-movie set has been created. It's a haunted mansion with sinewy spider webs everywhere. There's a small digital camera on a stand. In the center of the scene is a JADED TEEN BOY.

A man in a WEREWOLF suit stops HOWLING when he sees Crystal.
The DIRECTOR of the scene stands up from his chair.

DIRECTOR
CUT! What are you doing here?
You've ruined the mood?

CRYSTAL
I'm Detective Bennett, Chicago PD.
Is this your advertisement?

Crystal holds up the paper.

DIRECTOR
Yeah? So?

CRYSTAL
What exactly are you doing here?

JADED TEEN
I want my money back. This isn't
scary at all.

DIRECTOR
All sales are final.

JADED TEEN
But it was, like, my life savings.

CRYSTAL
I asked what is going on here?

DIRECTOR
We're just scaring kids. For a fee.

CRYSTAL
Scaring them to death?

DIRECTOR
No, it's just for fun. If they die,
that's up to them.

CRYSTAL
But your ad?

DIRECTOR
A little hyperbole. No one's died.

CRYSTAL
You do realize that there is a rash
of real deaths of young people who
appear to be paralyzed with fright?

DIRECTOR

Hello? That's why I did this. But
it's not illegal to film scenes.

Crystal puts her gun away.

CRYSTAL

You don't know what you're messing
with. There appears to be a real
serial killer behind this suicide
cult. By trying to capitalize on
it, you put yourself in jeopardy.

DIRECTOR

Okay, okay.

CRYSTAL

Do you have all your permits?

DIRECTOR

Come on, lady.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

The MALL SHOPPERS walking by Wendy express complete horror.
They panic and run. Confusion on her face, Wendy hurriedly
enters a department store.

INT. MAKEUP STORE - DAY

Wendy walks past the RETAIL TEAM at each counter. They all
collectively show wide eyes and disgusted faces. One ELDERLY
CLERK smiles through her revulsion.

CLERK

May I help you?

WENDY

I need some makeup. I want to look
like a scream queen.

CLERK

I'm sorry, what now?

WENDY

For like a horror show.

CLERK

Okay. I can see that.

WENDY
Some mascara and an eye brow
pencil, please.

The Clerk hands her some samples. Wendy goes to a mirror. Her reflection is of a MONSTROUSLY CONTORTED FACE, UGLY BEYOND IMAGINATION.

Her face looks as though it sank. Her eyes, lidded, droopy, dark. Her skin, covered with warts. Only a few strands of hair on her head.

Wendy screams and faints.

INT. SHOPPING MALL - DAY

Crystal and Winters make their way to the department store.

INT. MAKEUP COUNTER - DAY

They approach an EMT crew who have Wendy on oxygen and a stretcher. The elderly Clerk hovers over them. Wendy appears normal, back to her plain face.

WINTERS
She's still alive?

EMT #1
Just barely.

CLERK
Thank God they were at the food
court.

EMT #2
We were getting lunch when we heard
cries.

CRYSTAL
Will she be able to recover?

EMT #1
There's a good chance.

Crystal looks at Winters. Their first real lead is clinging to life. The EMTs cart Wendy out of the store.

EXT. STREET - DAY

The ambulance races through the streets.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

Wendy's family is startled by Crystal and Winters entering.

CRYSTAL
Chicago PD. We'll just be a second.

They leave. Wendy's Big Sister, appearing guilty, follows her parents out of the room.

BIG SISTER
Not my fault. She stole my makeup.

Crystal approaches Wendy as Winters takes a seat. Wendy's eyes flicker open.

CRYSTAL
Hi Wendy. I'm Detective Bennett.
Crystal.

WENDY
Hi.

CRYSTAL
They treating you okay?

WENDY
Fine.

CRYSTAL
May I ask you a couple questions?

Wendy turns away.

WENDY
I'd rather not think about it.

Wendy picks up a mirror that's been given to her from underneath her blanket. She stares at her face.

CRYSTAL
Okay. Then may I ask you just one little question? I'll be quick.

WENDY
Do you think I'm ugly?

CRYSTAL
No, no, precious girl. You're alive and beautiful.

WENDY
Because for a while I was a real, live, zombie face.

CRYSTAL
Is that what happened?

WENDY
And everyone pointed their fingers
and ran from me in the mall.

CRYSTAL
I'm sorry. But you're not ugly.

WENDY
I like being scared at monster
movies, but I don't like being the
monster.

She laughs a tiny laugh.

CRYSTAL
No one does.

WENDY
That's what Corson did. He twisted
up my face.

CRYSTAL
Corson?

WENDY
He sets up the whole thing.

CRYSTAL
Oh.

WENDY
Now I know it was stupid. You know,
to sign the contract and all.

CRYSTAL
Always better to be among the
living. There's always hope.

WENDY
I know I'm not ugly.

CRYSTAL
No.

Wendy looks again in her mirror.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Wendy. Do you remember the address?

WENDY
Where Corson lives?

CRYSTAL

Yes.

WENDY

Don't remember the number. I wrote it down somewhere. But the street!

CRYSTAL

Yes?

WENDY

Olive. Like olive oil dressing.

CRYSTAL

Great. Olive Street.

WENDY

Where did I write down the number?

CRYSTAL

Was it downtown?

WENDY

Yeah. I took the bus.

CRYSTAL

Okay. Were there any restaurants or stores next to it, that you may recall?

WENDY

No. I'm not good with numbers so I wrote it down.

Crystal looks at Winters. The Doctor comes back in.

DOCTOR

She needs to rest.

WENDY

I'm sorry I can't remember.

CRYSTAL

It's okay, Wendy. Be well.

WENDY

Bye!

Crystal and Winters walk to the door. Wendy waves and then Crystal sees the number! It's written in pen on Wendy's arm. She races up to her.

WENDY (CONT'D)

What?

CRYSTAL

The number. You wrote it on your arm.

Wendy looks at it and laughs another little laugh.

WENDY

That's right! Good catch, Crystal!

CRYSTAL

4225 Olive. Thanks again, honey!

EXT. HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Winters and Crystal chat outside the hospital.

WINTERS

Are you sure about this? You're going to be risking your life. Every person who's submitted to this has ended up dead.

CRYSTAL

We don't know that. Others could have escaped. Just like Wendy. And I'm not some scared kid.

WINTERS

Give it a night.

CRYSTAL

Another child could be dead.

WINTERS

Are you sure?

CRYSTAL

If we want the deaths to stop, I have to do this.

WINTERS

But you're signing up to be killed.

CRYSTAL

I could be killed every day investigating routine homicides.

Winters sighs, rubs his eyes.

WINTERS

Maya taking care of Dion?

CRYSTAL
Yes. Thankfully.

WINTERS
Do you want back-up?

CRYSTAL
No. I want to go in alone.

WINTERS
But that leather lady knows you.

CRYSTAL
She's seen me in tiger makeup.
Maybe she won't be there. You asked
me to go undercover, right?

WINTERS
I don't care, I'm having a sedan
parked out front.

CRYSTAL
If you must.

INT. CRYSTAL'S CAR - NIGHT

Crystal speaks with Maya on the bluetooth.

CRYSTAL
Did you watch him? Okay, maybe
basketball in our neighborhood is a
good thing. Just please always keep
an eye out. I should be home in a
couple hours. Thank you, Maya.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - NIGHT

Crystal approaches the building. The red button doesn't
flash. She walks to the intercom and pushes the button.

VOICE (V.O.)
Who is this?

CRYSTAL
Hi, I'm Crystal. I got the flyer.

VOICE (V.O.)
I don't have any record of a
Crystal anywhere.

CRYSTAL

Can I please come in and explain? I really want the service.

There's a beat. Then the doors open. Crystal enters.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

It's the same Receptionist from before.

RECEPTIONIST

Are you sure you were handed an invite?

CRYSTAL

How else would I know the address?

Crystal walks toward the double doors.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

The office is in here, isn't it?

RECEPTIONIST

Wait, you have to be chosen. I can't let you in!

Crystal barges in anyway.

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

The Bodyguard, Lawyer and Corson look up, surprised.

BODYGUARD

You can't just come in here.

The Bodyguard grabs Crystal.

CRYSTAL

I just want the service. I couldn't get a flyer, but I found your address and decided to drop in.

LAWYER

Found the address? Impossible!

CORSON

It's okay. Let her go.

LAWYER

But sir, she hasn't been summoned!

CORSON
I'll deal with this. Welcome,
Crystal Bennett.

CRYSTAL
You know my name?

CORSON
Of course. What I don't understand
is why a young woman who has
everything going for her is seeking
to end her life?

CRYSTAL
Oh, you gotta ask? Look outside.
Riots. The cost of eggs. Man's
inhumanity to man. Future's bleak
as can be.

Corson laughs.

CORSON
But my sense of you says you're a
skeptic. You don't believe in the
occult.

Crystal blinks. How the hell does he know so much?

CRYSTAL
I didn't. I'm coming around to it.

CORSON
Is that a fact? Your parents
believe. But unfortunately, they're
in league with the Nazarene.

CRYSTAL
How-- ?

CORSON
You're not my ordinary client. But
my boss would love to get someone
like you.

CRYSTAL
Like me?

CORSON
Look, let's cut to the chase.
You're an all-business type. There
are legalities to take care of.

Corson nods to the Lawyer who holds up a contract.

CRYSTAL
I have to sign something?

CORSON
We're engaging in a transaction,
right?

CRYSTAL
How much?

CORSON
Nothing. Just sign.

CRYSTAL
So you promise to scare me to
death? And it costs me nothing?

CORSON
That's right.

CRYSTAL
How do you do it?

CORSON
You don't want to know.

CRYSTAL
What if I do?

CORSON
You don't. Rest assured, you'll get
the fright of your life. And then
you'll pass onto the afterlife.

CRYSTAL
To hell?

CORSON
You don't believe in hell. So
nothing to worry about, right?
Just, sign away.

CRYSTAL
Okay.

The Lawyer holds up a clipboard with the contract and a pen.
Crystal takes the pen and is about to sign when she stops.

CORSON
Yes?

CRYSTAL
This is a whole sell-your-soul kind
of deal.

CORSON
Crystal, Crystal. Listen to me.
You're going to love this. It's the
perfect, grand exit to a miserable,
sad existence. It's what you claim
to want, isn't it?

Crystal signs the contract.

CRYSTAL
Bring it on.

CORSON
Come over to me. Take my hand.

Crystal takes Corson's hand. Flinches at the chill.

CORSON (CONT'D)
Oh yes. This is going to be fun.

His face does a series of evil contortions, eyes roll into
his head, his tongue again sliding out like a baby snake.
Then he lets go.

CORSON (CONT'D)
Okay, then. Off you go, Crystal.

CRYSTAL
When?

CORSON
Could be as soon as you step out
the door. Could be tomorrow. Could
be in a week. That's for me to
decide. And it wouldn't be a
surprise if I told you. Scares
depend... on surprises!

Corson does a quick flurry of "jazz hands" but instead of
looking corny, it looks scary.

CRYSTAL
So true.

Crystal turns and slowly leaves.

CORSON
Bye, Crystal. See you soon.

CRYSTAL
Sure.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - NIGHT

Dazed, Crystal makes her way to her car. She looks up and a HOMELESS MAN scampers away, frightened. She climbs inside and drives away.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal tosses and turns in bed. Another nightmare.

Suddenly, she wakes up. As soon as she turns on the light, she sees framed pictures of her parents. The eyes on the photograph seem to move and follow her. Crystal shakes her head and rubs her eyes.

CRYSTAL

You can't be ghosts. You're not
dead yet.

Crystal pulls the pictures down. Then she reaches for a sleeping pill and downs it with a half-full glass of water. After a quick survey of the room, she turns out the light.

INT. HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - DAY

Demonstrating a drawing ability, Crystal sketches the face of Corson. She hands it to Winters.

CRYSTAL

He had all the earmarks of a serial
killer. The confidence. The game
playing. And he was definitely a
narcissist. I asked, but he
wouldn't disclose his methodology.

WINTERS

Handsome devil, isn't he?

CRYSTAL

His personality kind of kills it.

WINTERS

So nothing then?

CRYSTAL

Nothing to book him on. Yet.

WINTERS

I'm surprised they let you come in
cold off the street.

CRYSTAL

Oh, they were freaked out at first.
But I managed to convince this
"Corson" I was legit.

WINTERS

No last name?

CRYSTAL

No, just Corson.

She types the name into her computer.

WINTERS

Odd name.

CRYSTAL

Nothing in the police records.

She Googles.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Here we go. Old Testament false
idol and demon overlord. One of
four principle kings who presided
over seventy-two demons. Bunch of
nonsense.

WINTERS

Give me the truth. Were you scared?

CRYSTAL

No. Hell no. It was less
intimidating than you'd think. I'm
too strong for his mental tricks.

WINTERS

I put a car out in front of their
building last night anyway.

CRYSTAL

Oh, I saw it. Callow and Hepner.

WINTERS

Too dangerous for you solo.

CRYSTAL

How long did you give them?

WINTERS

Fifteen minutes. Then they were
going to come in and get you.

CRYSTAL
Completely unnecessary.

WINTERS
So now what happens?

CRYSTAL
Now the boogey men comes after me.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dion bounces a basket ball to another KID on the sidewalk.
Crystal's car enters the city block.

INT. CRYSTAL'S CAR - DAY

Crystal reaches for her garage opener. While waiting for the parking garage gate to open, Crystal spots Dion. She waves.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Dion doesn't see his mother, he's too engrossed in tossing the ball back to his friend. Suddenly, a black van pulls up. A KIDNAPPER with a black ski mask, jumps out and grabs Dion.

DION
Hey, what-- ?

He throws the boy into the back of the van.

INT. CRYSTAL'S CAR - DAY

Crystal's eyes grow wide. She rolls down her window.

CRYSTAL
Dion! Hey! That's my boy!

EXT. STREET - DAY

The van's tires SCREECH as it takes off down the block.
Crystal's car immediately pursues it.

INT. CRYSTAL'S CAR - DAY

Crystal pushes her Bluetooth preset.

CRYSTAL

This is Crystal Bennett. I'm pursuing kidnappers on Fourth Street heading toward Wicker Park. It's a black van. I'd guess from the nineties. No license plate. Yes. They, they have my boy!

She chokes away a sob.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Please alert all black and whites in the area!

EXT. STREET - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The van pulls a U-turn right in front of Crystal's car. She nearly hits them but her brakes stop on a dime.

The van heads for the freeway onramp. Crystal cuts off two cars with her U-turn but makes good time, eventually catching up with the Kidnappers.

INT. CRYSTAL'S CAR - DAY

Crystal pulls her gun out of its holster.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

Crystal's car comes up on the driver's side, eventually aligning her with the driver. She motions to pull over with her gun. The driver rolls down his window. He has also has a gun. BLAM BLAM. He shoots Crystal's passenger window out.

Crystal decelerates and resumes her position behind the van. But then she pulls up on the driver's side again. Allowing a little distance, she's able to target the wheel. She shoots the rear tire. BOOM! The van starts to swerve.

Weaving in the lane, the van manages to get on the off-ramp. Crystal follows close behind.

EXT. COMMERCIAL DISTRICT - STREET - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The van zigzags through the streets and then finds an alley. It pulls into it. Crystal turns into it as well.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

The van sits quietly at the end of the alley.

INT. CRYSTAL'S CAR - DAY

Crystal's on Bluetooth again.

CRYSTAL
I'm in an alley off Washington and
14th streets.

Crystal gets a tight grip on her gun and opens the door.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Crystal slowly approaches the van.

EXT. VAN - DAY

The Kidnapper kicks the door open. He rips the tape off
Dion's mouth. The other Thug helps him take Dion out.

DION
MOM! HELP!!!

Crystal points her gun at the men.

CRYSTAL
Let him go.

KIDNAPPER
We're getting paid to apprehend
your son. If you let us go, he
won't be hurt, we collect our dough
and you can deal with our client.

CRYSTAL
Corson?

KIDNAPPER
That's privileged information.

CRYSTAL
I'm not leaving without my son.

KIDNAPPER
That's a shame; neither are we.

The Kidnapper picks up Dion and using him as a shield fires
at Crystal.

The impact of the bullet on her arm causes a reflex to snap in her hand and the gun goes off. BLAM! Blood gushes from Dion's head. It's been partially shot off by Crystal.

KIDNAPPER (CONT'D)
You ruined everything.

The Kidnapper throws Dion on the ground.

KIDNAPPER (CONT'D)
Let's get the hell out of here.

The Kidnapper and the Driver hop in the van and roll out of the alley.

As Crystal picks up her son, she SCREAMS in terror.

CRYSTAL
I NEED AN AMBULANCE!

Crystal looks down at the gore on her son's head, horrified and then, remembering, thinking, closes her eyes.

CRYSTAL
Wait. This can't be! It's not happening! Part of the psyop.

WHEN SHE OPENS HER EYES BACK UP, CRYSTAL FINDS HERSELF...

EXT. STREET - DAY

On the block where she lives. Her car is still idling before the apartment building. She's on her knees in the middle of the street, pointing her gun out at nothing. A group of PEOPLE have formed around her.

Police car sirens SOUND in the distance.

MAN
You were screaming and then you start shooting at the empty street.

CRYSTAL
Sorry, I didn't realize.

Crystal takes a deep breath. She looks around her. No Dion.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Wait, where's my son? WHERE'S DION?

MAN
He went inside.

A squad car pulls up.

MAN (CONT'D)

Miss Bennett was screaming and shot
her gun at the empty street.

COP

Detective Bennett?

CRYSTAL

It was a mistake.

COP

You on a new case?

CRYSTAL

I have to find my son.

COP

Wait, Detective Bennett!

Crystal climbs in her car and drives it into the garage.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Crystal bursts into the apartment, screaming.

CRYSTAL

DION? DION WHERE ARE YOU?

She races through the DINING ROOM.

THE KITCHEN

THE HALLWAY

DION'S BEDROOM

HER BEDROOM

Then she's back out the front door.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

She darts by the Cop.

COP

Detective, this doesn't look good.

CRYSTAL

I have to find my son.

She looks at the Neighbors who are all watching.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
WHERE'S THE BASKETBALL COURT?

WOMAN
On the corner.

The Woman points. And Crystal bolts down the street. She pulls her gun out.

EXT. BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Crystal runs to the court. She sees a group of BLACK KIDS all around Dion's age playing a pickup game. Then she spots Dion shooting a three pointer. SWISH!

CRYSTAL
DION! DION GET OVER HERE RIGHT NOW!

She waves her gun at him. Maya stands up.

MAYA
Miss Crystal?

DION
Mom, what the hell?

CRYSTAL
We're going home!

DION
But mom, you said I could play!
Maya's been watching me.

Maya nods and raises her phone in the air.

MAYA
It was perfectly safe here.
And I have 9-1-1 on speed dial.

CRYSTAL
You're in danger!

Dion throws the ball at the other kids who watch, stunned at Crystal's manic behavior.

DION
You're embarrassing shit out of me.

CRYSTAL
I don't care.

DION
What's with the gun?

CRYSTAL
You're not safe on the street.

DION
But you said I could!

CRYSTAL
Let's go home.

Crystal, Maya and Dion march down the street.

EXT. CRYSTAL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Chief Winters is waiting at the porch.

WINTERS
Crystal? What happened?

CRYSTAL
I'll explain as soon as Dion goes
inside with Maya.

DION
Life sucks dick!

CRYSTAL
Dion!

Dion and Maya go inside. Crystal tries to catch her breath.

WINTERS
Is this part of the thing?

CRYSTAL
He's going after my boy.

WINTERS
But you were screaming and shooting
your gun.

CRYSTAL
I don't know how he did it.

Winters gives her a concerned look.

WINTERS
Dion's going to be okay?

CRYSTAL
He's staying inside!

WINTERS
Crystal, did you lose it?

CRYSTAL
I'm sorry.

WINTERS
I'm not looking for an apology. I
just want to know what the hell
happened here just now.

CRYSTAL
I'll explain.

WINTERS
Come on, get in my car.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Crystal, Dion and Maya eat a late dinner.

CRYSTAL
I have to take a psych eval. I
could be suspended. Or worse.

MAYA
I understand your concern but
everything was fine.

CRYSTAL
I'm going to send Dion to my
friends in the country so you have
a week off, Maya.

DION
WHAT?

MAYA
If you say so, Miss Crystal.

CRYSTAL
Only for a little while, Dion.
Someone is trying to get to us.

DION
You're just going nuts.

CRYSTAL
Dion, I need you to cooperate.
Please.

DION
Freak.

Crystal's phone rings.

CRYSTAL

Hi Joanne? Thanks for getting back to me. Okay, so you heard the message. Yeah, can I? For a week? It's okay with Hank? It's the case I'm on. I just want him away from the city. Yes, he's excited.

DION

Joanne is weird. My life is over.

CRYSTAL

Dion's excited to go fishing with Hank. Okay. Yes. We'll be there tomorrow first thing. Thank you so much. Bye. Yes, love you too.

Crystal sighs. At least Dion will be safe.

EXT. COUNTRY - DAY

Crystal's car goes down a long dirt road to a modest home with a half acre of land. There's a chicken coop and a menagerie of dogs, cats and a pig.

INT. COUNTRY HOUSE - DAY

Crystal and Dion enter with Dion's suitcase and his basketball. Crystal's friend JOANNE, tall, blonde and sweet looking (35) and her husband HANK (42), bald, chubby, smiling face, exchange hugs with her.

CRYSTAL

Dion, these are old friends of your mom's. We all went to high school together.

DION

I already met them before.

HANK

Dion, we have a guest room upstairs for you.

DION

Can I put up a hoop on the garage?

HANK

Uh, we'll see. Joanne's going to the store. Anything special you like to eat?

CRYSTAL

Burgers and hot dogs and burritos.

DION

I need Gatorade. I'm a baller. Dion takes his suitcase up the stairs.

JOANNE

How about some coffee, Crystal?

CRYSTAL

Please.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Crystal sips on her coffee while Joanne and Hank exchange concerned glances.

CRYSTAL

I don't expect you to understand it. I don't.

HANK

Well, whatever's going on, it sounds like city business.

CRYSTAL

I miss it out here. So peaceful. Something about the city that eats on kids. Makes them sullen.

JOANNE

Don't worry about Dion.

HANK

Yeah, do what you have to do.

JOANNE

I'm just curious. Why didn't you send him to your parents? They're just up the road. We see them all the time.

CRYSTAL

It's complicated. Let's just say we have different worldviews.

INT. MEDICAL OFFICE - WAITING ROOM - DAY

A RECEPTIONIST enters the room.

RECEPTIONIST

Miss Bennett? Dr. Burns will see you now.

CRYSTAL

Oh, thank goodness. I appreciate it. On such short notice.

RECEPTIONIST

Your referral helped.

CRYSTAL

Good ol' Chief.

INT. OFFICE - DAY

DR. BURNS (48), with piercing eyes behind thick glasses, pulls his chair up to where Crystal is reclining on a couch.

DR. BURNS

With hypnotic suggestion, we can fortify your focus.

CRYSTAL

I need my mind to be a steel trap.

DR. BURNS

We're going to start with some relaxation techniques. Take some deep breathes.

Crystal breathes deeply.

DR. BURNS

Okay, you're sinking deeper and deeper into a warm bath. Just letting go of all tension in your body. Clear your mind of all thoughts. How do you feel?

CRYSTAL

Very relaxed.

DR. BURNS

Good. Now I want you to slowly open your eyes and look at me.

Crystal opens her eyes but Dr. Burns' face has TRANSFORMED into a hideous, scowling grimace.

DR. BURNS (CONT'D)
YOU'LL NEVER BREAK FREE FROM HIS
GRIP. NEVER! HE WILL GET YOU SOONER
OR LATER.

CRYSTAL
What? No! NO, NO, NO!!

DR. BURNS
Corson always collects on his
payments.

Crystal panics, leaps from the couch.

INT. WAITING ROOM - DAY

She bolts past the Receptionist and the other PATIENT reading a magazine.

RECEPTIONIST
Are you okay, Miss Bennett?

Crystal exits, terrified. Dr. Burns emerges from his office.

DR. BURNS
Where did she go?

RECEPTIONIST
She freaked out.

DR. BURNS
We had just started the session.
She was relaxing and then...

EXT. MEDICAL BUILDING - DAY

Crystal breathes heavily but manages to regain composure as she heads to her car. She looks up at the sky for a moment.

CRYSTAL
Whatever game you're playing,
you're not going to win!

INT. HEADQUARTERS - OFFICE - DAY

Crystal downs an aspirin while she maneuvers through data on her computer. Winters sits in a chair next to her desk.

CRYSTAL

Everyone knows about "Project MK Ultra." If Corson is retired CIA, then he has the techniques.

WINTERS

Mind control.

CRYSTAL

Hypnotically induced anxieties. Most of their brainwashing techniques involve chemicals. But I don't think I was drugged. Maybe while in his office, they pumped something into the atmosphere?

WINTERS

Maybe he's a foreign agent?

CRYSTAL

What?

WINTERS

I mean, working for the Chinese. They have something called the Filin. It works by firing off low-frequency oscillations of powerful light. It disorients foes. They've used it in their Navy.

CRYSTAL

I don't remember any blasts of light. Except maybe in the hypnotist's office. I don't recall.

A COP enters.

COP

Chief, we got another one.

WINTERS

It's going to be a long Halloween. You okay, Bennett?

CRYSTAL

I'm determined to stay strong, Chief.

WINTERS

Call if you need me.

CRYSTAL

I'm going home and resting.

WINTERS
Smartest thing right now.

INT. CRYSTAL'S APARTMENT - FOYER - DAY

Crystal enters to find herself alone. She fidgets for a moment.

She looks through the curtains of her apartment to the street below. As the sun relinquishes its grasp on the day and the shadows grow, creepy looking TRICK-OR-TREATERS float by.

One is of a GRINNING SKELETON. Another of a VAMPIRE. A group of ZOMBIES stumble about. She closes the curtains. She picks up her phone.

CRYSTAL
Hi honey. I know this is late notice but since I don't have Dion this year, could you come over and help me hand out candy? You would? Ah, you're sweet. See you soon.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Crystal and Archibald eat popcorn and watch the old Vincent Price film, "The Masque of Red Death."

ARCHIBALD
This is actually a combination of two of Poe's finest: "The Masque of Red Death" and "Hop-frog."

CRYSTAL
It does seem a little padded out.

THE DOORBELL rings.

ARCHIBALD
I'll get it. Pause please.

CRYSTAL
Paused.

ARCHIBALD (O.S.)
Just adorable. Don't eat all your candy tonight! Ha ha.

Archibald returns.

ARCHIBALD

Two delightful little girls dressed
as ballerinas.

CRYSTAL

Maybe I should put on my costume.

ARCHIBALD

Ooo. Nothing diabolical, I hope.

CRYSTAL

No, I don't do scary stuff. It's a
Queen of Hearts outfit.

Archibald looks blankly.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

From "Alice in Wonderland."

ARCHIBALD

Ah! Perfect. Then I shall have to
find a Mad Hatter getup. We shall
do it right next year.

CRYSTAL

Yes, we shall.

The DOORBELL rings.

ARCHIBALD

Let's face it. We're never going to
finish this film.

CRYSTAL

I'll get it this time.

Crystal opens the door.

EXT. STOOP - NIGHT

On the porch outside her apartment stand all the DEAD SUICIDE
VICTIMS from the horror euthanasia, including the GOTH
BARISTA, BRYCE, ANTOINE, ET AL.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

It takes a moment for their decomposed, grey faces to
register but then Crystal's face turns pale.

SUICIDE CREW

TRICK OR TREAT!

CRYSTAL

What, what are you doing here?

GOTH BARISTA

We're waiting for you to join us.

CRYSTAL

Join?

BRYCE

Corson's throwing a wicked party.

Crystal freaks out and slams the door.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Archibald gets a look at Crystal and stands up.

ARCHIBALD

What's wrong?

CRYSTAL

It was all the victims. But it couldn't be.

ARCHIBALD

Sit down. What victims?

Crystal shakes her head.

CRYSTAL

Not real.

ARCHIBALD

I'll check the door.

CRYSTAL

No, don't.

But it's too late. Archibald is up and walking.

FOYER

Archibald opens the door. A GIRL dressed as a WITCH and a boy as a VAMPIRE stare at Archibald.

VAMPIRE

I didn't think we were that scary.

ARCHIBALD

No, no. That was just a joke.
Here's some candy, sinister duo.

He closes the door.

LIVING ROOM

Archibald sits down next to Crystal. Takes her head.

ARCHIBALD (CONT'D)
Just a normal, ever day, garden
variety witch and vampire.

CRYSTAL
I need to tell you about my case.
What's going on.

ARCHIBALD
I'll turn out the front lights.
Halloween's over here.

CRYSTAL
Yes.

Archibald turns off the TV and walks out of the room.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Archibald appears stunned by Crystal's story. He takes a big
gulp of his coffee. Crystal just stirs hers with a spoon.

CRYSTAL
That brings you up to date. I can't
even imagine what Dr. Burns must
think. I left his office like a
raving lunatic.

ARCHIBALD
I'm not sure I understand.

CRYSTAL
It's okay. I don't really either.

ARCHIBALD
But I want you to know that I'm
here for you.

CRYSTAL
That means a lot.

Archibald checks his watch.

ARCHIBALD
But it's getting late now. Look,
I'll call you when I get home.

CRYSTAL

Wait.

ARCHIBALD

What?

CRYSTAL

This isn't a romantic gesture
although I'm not saying that day
isn't coming soon. I mean, once our
commitment is sure--

ARCHIBALD

You want me... ?

CRYSTAL

Could you stay over?

ARCHIBALD

I could camp out right on the
couch.

CRYSTAL

No. Come to bed with me.

ARCHIBALD

Okay.

CRYSTAL

No funny stuff.

ARCHIBALD

No funny stuff.

CRYSTAL

Not yet.

ARCHIBALD

I completely understand. I shall
be, as always, a gentleman.

CRYSTAL

Thank you, Archibald.

Archibald stands up.

ARCHIBALD

Shall we?

CRYSTAL

Yes. I'm bushed.

ARCHIBALD

Tucked in by ten.

CRYSTAL
And Archibald?

ARCHIBALD
Yes, love?

CRYSTAL
If I start to hallucinate, go into
a trance, whatever this Corson puts
into my head to try and scare me,
just take my arm and shake me until
I snap out of it.

ARCHIBALD
I shall do so. Without manhandling
the lady.

CRYSTAL
It really is reassuring to have you
here.

ARCHIBALD
Not another word.

They both head for the staircase.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal snores lightly. Archibald watches her for a moment
and then turns over and falls asleep.

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

REVELERS are still out cruising the streets in their
costumes. Leaves flutter in their paths.

INT. CRYSTAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Crystal wakes up as if from a nightmare. She looks at the
clock: 11:30. She glances over at Archibald's side of the
bed. He's not there. The sheets have been pushed aside.

CRYSTAL
Archibald?

She sits up.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Archibald, are you in the bathroom?

No response.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
ARCHIBALD? WHERE ARE YOU?

Archibald enters the room with Dion in tow.

ARCHIBALD
Hello, love. I went and retrieved
your precious boy.

CRYSTAL
In the middle of the night? You
drove? Why did you do that?

ARCHIBALD
He was being beaten by your father.

CRYSTAL
But he's at Hank and Joanne's.

ARCHIBALD
Your parents came and got him.

Dion's neck and face are covered with bruises.

CRYSTAL
NO! THAT EVIL BASTARD!

ARCHIBALD
And he has something to tell you.
Seemed rather important.

CRYSTAL
I'm sorry your grandfather hurt
you, Dion. I tried to prevent that
from ever happening!

DION
Mom, stop. I have something to say.

CRYSTAL
What is it?

DION
Mom, if you die, I want to die too.

ARCHIBALD
Sporting little chap.

CRYSTAL
I'm not going to die.

DION

Yes you are. You signed a suicide pact with Corson. And your suicide will mess with my head. Can't play ball when I'm messed up in the head because of my dead mama.

CRYSTAL

No, no.

DION

He's going to collect your soul when you die. And I'm going too!

CRYSTAL

STOP! DION! STOP THIS!

Suddenly Dion's body ages. The skin wrinkles. His hair falls out. His eyes sag. Maggots appear and eat his flesh.

ARCHIBALD

This is better than anything Poe ever wrote, don't you think?

CRYSTAL

NOOOO, Dion. This can't be happening. NOOOOOOO!!!!!!

Finally the flesh starts to recede off Dion's face, leaving only the eyes in his bare skull. He smiles one last time.

DION

You're next, Mom. Later!

Dion collapses into a stack of bones.

ARCHIBALD

Actually, your grandfather didn't beat up Dion. I did! You really have poor taste in men.

Archibald lifts his fist as if to hit Crystal. She reaches for her gun off her night stand and shoots! BLAM! Then she closes her eyes and SCREAMS.

ARCHIBALD (CONT'D)

Crystal?

Crystal opens her eyes and sees Archibald, sitting up in bed, a bullet in the center of his forehead.

CRYSTAL

Archibald!!!!!! OH MY GOD! NO!

Archibald flops back onto his pillow, blood squirting out of his wound.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Can't be real. This is Corson's
mind game!

Crystal takes a deep breath. Closes her eyes and then opens them again. But Archibald really is dead. And that bullet in the center of his forehead really is gushing blood.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
It happened. It happened.

Crystal bolts out of bed.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Dion?

Crystal searches the bedroom, but there are no bones. No signs of Dion. She looks at Archibald again. Tears falling.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Archibald, I'm so sorry. I
shouldn't leave you, honey. But
it's my child. My father-- he's an
abuser! I have to go!

Crystal dresses. Puts on her gun holster. Then she picks up her phone.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
This is Detective Bennett. Please
send an ambulance to 2546 Lotus
Street, Apt. D. Yes, it's my
apartment. The door will be open.

Crystal places her hand on Archibald.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Please forgive me, dear man.

Then she scrambles out of the room.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
DION!!

INT. CRYSTAL'S CAR - NIGHT

Crystal drives as quickly as she possibly can, dodging the remaining TRICK OR TREATERS, mostly older kids partying in the streets. Crystal punches her preset button. The sound of a phone RINGING. Then someone picks up.

CRYSTAL
Joanne!!

INT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

Joanne and Hank sit before the boarding gate.

JOANNE
Crystal?

INTERCUT PHONE CALL

CRYSTAL
What's going on?

JOANNE
I tried to call you. Hank's mother died. We have to fly to New Jersey.

CRYSTAL
WHERE IS DION?

JOANNE
We just thought that since your folks were up the road--

CRYSTAL
YOU LEFT MY SON ALONE WITH MY FATHER?

JOANNE
Hey, Crystal. I tried to call you. No answer. And your folks were more than happy to take him. Didn't seem like there was anything wrong.

CRYSTAL
I have to save him!

JOANNE
Crystal. Try to understand. Hank's beside himself over his mother. We couldn't take Dion with us.

CRYSTAL
I'm sorry, Joanne. I'm sorry for your loss. I truly am. But my father! You don't understand.

JOANNE
I wish you'd just tell me what's going on.

But Crystal's hung up already. Joanne hugs a devastated Hank.

EXT. MAURICE AND GEORGIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Crystal pulls her car up to the house, situated on a bucolic end road. She stumbles to the porch and bangs on the door.

CRYSTAL
MOM? DAD? OPEN UP! NOW!

She quickly reaches into her purse and produces a set of keys. She jams an old one into the door lock.

INT. MAURICE AND GEORGIA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Crystal bursts in to see Georgia and Maurice, both on the floor, knocked out.

Maurice has a bruise on his forehead. His rifle is in pieces next to him. Georgia slowly comes to.

CRYSTAL
What happened? Where's Dion?

Georgia climbs to her feet and holds a hand up as if to say, "give me a second."

GEORGIA
Some evil man, calls himself
Corson, came to the house. Your
father confronted him with his
rifle and he broke it to pieces!

CRYSTAL
WHERE IS DION?

GEORGIA
I'm trying to tell you. He knocked
us out. Must've been a gas. That
man is a demon!

CRYSTAL
But where did he go?

GEORGIA
I don't know. Dion just went with
the possessed man. Lord help him.

CRYSTAL
Oh no, NO! I have to go.

GEORGIA

No, honey, don't. You don't know what you're dealing with.

CRYSTAL

I don't have time for your Bible thumping bullshit!

GEORGIA

He's a ruler of the darkness!

CRYSTAL

He's a sick killer who uses brain washing techniques!

MAURICE

What's going on? Ow.

CRYSTAL

You didn't touch Dion, did you?

MAURICE

He was only here a couple hours.

CRYSTAL

You didn't try to brainwash him into your cult, did you?

GEORGIA

It's not a cult. It's about engaging with a loving father.

CRYSTAL

I remember how dad engaged me when I was a kid.

GEORGIA

We'll pray for you, honey.

CRYSTAL

I'll kill that evil man!

GEORGIA

Your father and I love you.

But Crystal's gone. Georgia gives Maurice a worried look.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - NIGHT

Crystal's car screeches to a halt in front of the building. She jams her way out, leaving the door open. Ignoring the intercom, she races to the glass doors. She bangs on them. Nothing. Locked.

INT. POLICE CAR - NIGHT

Two OFFICERS surveilling the location perk up.

OFFICER #1
Hey, that's Bennett.

OFFICER #2
Something must be up. I'm going to
radio headquarters.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - NIGHT

Crystal pulls out her gun and shoots the door. It shatters.
She steps in.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

The Receptionist rises from her seat.

RECEPTIONIST
You shouldn't go in there.

CRYSTAL
WHERE IS MY SON?

Crystal bangs through the door to Corson's office.

INT. CORSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Crystal storms in. The Bodyguard races toward her but she
points her gun at him.

CRYSTAL
Back off.

Crystal turns her head and is shocked to see Dion about to
sign a contract at the Lawyer's desk. Corson stands with him.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
DION! DON'T! Don't sign that!!!

CORSON
Why not?

Dion turns and faces his mother. Tears on his face.

DION
You won't let me play ball, so why?

CRYSTAL
I will let you play.

DION
But you ain't even going to be
around. My life is over already.

CRYSTAL
Yes, I will be around. Don't listen
to this psycho.

CORSON
We have an interesting scenario
unfolding Detective Bennett? You
refuse to believe in the
supernatural yet you're stopping
your son from signing a contract
with the Devil.

CRYSTAL
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO PLAY GAMES WITH
MY SON. HE'S EVERYTHING TO ME.

CORSON
But there's no such things as the
Devil. Or God.

CRYSTAL
Dion, wait for me outside.

Corson gives Dion a sympathetic look.

CORSON
You don't have to go.

CRYSTAL
I SAID GO OUTSIDE.

Dion shrugs and sits down.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
You two leave. I need to talk to
your boss.

The Bodyguard and Lawyer leave.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
Corson, let my son go! Whatever
grip you have on him, let it go.

CORSON
Oh, he's free to go at any time.
But he doesn't want to.

CRYSTAL

I mean stop these mind games you're using to persuade him.

CORSON

The mind games start only after the contract has been signed. You ought to know that.

CRYSTAL

I'm begging you.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - NIGHT

The Officers point their guns at the Bodyguard and Lawyer when they exit the office.

OFFICER #1

Freeze!

The Bodyguard immediately storms the Policemen, kicking the gun out of one's hand and punching the other in the mouth. He picks up their guns and shoots them both.

INT. CORSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Crystal holds her gun steady on Corson. Dion watches with a blank expression from the chair.

CRYSTAL

I know you have some kind of grip on my son.

CORSON

That's not how it works.

CRYSTAL

Then how the fuck does this work?

CORSON

Oh, you're stubborn! Very focused. Your mind is guarded like Fort Knox. I admire that kind of will.

CRYSTAL

You haven't told me. Is there some kind of invisible, hypnotic beam? Is the air in here filled with chemicals?

CORSON

Ha ha, no.

CRYSTAL
Then what?

CORSON
But you don't believe.

CRYSTAL
Okay, let's say I did. Believe.

CORSON
Good. You've heard of demonic
possession correct?

CRYSTAL
It's mental illness.

CORSON
Now please shut your prideful mouth
for a moment and let me speak.

Crystal stops talking but keeps her gun pointed at Corson.

CORSON (CONT'D)
Now you see this gorgeous body? It
once belonged to a Roger Van Gips.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY (FLASHBACK)

ROGER VAN GIPS (33), admires himself in the mirror as he puts
on a new suit.

CORSON (V.O.)
You see, he allowed me into his
soul. Not all at once, mind you,
but gradually. That's how we work
it. It's never instantaneous. It's
always inch by inch.

CRYSTAL (V.O.)
Get on with it.

INT. BALLROOM - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A high end party is in swing. Roger Van Gips snorts coke off
a tray held by a WAITER and then kisses two SUPER MODELS,
each on his arms.

CORSON (V.O.)
I offered Gips more and more
pleasures, he offered me more room
inside his soul.

Finally, I had total control. I've possessed him now for six months.

Roger's eyes slide back into his head, revealing only the whites. He smiles a twisted smile.

INT. CORSON'S OFFICE - NIGHT (PRESENT)

CRYSTAL

Enough with this b.s. How do you create the mind trips?

CORSON

Easy. I made a deal with my boss. The Big Guy. Evil Supreme. He said I could have the power to create hallucinations if I delivered a certain amount of souls.

CRYSTAL

You preyed on depressed kids. You're sick.

CORSON

Their souls are chosen for their vulnerabilities.

CRYSTAL

Innocent kids.

CORSON

They're already miserable little shits. No real hope of a future. Perpetually on social media even though it destroys their self esteem. But you see, the gloom makes penetrating their minds a whole lot easier.

CRYSTAL

You sure are proud of picking on children, aren't you?

CORSON

Jesus said, you hurt the least of mine, you hurt me. So yes, I am quite proud.

CRYSTAL

Didn't work on me.

CORSON

You don't really want to die. On some level all these youngsters did. Dion does too.

Dion looks at his mom with some guilt.

CRYSTAL

No, Dion.

CORSON

It's a remarkably simple setup. I get to play with their heads. Satan gets their souls. And I must say, he's been quite pleased with my performance. How many have we condemned to hell already? A dozen in just a few weeks! But then you and Detective Winters know all about that.

CRYSTAL

You've got plenty of souls. Let my son go.

CORSON

I'll make you a deal. I won't enter any contract with your son...

Dion looks up, concerned.

CORSON (CONT'D)

...if you look at what's hiding behind door number two. Hint: there are no cash or prizes.

CRYSTAL

Dion, you heard the man.

DION

So we won't... ?

CORSON

Not if mommy plays along.

CRYSTAL

Go outside.

Dion stands up, walks toward the door.

CORSON

You're the one that got away, Dion.

CRYSTAL
You can play basketball as much as
you want.

DION
Promise?

CRYSTAL
Yes, yes. Now please leave. There's
a police car out front. Go to them.
I'll be with you in a moment.

Dion looks up at his mom.

DION
But you're gonna die.

CRYSTAL
DION, GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE.

DION
Okay, okay.

Dion leaves.

CRYSTAL
You lose, Corson.

CORSON
Are you a Taurus? So obstinate.
Well, okay Miss Thang, it's time
for some theatrics. You don't
believe in the Devil. You don't
believe in demons. How about this?

Corson swiftly grows and transforms into a monstrous Demon
King, large horns, large wings, flowing cape.

CRYSTAL
Halloween's over.

CORSON
Not quite yet. The contract must be
fulfilled. The door.

Crystal appears dizzy. She rubs her head.

CRYSTAL
Can't we just call it off? Say it's
a draw?

CORSON
Oh no. Suicide's a mortal sin. I
want you in hell.

CRYSTAL
I WANT TO CALL IT OFF! I CAN'T GO
ON LIKE THIS!

CORSON
Sorry! But a deal's a---

Crystal fires her gun into the Demon. BLAM! BLAM! BLAM! But
he's still standing. Still smiling. Crystal drops her gun.

CORSON (CONT'D)
It's too late, dear.

CRYSTAL
Too late.

CORSON
Since all our cards are on the
table, you might as well get a peek
at your destiny.

CRYSTAL
My... ?

CORSON
Where you're going. The door!

Corson points to a large door behind him.

CRYSTAL
What?

CORSON
Just go open the door and look
inside.

CRYSTAL
No. Why would I?

CORSON
Just go, Crystal.

Crystal remains rigid. Corson walks over and escorts her to
the door. They stand before it.

CORSON (CONT'D)
Go ahead. Open it.

CRYSTAL
But what's-- ?

CORSON

Everything your mom and pop taught you. It's all true. But you wouldn't listen. No, Crystal's too smart for that backwards religion. She has science!

CRYSTAL

STOP!

CORSON

Open it.

Crystal's hand, shaking now, reaches for the door knob. Slowly, she turns it.

The door opens up to reveal an infinity of suffering in a blazing inferno. In short, HELL!! Millions of SINNERS swirl in an endless ballet of agony.

They're tortured by armies of DEMONS, all ghastly mutations of humanity, half animal, half human. Insect heads, muscular human bodies.

CRYSTAL

No, no.

CORSON

Your future, unbeliever!

CRYSTAL

It can't be real. It can't be real.

CORSON

Of course, it's real. And now, it's your reality!

Then in the midst of the swarm of despairing humanity, Crystal sees herself!!! Her face reflects the eternal damnation she's suffering!

The sight shocks Crystal to her core. Her eyes go white. Her body freezes from fright. Her mouth twists in an agonized, twisted shape of pure anguish.

Corson returns to his human guise, turns and walks out of the room, leaving Crystal standing before the open door inferno, still as a statue.

EXT. HIGH TECH BUILDING - NIGHT

Dion, hiding in a bush outside, watches Corson, his Bodyguard, his Lawyer, Ronnie and his Receptionist, all climb into a limousine.

CORSON

Let's try another city, gang. Los Angeles, maybe?

The Limo speeds off among the few Halloween PARTY HOUNDS still whooping it up on the dark streets.

Dion climbs out of the bushes, gives the double doors a final glance and then bolts down the street into the darkness.

INT. CORON'S OFFICE - DAY

Detective Winters and a phalanx of COPS surround Crystal, still frozen, standing in the middle of the office. But now there's no doorway to hell, no furniture, no desk. No candle. It's just a drab, run-down room. Could be in a crack house.

WINTERS

I can't get over that expression.

COP

She really saw something, didn't she, Chief?

WINTERS

Yes. I'm afraid what she saw was the most extreme thing any demon could conjure.

COP

Huh?

WINTERS

Nothing else would've broke her.

COP

I don't get it.

WINTERS

You can take her to the morgue now.

COP

Where you going?

WINTERS

To say a prayer for good cop.

Winters walks out. A stretcher's brought in. Crystal's body is laid on it. As the cop pulls the sheet over her face, we see that final terrified expression.

AND HEAR HER SCREAM FROM HELL.

THE END