

PARTY CLOWN

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INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The studio apartment is cluttered with piles of fashion magazines, scripts, dirty dishes, and clothes. The bed is in disarray.

A shelf holds old trophies and ribbons from beauty pageants. One wall is covered with clothing racks bulging with fashionable clothes.

The kitchen counter is covered with stacks of unopened bills stamped as past due. The calendar above it is filled with notes for auditions and times, each with a red slash across it.

CLAUDIA, 24, picks up a stack of magazines from the lone chair and dumps them on the bed. She gestures for TRISH, 22, to sit, before turning on the lamp and perching on the edge of the bed.

Trish sits in the chair, crossing her arms.

TRISH

What happened this time, Claudia?

CLAUDIA

I can't play a waitress, Trish.
I'll be typecast forever.

TRISH

It was a job. It doesn't matter if you play a waitress, plenty of actresses have played waitresses without being typecast. I can't keep getting you auditions if you keep turning down the parts.

CLAUDIA

At least I get offered the parts. That proves I have what they want, so I can get a great part without settling.

TRISH

Having what they want doesn't pay the bills. Neither does taking a part that doesn't pay anything, like that student film.

CLAUDIA

But, she needed someone or she would fail her class. I had to help her.

TRISH

She paid a pretty penny for the editing and sound, she could have paid you.

CLAUDIA

Well, people will see that I have a heart when they find out.

The lights go out in the apartment. Trish clicks on her phone's light.

TRISH

Heart doesn't pay the bills either.

INT. PAUL'S PARTY PLANNING OFFICE - DAY

The walls are covered in celebrity photos and pictures of performers in costume. PAUL, 35, sits behind a cluttered desk, whispering into the phone. A name plaque identifies him as Paul Kingman, Owner and Performer.

Claudia stands awkwardly near the door staring at the picture of a CLOWN with a blue suit and blue makeup. She shifts back and forth in front of the picture.

CLAUDIA

Creepy.

Paul hangs up the phone.

PAUL

What's creepy?

CLAUDIA

His eyes follow you.

PAUL

He's the reason you're here.

Paul rolls his wheelchair around the desk.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I had to fire him, and I need a replacement asap. I read your profile and saw some of your work. I need someone with experience I can mold in just a few days.

CLAUDIA

I've never been a party performer.

PAUL

It's just another acting job. Your pageant baton twirling sold me on you. I can make that work for the party.

CLAUDIA

But, when a producer sees I was a clown, my career will be over.

PAUL

I can give you a stage name so no one will know if you don't want them to. I need you. If I lose this party, my business is sunk.

INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Claudia stands in front of the mirror. Her face is white, and she puts purple makeup around her mouth.

Knock at the door.

CLAUDIA

Come in.

Trish enters the apartment. She stops abruptly.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)

Is it that bad?

TRISH

No, I just have a thing about clowns.

CLAUDIA

Maybe this will help you get over it.

TRISH

At least you got your lights back.

CLAUDIA

Paul paid me up front.

TRISH

Don't you find it a little strange that he can pay you that much but says his business is in trouble?

Behind the girls' backs, Clown peeks through the window with a sad face.

CLAUDIA

His contract is worth way more than
he's paying me.

INT. PAUL'S PRACTICE STUDIO - EVENING

The studio has an open floor with mirrors on two sides. The wall opposite the windows is filled with racks of costumes. Paul watches Claudia flip a baton in the air and applauds.

PAUL

That's perfect. You are perfect.

CLAUDIA

I'm still rusty. I need more
practice.

PAUL

You need to practice in the outfit.

Paul wheels to the costume rack. He picks out a clown suit and passes it to Claudia.

PAUL (CONT'D)

This will fit over your clothes.
I'll be back in a moment.

Paul leaves the room. Claudia tries on the suit.

EXT. PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Claudia walks to her car carrying a garment bag.

Clown peers out from behind a tree.

Claudia glances back as Clown ducks back out of sight. She pulls out her phone.

CLAUDIA

Trish, can you stay on the phone
with me? I think I'm being
followed.

She unlocks her car.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)

I swear there's a clown watching
me. The creepy one Paul said he
fired.

She climbs in her car.

INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Claudia and Trish sit on the bed and chair. The window shades are shut. Claudia pulls up a picture of Clown on her phone.

CLAUDIA
This is the picture hanging in the office. Creepy, right?

TRISH
All clowns are creepy.

CLAUDIA
Even me?

TRISH
Maybe. How do you know he's following you?

CLAUDIA
I keep seeing glimpses of him.

TRISH
Are you sure you aren't just trying to find an excuse to drop this job, too?

CLAUDIA
No. Paul needs me and he has connections I can use to get into the big leagues.

TRISH
So what are you going to do?

CLAUDIA
I'm going to try to catch this clown in the act.

TRISH
If he really is stalking you, he might be dangerous.

CLAUDIA
I have to do something. If I get proof, I could get a restraining order.

A shadow passes across the closed window shades.

MONTAGE - CLOWN WATCHING

-- EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY -- Claudia crosses the parking lot with her phone pointed behind her. She glances sideways, trying to be discreet.

-- EXT. JOGGING TRAIL - DAY -- Claudia jogs with her phone out. A flash of blue behind the trees. Claudia raises her phone to click a picture. The blue is the shirt of another JOGGER.

-- INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT -- Claudia sets her phone down. Clown peers in the window with an evil, sharp-toothed grin. Claudia screams and grabs her phone. Clown is gone.

INT. POLICE DETECTIVE'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The small, cramped office holds boxes and stacks of files. The open door faces a narrow hallway. DETECTIVE JOHNSON, 45, slouches back in his chair, biting the cap of his pen.

Claudia slides her phone across the desk with a shaky hand.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

This is the clown looking in your window?

CLAUDIA

Yes, except this time he had a horrible face and fangs.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

So, he's a vampire clown?

CLAUDIA

What? No, his fangs were all over.

Detective Johnson sets his pen down and leans forward.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

What kind of drugs did you take tonight, ma'am?

Claudia jumps to her feet.

CLAUDIA

I'm not on drugs, I'm being stalked by a crazy clown with fangs.

In the hall, Officers SMITH and JONES stop and stare at her.

Claudia covers her face with her hands, dropping back into her chair.

DETECTIVE JOHNSON

Look, ma'am, I just can't help you.
If you knew who was stalking you,
or had some proof, maybe I could do
something. But if I go to my boss
with a story about a clown with
fangs peering through windows,
he'll think I'm on drugs.

Claudia glares at the detective. She stands slowly, picking up her phone.

CLAUDIA

Thank you for your time, detective.
You have made your position
perfectly clear.

Claudia stomps out the door, pushing past the other officers in the hallway.

INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - DAY

Trish and Claudia occupy their typical perches.

TRISH

You can appeal to another
detective, or go over his head. He
can't just dismiss your complaint
like that.

CLAUDIA

No, I know what I have to do. I'm
going to find out who the clown is
and give him a taste of his own
medicine.

TRISH

That's not a good plan. You need to
be careful. If he's letting you see
him to increase the fear, he's more
dangerous than we thought.

CLAUDIA

I have practice scheduled tomorrow.
Paul said he has a meeting, so he
gave me a key. I can sneak into the
office and look through his files.

TRISH

You're playing a dangerous game.
What if the clown still has his own
key, and he follows you inside?

CLAUDIA

I'll set the alarm. When it goes off, he will be trespassing, so the cops would have to respond.

INT. PAUL'S PARTY PLANNER OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Claudia creeps through the empty office. She sits at the desk, turning on the computer. She clicks through some files, finding one for employee head shots.

She finds a picture of Clown, but it doesn't have a name.

She opens more files. Then sees one with her name on it.

The file has pictures of satanic symbols and a detailed guest list for the party she was hired for.

CLAUDIA

Oh my god, he's a devil worshipper.

She hits print and turns to get the papers from the printer. Behind her, Clown peers in the window with an angry face.

INT. CLAUDIA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Stacks of books balance precariously on the bed. Claudia sits among them, frantically switching between pages of symbols and her laptop. A notebook filled with scribbles sits next to her.

Trish enters the apartment and sets a bag of take-out on the table. She picks up an old, leather text.

TRISH

What is all this?

CLAUDIA

Paul's a devil worshiper. I'm trying to decipher the symbols so I can stop him from sacrificing all the people at the party.

TRISH

Why do you need to know about spells? Why can't you just have the cops raid the party?

CLAUDIA

That clown is not human. I think he's a demon. Paul must have summoned him for the ritual.

(MORE)

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)
If I'm going to stop it, I need to
know how to counter the spells.

TRISH
Do you hear yourself? Spells and
demons? You're not thinking
rationally. This man is dangerous.
You need to let the authorities
handle it.

Claudia holds out a sheet of paper with a list of names.

CLAUDIA
The people on the guest list are
all producers and directors. If I
stop the ritual and save them, I
can write my own ticket in this
town.

Claudia hands her another page.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)
I'm having trouble with this
translation, it's something about
remorse and forgiveness. I think
it's the key to reversing the
spell.

Trish pushes the paper aside. She crouches next to the bed.

TRISH
No, Claudia, you have to stop this.
Just let it go. Don't go back to
that place. I'll help you get
another job.

CLAUDIA
When this is over I can have any
job I want. I won't need your hand-
outs or your recommendations to get
a part.

Trish jerks back and slowly stands.

TRISH
Fine, I'll just leave you to your
delusions of grandeur.

Trish storms to the door. Before leaving, she glances back.
Claudia is absorbed in the books and doesn't look up when the
door slams.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Trish paces near her car. She pulls out her phone and places it back in her pocket.

Clown stands up on the other side of the car.

Trish stops pacing, pulls out her phone and dials.

TRISH

Claudia, I'm sorry I left like that.

Clown moves around the back of the car.

TRISH (CONT'D)

No, I just think you are taking things too far. Why don't we take what you found to the cops first. If they still won't help, then we'll talk about the next step.

Clown stands directly behind Trish.

TRISH (CONT'D)

I'm still out front.

Trish turns, screams, and drops her phone.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Claudia runs up to Trish's car. Trish is gone. The driver's window displays the message "come to the party" in smeared blood.

EXT. PARTY VENUE - NIGHT

The quiet suburban house is barely visible in the light of a single street lamp. The windows are all dark.

Claudia slinks down the shadowed driveway.

She creeps around the side of the house.

INT. PARTY VENUE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

The room is empty, uninhabited. The only light comes from the streetlight shining through the window over the sink.

The outside door eases open. Claudia peers around the side. She slips through the narrow opening and gently closes the door.

Suddenly, light flickers through the open doorway to the living room. Claudia slides along the wall toward the doorway.

INT. PARTY VENUE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is clear of furniture. A large circle adorns the floor. It is filled with strange symbols. The only light is from the ring of candles surrounding the circle.

Four bodies are laid out, heads inside the circle and feet toward the corners of the room. A larger candle sets in a pool of blood in front of each head.

Trish lies unconscious in the center of the circle, in the only space free of symbols.

Claudia rushes toward her friend but stops short of the circle's outer edge.

Clown steps out of a side room, holding a ritual dagger.

Claudia retreats, checking behind her, and places her back against the wall.

She returns her gaze to the circle.

CLAUDIA

Paul?

Paul stands where the clown was, dagger in hand. He steps into the circle next to Trish.

PAUL

Is this better? My other face can be disturbing, I know.

CLAUDIA

What do you want?

PAUL

I knew you couldn't resist this little party.

He holds out the dagger towards Claudia.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm here to collect souls. I only need one, so I'll give you the honor of choosing who I take. You or your friend.

CLAUDIA

I can't make that choice.

PAUL

Sure you can. Save yourself and condemn her to an eternity of torment or sacrifice your soul to me and save her.

Claudia tentatively steps inside the circle. She reaches out and grasps the handle of the dagger. She kneels down beside Trish, brushing the hair off her friend's face. She lifts the dagger above Trish.

She jumps up and swings the dagger at Paul, missing his chest by inches.

Paul laughs and ducks as she swings the blade again.

Trish moans, shifting on the floor.

Claudia takes another wild swing at Paul.

He sticks his foot out, knocking her off her feet.

Claudia falls on top of Trish. The blade plunges into Trish's chest.

Trish screams, writhing on the floor.

Claudia presses her hands against Trish's chest, around the blade, trying to stop the bleeding.

CLAUDIA

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Please, I didn't mean it. I don't want you to go to hell.

Claudia, tears in her eyes, looks pleadingly up at Paul.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)

Please, don't take her.

Trish reaches up, turning Claudia's face back to her.

CLAUDIA (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I'll take your place.

TRISH
It's not your fault.

Trish's hand falls away. Claudia pulls her bloody hands away from the blade. Her tears fall in the blood.

A bright light fills the room. When it fades, Trish's body is gone.

The candles go out, plunging the room into darkness. Slowly, a red glow fills the room.

Paul shrieks in terror.

He tears at his clothes and skin in agony.

PAUL
No! No! I won't go back!

CLAUDIA
What's happening?

PAUL
Please, I can't go back to that torment.

Claudia turns to leave. Paul writhes on the floor.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Wait! You can save me. Please, Claudia, I can give you everything you've ever wanted.

CLAUDIA
Too late. Because of you, Trish is dead and suffering in hell.

PAUL
No, she's not. She escaped. Her soul is free.

CLAUDIA
I don't believe you.

PAUL
It's true. Tears of remorse mixed with the blood of the slain. You released her, but the spell demands its sacrifice. It will suck me back into hell. Please, that same blood can save me.

Claudia looks at her bloody hands.

CLAUDIA
This blood can save you from hell?
Why would I want to do that?

PAUL
Please, I'll give you anything.
Money. Property.

CLAUDIA
Not interested.

Claudia steps toward the door.

PAUL
Power. Fame.

Claudia hesitates, turning her head back toward him.

PAUL (CONT'D)
You can have any job you want, any
part you want. I can give you the
power to make the world love you.

EXT. POLICE PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Detective Johnson trudges toward his car.

Claudia approaches behind him.

CLAUDIA
Detective, do you have a moment?

Detective Johnson turns around.

CLOWN CLAUDIA grins at him with a mouth full of sharp teeth.