

Summer of Ghosts
by
Darren Callahan

darrencallahan@darrencallahan.com
darrencallahan.com
(c) all rights reserved

FADE IN:

INT. CAR DAY

Out a car windshield, the sun flares over a parking lot.

SOUND: A rip, paper.

A WOMAN, 40s, meticulously flattens a spiral, lined sheet of paper on the dash. She sets down her pencil.

She notices her lap -- orange shavings from her pencil's eraser. Furiously, she bats the dust from her skirt.

Her face in the rear-view: something buried deep.

At last, she tugs her heavy purse from the passenger seat and climbs out...

TITLE CARD: "May, 1982." "Indiana."

EXT. SHOPPING MALL CONTINUOUS

The woman weaves through the parking lot with an almost robotic walk.

Coming into view:

A shopping mall -- glowing, as if on fire, a trick of the sunset.

The woman enters through J.C. Penney, passes a MOTHER with CHILDREN. The mother gives the woman a strange look and clutches the children closer.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (J.C. PENNEY) CONTINUOUS

The woman passes TEENS (trying on clothes) and WIVES (sampling cosmetics.) CLERKS notice the woman, but move to other distractions. The woman clutches her purse as if it's a shield.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) CONTINUOUS

The woman stops at the mouth of J.C. Penney and surveys the mall's main concourse -- a "T" shape, two floors, large and wide, with bustling shops.

Ahead is the longest stretch -- capped by a fountain beside a small cafe. To the left are escalators.

At last, the woman hops forward, as if shoved.

On the escalators, she rises to the second level. She rounds a bannister and eyes the shoppers below.

She turns to the mezzanine food court. More PEOPLE.

She takes position at the midway point of the bannister.

From her black purse, she pulls out a revolver. Spare change and the woman's car keys spill onto the marble walkway.

She puts the revolver in her mouth--

For a flash, she opens her eyes and sees:

ED PESCERO, 40s, a security guard -- hand raised.

ED

Lady!

She bends over the bannister and--

FIRES! The bullet takes her face off. Her body flops forward over the rail and tumbles. Her body HITS!

Shoppers scream, run, panic.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL (CORRIDOR) DAY

The crowded corridor of a high school.

INT. CLASSROOM SAME MOMENT

Students take seats in the homeroom of bright and welcoming MRS. NICOLODI, 20s.

ERIKA LANG, 16, sits at the furthest desk. With dyed black hair, a Bauhaus T-shirt, dark lipstick, and too much eye-shadow, she's attractive, but not in the usual way -- particularly for Indiana. Erika walls her books around like a fort.

JENNY MALONE, blonde and pretty, chats with a PREPPY STUDENT.

JENNY

Did you hear?

PREPPY STUDENT

Isn't it just insane?

JENNY
Right in the mall!

PREPPY STUDENT
Did you see her do it?

JENNY
No, but Sara--

Jenny notices Erika eavesdropping.

PREPPY STUDENT
It must have been disgusting.

JENNY
(to Erika, sneering)
This stuff freaks you out, I bet.

Erika's face, confused.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Oh my God. She doesn't know!

INT. HIGH SCHOOL (LOCKERS) DAY

Erika pulls books from her locker -- plastered with stickers from lesser-known "cool" bands of the late '70s. At the shut of her door, she sees a BOY.

ERIKA
Did something happen at the mall?

BOY
Weird, huh?

ERIKA
What, in a store?

BOY
On the strip. Some mom shot herself.

The boy slams his locker and heads to class.

ERIKA
What was her name?

He's too far in the crowd to hear...

INT. SHOPPING MALL DAY

Still life. Stores, closed; too early to be open.

A shoe store.

A candy shop.

Montgomery Ward.

Jewelry Boutique.

Discount Clothing store.

Hardware store.

A bar.

Sears.

The food court.

All empty.

A kiosk: "Earring Island," in the center of the concourse.

SOUND: Footsteps, high heels.

BERNADETTE CAUDILL, 40s, attractive but weathered, makes a beeline. She unlocks the kiosk's gate, enters the earring stand, and clicks on the lights.

She hears a noise, startles! An OWNER opens a shop gate down the concourse. Bernadette relaxes, sighs.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY

School's out, bells ring. Erika finds her bicycle (a boy's 10-speed) locked to the rack.

A NERDY GIRL next to her moves her own bike out.

ERIKA

Hey, do you know the name of the woman that killed herself at the mall?

NERDY GIRL

Barlow. Something Barlow.

When the Nerdy Girl is away, Erika slumps, relieved. She wheels her bike around a corner.

Erika spots Jenny Malone with three other girls, pretty variations of each other: JENNY MOESER, JENNIFER KRAMER, and SARA GERBITZ.

Erika waits for Jenny and the others to clear. When they do, she starts moving.

At the turn, there stands Jenny.

JENNY

Hi, Lung.

Erika keeps walking.

JENNY (CONT'D)

I said hi.

ERIKA

I didn't hear my name.

JENNY

You know I'm talking to you, Lung.
Don't you want any friends? Poor
baby.

Erika ignores them. Jenny steps beside. Calmly, Erika mounts her bike and pedals off.

EXT. STREET DAY

Erika glides down a paved hill past prefab houses bathed in afternoon light. She wheels into a driveway and lets her 10-speed fall in the grass.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) DAY

She enters to absolute silence. The TV in the corner is hooked to an Atari video game system. Dirty dishes and discarded clothes are peppered about the living room.

Down the hallway, she stops at a bedroom -- a boy's room, filled with motorcycle posters and BMX (Bicycle Motor Cross) trophies.

She passes the master bedroom -- clean, as if a museum.

No one home. Maybe for a long time.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (BEDROOM) CONTINUOUS

Erika falls onto her bed and looks up.

Taped to her ceiling: a Berlin-era poster of David Bowie. She stares at his face.

After a second, she reaches to the end of her bed, puts on an LP of British rock, leans back and shuts her eyes.

Beside her bed, a rabbit's foot, which she touches once.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) DAY

Erika enters the shopping mall.

She passes A BALD MAN on a bench.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (EARRING ISLAND) DAY

Bernadette talks with a CUSTOMER, who floats away as Erika approaches. Erika lifts the brace and enters the circle of the kiosk, ready for work.

ERIKA

Hi.

BERNADETTE

Hello.

ERIKA

I heard some lady shot herself yesterday.

BERNADETTE

Don't talk about it.

ERIKA

Place looks normal.

BERNADETTE

They cleaned it up fast.

ANOTHER CUSTOMER strolls by and Bernadette and Erika both put on varied, but equally false smiles. The person passes.

BERNADETTE (CONT'D)

I'm glad you weren't here.

Bernadette squeezes Erika's arm.

BERNADETTE (CONT'D)

Don't forget to clock in.

Punch of the timecard. CRACK!

INT. SHOPPING MALL (FOOD COURT) DAY

Erika sips a smoothie and stares at the spot of the suicide.

Suddenly, there's a fair-haired boy beside her. This is JEREMY ATKINS, 15, skinny, awkward, wearing a horror flick T-shirt and ripped jeans.

JEREMY

Boo.

ERIKA

Boo.

JEREMY

How late you working?

ERIKA

Seven.

JEREMY

Want to watch a movie at my place tonight? My brother's out.

ERIKA

I have a test tomorrow.

JEREMY

Does that mean you're gonna study?

ERIKA

(caught)

What movie?

JEREMY

"Children's Shouldn't Play With Dead Things."

ERIKA

No, thanks. What are you doing here, anyway? I thought you hated the mall.

JEREMY

Sure. I guess.

ERIKA

I have to get back. My break's almost over.

JEREMY

I'm gonna keep inviting you until you say yes.

She smiles and drifts away.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (EARRING ISLAND) DAY

Back at work, Erika uses her earring gun on a BLONDE CHILD. BANG! The girl cries and Erika hands her a towel.

BERNADETTE
It's okay, sweetheart. You're
gonna look beautiful.

As the GIRL'S MOM fishes for money, Ed Pescero, in security guard uniform, struts alongside the kiosk.

ED
Ladies...

ERIKA
You're early.

ED
I knew you'd want the gossip. I
was only about 10 feet from her
when she did it.

Bernadette hears this and finishes up quickly with the Girl's Mom.

BERNADETTE
Thank you, have a good night. Ed,
we don't want to talk about it.
Shoo.

ED
Spend all day writing up
shoplifters gets a little boring.
Cop told me she left a suicide note
in her car. "This is not me."

BERNADETTE
Ed! Enough.

Bernadette makes a face and gestures to indicate Erika. Ed suddenly realizes, clicks.

ED
Oh, shit! I'm sorry. I'm an
idiot. Sorry, ladies...

He shrinks away.

Erika's face -- an embarrassed look to Bernadette.

BERNADETTE
He's cute, but he's dumb sometimes.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) NIGHT

Erika sits in darkness, watching the first season of The David Letterman Show.

A noise sounds behind her. She gets up and turns down the TV volume. She peers toward her bedroom, light on, door open. Nothing.

She turns the TV back up. Loud.

Though it's late at night, no one is home but her.

INT. CLASSROOM DAY

Erika, distracted, takes a school test. Mrs. Nicolodi catches her eye and points Erika back to her paper.

DISSOLVE TO:

Test done, students leaving.

MRS. NICOLODI
Erika...

Erika stays behind.

MRS. NICOLODI (CONT'D)
I'm trying to schedule a conference with your mother, but she hasn't returned my calls.

ERIKA
She's super busy.

Mrs. Nicolodi jots something down.

MRS. NICOLODI
Can you give her my home number?
I'd like to hear from her soon.

ERIKA
Sure thing.

MRS. NICOLODI
Don't worry. It's nothing bad.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL (GIRL'S TOILET) DAY

Erika drops Mrs. Nicolodi's phone number into the trash.

INT. APARTMENT DAY

A dirty apartment. It's daytime, but curtains are drawn, the dusty closeness oppressive.

An easy chair propped in front of a snowy television picture.

In the chair is a DAVE FORD, 40s, bearded, weary, paunch belly. He wears overalls and a trucker's cap. His legs are up on the foot rest. He is missing one of his feet.

Dave glances to a bowl of peanuts on the TV tray. He's accidentally put a cigarette out in the peanuts, short of the ashtray alongside. Disappointed, he stares back at the malfunctioning television.

THEN: a voice in the room. When it sounds, Dave doesn't startle, doesn't even seem to notice. The voice, very flat and hollow, could be a boy's or a girl's -- hard to tell.

THE VOICE

Go to the window. Go to the window...

Dave struggles out of the chair with his crutches.

He pushes the curtain aside. Daylight stings his eyes.

Just a few hundred meters beyond is the front of the shopping mall...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SEARS) DAY

A HOUSEWIFE wanders the racks of Sears, drifting, touching, deciding. She turns away from the main thoroughfare to inspect a necktie display. She considers, looks for a clerk.

She notices something inside a dressing room at the end of the row. Bends. A pair of legs are suspended under the dressing room's door.

JUMP TO:

A CLERK and MANAGER arrive and, with the Housewife in the rear, unlock the dressing room to reveal:

A HANGING MAN, strung up by a necktie to the pipes above.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CINEMA LOBBY) DAY

An USHER fits a poster of the film "Poltergeist" (1982) into the lobby frame of the mall's cinema.

Rushing by -- Ed Pescro.

The Usher turns, too late to see anything. He resumes work...

Noise preceding, then TWO PARAMEDICS speed by, hauling a gurney.

The Usher turns again. Too late.

INT. APARTMENT DAY

Dave Ford stares out his cracked curtain at the shopping mall. The voice speaks to him...

THE VOICE
A man has killed himself.

A firetruck pulls into the mall parking lot, followed by a police car. They join the ambulance already parked out front.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
From Davenport. He arrived last night.

Dave lets the curtain fall.

THE VOICE (CONT'D)
You know what's going to happen next. Everything I told you is going to come true.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL (CORRIDOR) DAY

Erika walks down the corridor, clutching books. There's great excitement on everyone's faces, but not Erika's.

INT. CLASSROOM DAY

Mrs. Nicolodi looks up from her desk when Erika enters.

MRS. NICOLODI
I haven't heard from your mother.
There are only four more days in
the school year. It's important
that I speak with her.

ERIKA
Okay. I'll remind her.

MRS. NICOLODI
I could stop by your house this
weekend.

ERIKA
Sure. If you want.
(casually)
Wait. I forgot. My brother's got
a dirt bike race. In Fort Wayne.

MRS. NICOLODI
Okay, well... Tell your brother to
try not to break his neck.

Class begins...

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL DAY

Erika's bike rests in the rack alongside others. Both her
tires are flat.

She unlocks her bike, walks it towards the parking lot.

Zoom! A car cuts her off and slams on the brakes.

Jenny Malone sits in the passenger's seat; Jenny Moeser
drives; Jennifer Kramer and Sara Gerbitz are in back.

JENNY
Trouble?

ERIKA
Flat tires.

JENNY
Want a ride?

ERIKA
No, thanks.

JENNY
You have to get to work, don't you?
I've seen you at the mall. Earring
place, right?

ERIKA
I guess I'll be late.

JENNY
Come on. There's a rack on the
back. It's no prob.

Erika looks around for other options. There are none. She
bends and looks inside the crowded car.

ERIKA
Will I fit?

JENNY
Jennifer will move over. Move,
Jenn. Company.

Erika checks her watch. Reluctantly, she nods.

INT. CHRYSLER (MOVING) DAY

Erika is sandwiched between Jennifer Kramer and Sara Gerbitz.

ERIKA
Thanks for the lift.

JENNY
Our pleasure.

ERIKA
Three Jennys and a Sara. Sounds
like a TV show.

JENNIFER
I'm actually a Jennifer.

JENNY
Did you hear?

SARA
Guy hung himself in Sears.

JENNY
Two in a week.

ERIKA
(non-committal)
Huh.

JENNIFER
Why do you wear so much makeup?

ERIKA
Why's your hair so tall?

MOESER
Ha! Good one.

JENNIFER
Don't stand up for her!

JENNY
So... Lung--

ERIKA
Lang.

JENNY
Not to us.

ERIKA
(dry)
One typo and I'm ruined.

JENNY
Betcha hate going to the mall,
don't you? I mean now with the
suicides. Your dad and all. He
shot himself, right?

ERIKA
I haven't thought about it. I've
been really busy.

MOESER
And to shoot yourself. Geeeww.

SARA
I'd do pills.

JENNIFER
Drowning.

JENNY
I'm not going out that way. I'll
kick and scream.

The Chrysler takes a hard turn.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Got a boyfriend?

ERIKA
I'm saving myself for David Bowie.

MOESER
Isn't he homo?

ERIKA
No he is not.

JENNY
I'm dating Ryan Julip now.

ERIKA
Well, he's definitely gay.

Jenny gives a death look. The others don't know how to react.

JENNY
Ryan's n-- Never mind.

Jenny thinks.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Stop the car. I said: stop the car.

Moeser pulls over.

JENNY (CONT'D)
Get out.

Erika seems to accept this eventuality and excuses herself out the rear door, crossing over Jennifer, who flicks a cigarette lighter under Erika as she moves. Erika jumps, but says nothing.

The Chrysler starts to go.

ERIKA
My bike!

Brakes.

Erika lifts her 10-speed off the rack.

JENNY
'Bye, Lung! Come back when you've washed your face!

The car drives out of sight. Erika walks her bike to the top of a small hill.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (EARRING ISLAND) DAY

Erika arrives at the crowded mall. Bernadette checks her watch.

ERIKA
Sorry. Got a flat. I heard about the guy in Sears. Is that why there are so many people here?

BERNADETTE
I think it's just the movie crowd.

ERIKA
No, it's more than that.

ERIKA'S POV:
The Bald Man, distant, sits on a bench.

ERIKA(CONT'D)
Bernadette. You know that guy?

BERNADETTE
No.

ERIKA
I see him here all the time.

Erika watches the Bald Man. Their eyes meet and she looks away.

TITLE CARD: "The Last Day of School"

INT. CLASSROOM DAY

The classroom's wall clock, the seconds. At 3:00, there's an explosion from the students. It's summer.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL (LOCKERS) DAY

Erika cleans out her locker. Jeremy appears in the crowd.

JEREMY
Do you have to work? We should celebrate. Wanna come over?

ERIKA
You know, I don't really like horror movies, Jeremy.

JEREMY

That's because you watch bad ones.
Come over. I've got some new
stuff.

ERIKA

I'm not going to make out with you.
(giving in)
What movie?

INT. JEREMY'S HOUSE (BASEMENT) DAY

Jeremy leads Erika down narrow stairs to a basement. It's dark, low rent -- a laundry and TV room, covered sofa, record collection, horror and rock posters, cheap TV hooked to a Beta tape player. Jeremy's collection is full of dubs -- all handwritten labels, nothing "official."

Erika gravitates towards the records, flips the stack.

ERIKA

Jesus, are all these RUSH?

JEREMY

There's some VAN HALEN in there.

ERIKA

(sarcastic)
Great.

JEREMY

Come on, don't be a snob. RUSH is
the greatest band on the planet.
Do you smoke pot?

ERIKA

Will that make me like RUSH?

JEREMY

Ha ha. No, I don't smoke -- just
didn't want you to be disappointed.

ERIKA

Do I look like a girl who smokes
pot?

JEREMY

Yeah. You do.

Jeremy pulls a video from the line-up.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
"Dawn of the Dead." Sequel to
"Night of the Living Dead."

ERIKA
I have never heard of either of
those movies.

JEREMY
Well, what kind of movies do you
like?

ERIKA
Long ones.

JEREMY
Then this is for you. "Dawn" is,
like, three hours long.

He pops a video into the player and turns on the TV to
static. When the video comes on, it's flickering with
magnetic lines.

ERIKA
It looks like one of those accident
prevention movies they show you in
Driver's Ed.

JEREMY
Bad copy. I'm looking for the
Italian version, but I can't find
it. It's got more gore.

ERIKA
Is this going to make me puke?

JEREMY
It's actually really good. Sit
down.

Erika takes the far end of the sofa.

ERIKA
So... this is your hangout.

JEREMY
It's my brother's. He kicks me out
when he wants to party.

The movie starts...

JEREMY (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oh, hey, this is set at a shopping
mall. Make you right at home.

INT. APARTMENT NIGHT

"Dawn of the Dead" morphs into the static of Dave Ford's television -- white noise and hum.

Dave sleeps in his chair, next to his crutches.

THE VOICE

Wake up.

Dave wakes up, angry. Slowly, he rises, lifts his leg off the footrest.

DAVE

Tell me who you are.

Dave hobbles to the television, considers, and then quickly smacks the OFF knob. The room goes dark. He starts to back to the chair. The television comes back on.

THE VOICE

Don't be scared.

Dave stares at the television...

INT. JEREMY'S HOUSE (BASEMENT) NIGHT

"Dawn of the Dead" credits roll.

JEREMY

You forgot to pee.

ERIKA

Did I?

JEREMY

Yeah, you asked where the bathroom was, but never went.

ERIKA

Pretty good.

JEREMY

Told you so.

ERIKA

Kinda gross, though.

JEREMY

Gettin' dark. Do you have to get home?

ERIKA
Let's watch something else.

JEREMY
Really?

ERIKA
Sure.

JEREMY
Do you need to call your mom?

ERIKA
Oh. Yeah.

Jeremy fishes around, pulls on a phone cord until a cheap phone appears from underneath some laundry.

INSERT: Erika's house; ringing phone.

SOUND: In Erika's ear, the rings. No one answers, but she speaks anyway.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Hi, Mom. No, I'm fine. I'm at a friend's house. Jeremy Atkins. Watching movies. What time? Before midnight. That's okay? Great. I'll see you.

She hangs up. The phone was never answered.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
She says have fun.

JEREMY
Wow, you're mom must be cool.

ERIKA
Yours, too. You've got a strange girl in your basement and she's not coming down to bust you.

JEREMY
Aw, you're not so strange. And compared with my brother, I'm a saint. On with the Double-Feature. Now's your chance to pee. Better go before it gets awkward.

As he searches for a new tape, Erika smiles, then rises.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) DAY

Ed walks the concourse through a phalanx of shoppers.

He spots the Bald Man, sitting on a bench by the fountain. Diverting, Ed approaches.

ED

Hey-!

The Bald Man looks up. This is CHARLIE CARPENTER.

ED (CONT'D)

I've been watching you. Is there something I can help you with?

CHARLIE

No, thank you. I'm planning on making a purchase, though.

ED

Where? From this bench?

CHARLIE

No, I get up and walk around. I usually eat lunch here.

ED

Do you work around here?

CHARLIE

No. I am, unfortunately, unemployed. Are you hiring?

ED

You can't loiter.

CHARLIE

Good to know.

ED

I'm paid to keep the place safe. I'll be watching you.

Ed straightens, walks away.

FOLLOW:

Ed resumes his rounds. He passes Earring Island, where Erika works alone.

ED (CONT'D)

Where's Bernadette?

ERIKA
Looking at shoes.

Ed leans on the counter. He nods in Charlie's direction.

ED
Do you know that bald dude?

ERIKA
I've seen him.

ED
Yeah, here, right? Hanging around.
Like months now. Do you think he's
a molester?

She looks over Ed's shoulder.

ERIKA
How can I tell?

ED
You seen him looking at any kids?

ERIKA
Not really.

ED
Well, stay clear. All the shit
going on, don't need trouble.
First goddamn week of summer.

Ed continues his rounds.

FOLLOW:

Ed moves down the concourse. He looks in windows, waves at employees.

A FEMALE CLERK with a hardware store grabs Ed's arm!

FEMALE CLERK
Please, help, please!

She drags him...

INT. HARDWARE STORE CONTINUOUS

People running, screaming. Something is happening down the aisle of the store.

Things knocked off shelves, a buzzing noise, confusion.

An OLDER WOMAN has placed her head down on a drill press and throws the switch.

The drill gouges into her and she dies a flailing, bloody death.

TITLE CARD: "June"

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE DAY

Mrs. Nicolodi steps out of her car. She goes up the driveway, past Erika's 10-speed in the lawn. She rings the doorbell. No answer.

She peeks in the windows, circles the house, knocks again on the door. At last, she writes a note and drops it through the mail slot.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) DAY

The note falls on the carpet.

Erika stands at the bend of the hallway. She looks the window, then bends to read the note:

"Mrs. Lang: Please call me. (signed) Erika's teacher, Mrs. Nicolodi..." and a phone number.

Erika throws the note in the kitchen trash. She opens the refrigerator. It is nearly empty.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (BEDROOM) DAY

She lifts the corner of her mattress. Bundles of cash underneath. She grabs some twenties.

INT. GROCERY STORE DAY

Erika shops. She wheels to the checkout line.

GROCER
Shopping for your folks again?

ERIKA
Yeah. We're out of a lot of stuff.

GROCER
They never do it themselves?

ERIKA
Have to earn my allowance.

The GROCER doesn't seem to believe her.

EXT. GROCERY STORE PARKING LOT DAY

Erika loads two bags on the handlebars of her 10-speed.

Jenny Malone and Jenny Moeser, arms crossed and smiling, come into view. Erika notices and startles.

ERIKA
I don't need a ride, so, 'bye...

Erika starts to pedal away. The Jennys follow, one on each side. Erika can't get much speed because of the groceries.

JENNY
How's your summer going? Gettin' hot. You shouldn't wear so much black, Lung. You'll melt.

MOESER
You don't want to smell.

Erika's speed increases. She loses the Jennys... for a moment. One of her grocery bags break. Goods crash to the sidewalk. The Jennys laugh and walk away, leaving Erika with the mess.

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE DAY

Erika arrives home with her surviving bag of groceries.

A TALL MAN in a blue shirt and pressed pants, 40s, stands stiffly on her porch.

ERIKA
Jesus! You scared me.

TALL MAN
(flat)
Erika Lang.

ERIKA
Who wants to know?

TALL MAN
I have a message.

Erika goes to the door, takes out her key, puts it in the lock.

ERIKA
From the school? My mom's out for the afternoon. You can tell Mrs. Nicolodi I gave mom that note.

TALL MAN
It's about the mall.

ERIKA
I need to put my groceries away.

TALL MAN
I can't leave without delivering this message.

ERIKA
If you're a murderer or something--
She unlocks the door.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) DAY

Erika enters, hiding her nerves; the Tall Man follows. She places the groceries on the counter, picks up stray clothes.

ERIKA
My brother's around here somewhere, so don't try anything funny.

The Tall Man looks alien in the room.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
You can sit if you want to.

He pulls a chair from the dining table and sits.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
I just have to put away the groceries. They'll make me cook the meatloaf if I'm not careful.

TALL MAN
In six days, someone will knock at your door. Don't let him in. We've learned of this plan and can't let it happen. We think he suspects your use. He wants to, wants to, wants to...

As the Tall Man speaks, his lower jaw extends like melted taffy. With the stretch, his voice grows deeper and deeper, slower and slower. His body is normal, but his eyes and skin slide and his mouth falls, wide and grotesque.

Erika jumps from the table!

TALL MAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry... I'm running out of time. Please remember. Don't let him into... your... house.

Erika stumbles, knocking over her chair.

The Tall Man freezes. His jaw has completely melted from his body, down his chest, and onto the dining table -- as if he's a oddly burnt candle. In silence, he rests, saying nothing, doing nothing.

ERIKA

Mister...

The man twitches and Erika flees the house--

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE DAY

Erika lifts her bike from the lawn and rifles away.

EXT. STREET DAY

Over the hill, Erika stops and looks back towards her house.

EXT. POLICE STATION DAY

Erika sits on her bike outside a police station.

For a long moment, she stares at the station, considering.

At last, angry, she pedals away.

INT. PHONE BOOTH DAY

Erika calls her house.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) DAY

The Tall Man sits frozen as the phone rings.

INT. PHONE BOOTH DAY

Erika hangs up. She looks like she might cry.
Instead, she dials another number.

INT. JEREMY'S HOUSE (BASEMENT) DAY

Jeremy naps in his basement, listening to music.

The phone rings. He pulls the cord towards him and lifts the receiver.

JEREMY
Atkins'.

ERIKA
I need help.

JEREMY
Erika?

ERIKA
There's a man in my house.

JEREMY
Are you inside? Call the police.

ERIKA
I'm down the street. You have to
come help me. I can't call the
police.

JEREMY
Where are you?

EXT. STREET DAY

Erika waits on her bike. Jeremy arrives on foot. He sees the look on her face and, instinctively, hugs her. She tries to hug him back, but instead pulls away.

JEREMY
Is he still in your house?

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE DAY

The two sneak around the back. Jeremy stands on a drain pipe. Soon, he drops back down.

ERIKA
Do you see him?

JEREMY
He's there.

ERIKA
What's he doing?

JEREMY
Sitting in the kitchen.

ERIKA
Did you see his mouth?

JEREMY
No.

Erika pulls him to another window. Jeremy jumps to catch a look.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
I can't see.

ERIKA
He was, he was talking to me, and his mouth disconnected from his face! Like...

Erika gestures.

JEREMY
I guess I shouldn't have shown you those horror movies. Listen, if you don't know this guy, we gotta call the police.

ERIKA
I can't.

JEREMY
Why not?

ERIKA
I want to get out of here.

JEREMY
I think we should call the police. Or your mom. Is she-?

ERIKA
No!

JEREMY

Why not?

She paces. At last, she stops.

ERIKA

I have a place I sometimes go.

EXT. THE PLAYGROUND DUSK

Erika paces an empty playground. Jeremy leans on a metal Jungle Gym.

ERIKA

Dad killed himself. With a gun in our garage.

JEREMY

I heard. After you moved here, right?

ERIKA

Then, on Valentine's Day, my mom just, just took off. I think she cracked up or something. A few days later, my brother Dylan went to find her. I haven't seen either of them since.

JEREMY

You've been living by yourself for five months? How have you paid your rent?

ERIKA

My brother had been saving for a motorcycle. He left three thousand dollars on my dresser.

JEREMY

Harsh.

ERIKA

Yeah. I'm like... diseased or something.

JEREMY

You're not diseased.

ERIKA

My dad left a note. "I hate it here." That's his whole fucking explanation. "I hate it here."

JEREMY

Not because of you.

ERIKA

I thought that he meant he wished he had stayed in Chicago. But now, no. He hated it here. With us. With the living.

JEREMY

(realizing)

You can't go to the police.

ERIKA

I'm sixteen. They'd put me in a foster home. I have to make it until my brother comes back.

Pause.

JEREMY

I've got an idea.

INT. JEREMY'S HOUSE (BASEMENT) NIGHT

Jeremy sneaks Erika downstairs. He snaps on the light.

JEREMY

Stay here tonight.

ERIKA

What about your brother?

JEREMY

Steve'll help us. Him and me'll go back to your house. You stay here. Don't worry. My brother's cool. He's big, too. I mean he's got muscles. If there's any trouble.

ERIKA

What if he tells someone about my family?

JEREMY

I know where he keeps his weed. Don't worry. We'll wait a few hours, when neighbors won't be looking. We'll find out who your intruder is.

ERIKA

Be careful.

JEREMY
Don't worry. Let me take care of
everything.

ERIKA
I'm trusting you.

JEREMY
I won't tell any--

ERIKA
No, I'm trusting you not to get
killed.

INT. JEREMY'S HOUSE (BASEMENT) DAY

Morning. Erika awakens on Jeremy's basement sofa. She sits
up. Jeremy's not back yet. Realizing the time, she jumps--

INT. JEREMY'S HOUSE (KITCHEN) CONTINUOUS

Erika tiptoes out of Jeremy's house. She runs into JEREMY'S
MOTHER.

JEREMY'S MOTHER
Who are you?

Erika keeps going...

JEREMY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
You're a little young for Steven,
aren't you?

ERIKA
I'm a friend of Jeremy's.

Erika exits though the kitchen.

JEREMY'S MOTHER (O.S.)
I tell him no girls. He missed
breakfast...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) DAY

Erika, stale and disheveled, walks the mall. She passes
Charlie Carpenter. She notices him; he notices her.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (EARRING ISLAND) DAY

Erika opens Earring Island. Exhausted, trapped, she thinks. She eyes Charlie Carpenter. Finally, Erika lifts the brace and ducks out of the kiosk, leaving Earring Island open, but unattended.

FOLLOW:

Charlie looks up. Erika stands above him.

ERIKA
Are you a pervert?

He makes a face.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
I know that's a crazy question.

CHARLIE
It is. And I'm not. But thanks for asking.

ERIKA
What are you doing then?

CHARLIE
Is this about the trouble this morning, Officer?

ERIKA
What trouble?

CHARLIE
Never mind. You better get back to work. If that security guard catches me talking to you... could be a hassle.

ERIKA
I can handle Ed. I need to know: why do you come here? I mean, you don't shop...

CHARLIE
I shop.

ERIKA
Doubtful. Why do you come here?

Pause.

CHARLIE
I'll tell you someday.

ERIKA

When?

CHARLIE

Someday.

It's a final response. Erika drifts back to Earring Island.

INT. APARTMENT DAY

Dave Ford absently watches water boil.

Television: ON, usual white noise.

PAN OVER TO REVEAL:
The television is unplugged.

THE VOICE

There's something I want you to
see.

Dave turns.

The white snow cuts and a local REPORTER speaks into a fuzzy-
covered microphone.

REPORTER

(on TV)

...the latest in a series of
increasingly bizarre events.
First, three suicides. And now two
teenage boys -- one missing, the
other found dead. Last night, the
remains of eighteen-year-old Steven
Atkins were discovered in rear
parking lot of the Drexel Mall.
The victim's brother, Jeremy
Atkins, age sixteen, is missing at
this time. If you have any
information regarding--

The TV cuts to white static.

Dave comes around and stands in front of the television.

THE VOICE

The messenger may not have gotten
through.

DAVE

I'm ain't goin' anywhere.

The TV changes again. This time it's Dave, standing in the room, watching himself on the television.

DAVE (CONT'D)
(on TV)
I'm ain't goin' anywhere.

This repeats, over and over, in a loop on the TV...

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) DAY

Erika enters the unlocked house. She walks deliberately.

No one in her kitchen. The Tall Man is gone.

She checks the hallway. Her brother's room. Her mother's. Her room. Everything is in order.

ERIKA'S POV:
A door off the kitchen.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (GARAGE) CONTINUOUS

Erika throws open the garage door. There's a dust-covered blue Pontiac sitting in the center of the two-car garage.

She switches on the light and cautiously enters.

On the floor and wall, a faded bloodstain -- remnants of her father's suicide. She stares down at it...

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (KITCHEN) CONTINUOUS

Erika, back inside, stares at half-put-away groceries, the spilled milk, the bruised and rotting fruit. She begins to clean.

EXT. JEREMY'S HOUSE DUSK

Erika knocks on the door of Jeremy's house. When Jeremy's Mother answers, Erika can see the house full of dour adults.

ERIKA
Is Jeremy home?

Jeremy's Mother looks stunned.

JEREMY'S MOTHER
Jeremy's gone. Missing. His
brother... my Steven--

Another GRIEVER comes to the door and takes Jeremy's Mother's arm.

GRIEVER
(to Jeremy's Mother)
Come back inside. You shouldn't be talking to anyone.

JEREMY'S MOTHER
(to Erika)
You're the girl from this morning.

Erika steps away.

ERIKA
I'll come back later.

Jeremy's Mother follows out of the house, but she's stopped by the Griever.

JEREMY'S MOTHER (O.S.)
Wait a minute -- I want to talk to you!

Erika is on her bike and away.

EXT. STREET DUSK

Erika rides, crying, distraught.

EXT. THE PLAYGROUND NIGHT

Erika, atop the Jungle Gym, hides frustrated tears.

A police car pulls up and shines a flashlight over the park, finding first Erika's 10-speed, then her.

POLICE OFFICER
Playground's closed.

Erika wipes her eyes and starts to climb down.

POLICE OFFICER (CONT'D)
Can't be here after dark. Go home.

ERIKA
Sorry.

POLICE OFFICER
Go home.

She walks her bike out and the police car drifts away.

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE NIGHT

Erika stares at her house. She's afraid to go in.

She goes around back, curls up on the rear stairwell, and closes her eyes...

TITLE CARD: "Four Days Later"

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (BEDROOM) DAY

Erika plays an LP in her room. She counts how much money remains in her stash.

She hears a sound.

She turns down the music. Nothing. She turns it back up.

The sound, again.

She looks from her money to her open bedroom door.

SOUND: Pounding.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) CONTINUOUS

Out in the hallway, she spies around the corner. A shadow across the frame. A hand reaches up. Knocks.

DYLAN (O.S.)

Erika. Erika, open the door. It's Dylan.

ERIKA

Dylan?

DYLAN

Open the door.

ERIKA

Where have you been?

DYLAN

I'll tell you all about it.

Erika trembles.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Let me in! I lost my key.

Erika comes closer.

ERIKA
Are you my brother?

DYLAN
Yes. I am.

ERIKA
A man told me you'd come.

The shadow moves outside.

Erika reaches for the bolt--

Just as she touches it, the door shakes! She throws the bolt!

ERIKA (CONT'D)
Go away!

DYLAN
Erika.

ERIKA
Talk to me through the door.

DYLAN
Erika!

Erika backs away. Over her shoulder, she spots the patio door off the kitchen. The door is ajar. She races for it.

Though not physically possible, Dylan is around the house and at the rear in the five seconds it takes Erika to cross--

She slams the rear door, throws the latch!

Dylan stands framed in the window. He flashes an animalistic smile then disappears from view.

TITLE CARD: "July"

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CINEMA) DAY

A DAPPER MAN sits in the center of a large, near empty movie theatre watching "John Carpenter's The Thing."

Disgusted, he exits with his half-eaten bag of popcorn...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) DAY

Leaving the theatre, the Dapper Man passes SUMMER SHOPPERS. He picks at his popcorn and disappears from sight.

Like a relay, the summer shoppers pass a HAPPY COUPLE, who dodge a SHOE SALESMAN, who waves to a PREGNANT WOMAN, who sits on a bench and rubs her feet next to a GRANDMOTHER, who signals her GRANDCHILDREN who run in circles around the fountain...

Bursting into view -- man, woman? -- a person on fire streaks down the concourse.

Zoom, shouts, screams--

INT. ERIKA'S BEDROOM DAY

Erika, on the sofa, watches a music vide on MTV.

INSERT: FLASHBACK

The same music video plays, only it's night and Dylan sits beside her.

DYLAN
I want to go find her.

ERIKA
She's coming back.

DYLAN
She's not.
(pause)
I can find her.

ERIKA
Shut up!

DYLAN
I'll only be gone, like, a week. I
bet she never left Indiana.

ERIKA
Don't. I'm begging you. Don't.
What, you're going to leave me
alone?

DYLAN
Just don't go in the garage.

ERIKA
I'm never driving that car.

On the TV, the music video fills the silence between them.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
Don't go...

FLASHBACK ENDS

Erika's phone rings. Twice; three times.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
(answering)
Hello.

BERNADETTE
(over phone)
Hey. It's Bernadette.

ERIKA
Oh, hi.

BERNADETTE
Where have you been? Do you work
here anymore?

ERIKA
I just need a few days.

BERNADETTE
Are you sick? You gotta call me.
Not that it's been busy -- it's
like the worst summer ever. You
still haven't picked up your last
check.

ERIKA
Oh. Ya. Sorry.

BERNADETTE
Come tonight. I'm here until nine.

ERIKA
Okay. Maybe.

BERNADETTE
I want to get you on the schedule.
I'm worried about you.

ERIKA
I'm fine.

BERNADETTE
Come and get your check. You need
the money, right?

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (BEDROOM) DAY

She fans out her money on her bed.

It shows in her face: she's low on funds.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (EARRING ISLAND) DAY

Erika approaches Bernadette at the kiosk.

BERNADETTE
Hey, stranger. For you...

She hands Erika a paycheck.

BERNADETTE (CONT'D)
Do me a favor. I have to look at
these new shoes. Can you watch for
five?

ERIKA
Sure.

BERNADETTE
Thanks.

Erika waits outside the kiosk. She spots people approaching
and tries to feign being busy.

Jenny Malone, Jenny Moeser, Jennifer Kramer, Sara Gerbitz.

JENNY
Hey, Lung! What are you doing?
It's freaky to see you out on a
Saturday night. Only people with
friends do stuff on Saturdays.

ERIKA
I have friends.

JENNY
Are you waiting on someone? I
don't see anyone.
(sad face)
Poor baby. No friends.

JENNIFER
Jeremy Atkins?

SARA
Yeah, is he dead?

ERIKA
Haven't seen him.

MOESER
(not at all)
Sorry about your boyfriend.

The four girls continue on down the concourse, smiling.

JENNY
'Bye, Lung.

Erika spots Charlie Carpenter by the fountain. Eyes meet.
She turns away. Bernadette is back.

BERNADETTE
Too expensive. Oh, well. Do you
want me to pencil you in the
schedule?

ERIKA
Sure. I'll be back in a second.

Erika crosses to Charlie Carpenter.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
It's like I never left. You're in
the same spot.

CHARLIE
Where have you been?

ERIKA
Oh, were you looking for me?

CHARLIE
The mall isn't exactly crowded the
past week. You'd be hard to miss.

ERIKA
Want to get a smoothie?

CHARLIE
A smoothie?

ERIKA
I'm buying. I just got paid...
(waves check)

CHARLIE
Aren't you afraid of me?

ERIKA
(with humor)
Maybe I am.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (FOOD COURT) DAY

Erika and Charlie sit at a prefab table in the food court, sipping smoothies.

ERIKA
It's someday.

CHARLIE
What?

ERIKA
You said you'd tell me "someday."
I checked my calendar.

CHARLIE
I meant some someday in the future.
And the future's always tomorrow.

ERIKA
I demand it.

CHARLIE
You do?

ERIKA
I'll tell you one of my secrets.

CHARLIE
Teenage girl with secrets is old
hat... Okay... Better be good.

ERIKA
My father shot himself in the head.

CHARLIE
Well, that's... awful. I thought
you were going to tell me you had a
crush on your best friend. You
know... the world is a pretty dark
place.

ERIKA
Is this mall a dark place?

CHARLIE
You wouldn't think so. All these
fluorescent lights.

He takes a breath, looks around.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
But yes. I think it is. Have you
seen "Raiders of the Lost Ark"?

ERIKA

Are you trying to change the subject?

CHARLIE

I saw it two times. In a row. Back to back. Last summer. It was one of those God-awful hot days. I left my house and drove to the mall. I parked in the lot -- right in the center of the lot. I saw the movie and I just loved it. But it was more than that. It was like I was drugged. I don't really remember anything. It's like I saw the movie once and then something... pushed me... back into line again, to buy another ticket. I was in the mall nearly five hours. When I left, it was dusk.

ERIKA

Sounds like a good day.

CHARLIE

My five year old son Charlie Jr. had come with me to the mall. He was in the backseat taking a nap. I had belted him in so he wouldn't roll. I forgot he was with me. He fried like a chicken in an oven. I might have saved him if I had only stayed half the time. But I saw the movie twice.

ERIKA

Oh, God. I read about that. You're him.

CHARLIE

My wife moved to Dayton. I lost all my friends. I eventually lost my job. And I murdered my son.

ERIKA

That's the worst thing I've ever heard.

CHARLIE

Worse than your father killing himself? Tragedy is very personal.

ERIKA

Why do you come here? I would
never come back.

Charlie leans forward.

CHARLIE

Because sometimes... I think I see
my son. Here. Walking around the
mall.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) NIGHT

Erika watches Charlie Carpenter exit the mall through the main doors. Closing time, the exodus has begun. But Erika stands still. Her eyes look around at the dark places, the nooks and crannies of the mall -- the alcoves and the gaps in the fake foliage. Studying.

Out of the corner of her eye, she sees someone -- a MAN IN A SUIT. She follows. He disappears around the corner.

Erika moves in the opposite direction from the departing crowd.

She spots the man again -- he looks familiar. Fifties, gray hair, brown suit. Erika recognizes him.

ERIKA

Dad?

She continues to follow. The man takes another corner, this time down the corridor towards the public rest-rooms.

At the bend, she runs into Jenny Malone with the Jennifer, Sara, and Moeser coming out of the Women's Room.

JENNY

It's Lung!

The four block Erika's way.

ERIKA

Move.

JENNY

We were just wondering if you were
still around, weren't we?

The others nod, hungry.

JENNY (CONT'D)

We knew you wouldn't have any plans.

ERIKA

How about you? You're at the fucking mall.

Jenny grabs Erika and shoves her hard against the wall. She spots the placard on a nearby door: SUPPLIES. Without a word, Jenny wrestles with Erika.

The girls force Erika into the supply closet.

SLAM the door.

JENNY

Enjoy sleeping with the mops!

Jennifer tries the door.

JENNIFER

Oh, shit, Jenny, it's locked.

The girls start to laugh. Sara tries to open the door, too. They didn't intend for this. But it's funny to them.

Ed appears at the end of the corridor.

ED

Ladies -- time to go. Mall's closing.

He disappears, on his way, warning given.

The girls try the door again.

SARA

It's stuck.

ERIKA (O.S.)

Let me out! Let me out of here!

Ed reappears, not noticing the struggle with the door.

ED

Ladies! Come on. Or I'll clear you out myself.

The girls follow orders.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SUPPLY CLOSET) NIGHT

Erika swats her hand against the metal door. The closet is dark except for the light under the door.

ERIKA
Open the goddamn door!

She pounds... No one hears.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) NIGHT

Erika's pleas are drowned in the ambience of the mall. Lights switch off in sections, leaving only the low ebb of a few displays.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Employees exit, doors lock.

Bernadette heads towards her car.

So does Ed, with a wave.

BERNADETTE
Good night.

ED
You, too.

BERNADETTE
No night shift?

ED
Got the night off. My replacement's a no show, so GM says knock off. Cheap bastard. Doesn't want to pay the overtime.

BERNADETTE
'Bye.

ED
See ya, sugar.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) LATER

A CLEANING CREW mops a section of the concourse.

PULL IN TO REVEAL:

They all wear Sony Walkman headphones, listing to Marty Brennaman call the Cincinnati Reds game.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SUPPLY CLOSET) LATER

Erika, exhausted, slumps against the door. Resigned, she kicks the door in frustration.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SUPPLY CLOSET) LATER

Hours have passed...

PAN DOWN TO REVEAL:

Erika, picking at the lock with a screwdriver she's found in the closet.

CRACK! The handle breaks and falls out!

Erika, overjoyed, kicks the door open.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) CONTINUOUS

Erika runs onto the empty corridor to the darkened concourse. She looks at the Time Display near the fountain.

1:26 AM.

She walks to the main exit. Locked. She tries another. Locked.

When she turns, there is a FEATURELESS MAN standing at the very end of the concourse. He's wears a dark suit and his skin looks white and alien. She can't take her eyes from him. He walks off.

She jogs in his direction.

ERIKA

Do you have a key to this door?

At the "T" of the concourse, she's lost track of the Featureless Man. When her eyes come up, she sees the man bent over the railing and staring at her.

The escalators are powered off, so Erika takes the stairs two at a time.

When she reaches the top level, the Featureless Man is gone.

She's at Sears' mezzanine entrance -- the wide glass door pulled aside a few feet.

Cautiously, she enters the store...

INT. SEARS (FURNITURE DEPT.) NIGHT

Erika enters the furniture department. There are false walls, sofas, tables, chairs, arranged into imaginary houses.

She is drawn into the maze. At last, she see him: the Featureless Man. He sits at a poker table, decorated with chips and cards, in the middle of a fake recreation room.

The Featureless Man deals cards to empty seats.

FEATURELESS MAN
Do you like it here?

He puts down the cards and stares at her.

FEATURELESS MAN (CONT'D)
(a deep, terrifying boom)
I hate it here.

The Featureless Man shape-shifts into ERIKA'S FATHER -- bloody hole from a gunshot in his head.

She runs!

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) NIGHT

At the exit, she kicks the glass doors, cracking the pane. An alarm sounds.

She turns.

The shopping mall is dotted with PALE BYSTANDERS staring at her -- old, young -- at least twenty, just watching her.

The alarm continues.

One by one, the pale bystanders vanish behind plants, pillars, stairs, normal objects. They're not real.

Erika breathes, hard.

ERIKA'S POV:

The last person to disappear is a SMALL BOY -- blue and blistered in the face, hair matted. It's Charlie Carpenter's dead son, CHARLIE JR.

INT. APARTMENT NIGHT

Dave sleeps in his chair. Faintly, sirens. He sits up, finds his crutches.

 DAVE
 What's going on?

The television blinks with its usual white noise.

Dave hobbles to the window and looks outside.

The mall. Sounding in the night are the alarms Erika has triggered. Joining the sound are approaching sirens.

 DAVE (CONT'D)
 What's happening?

 THE VOICE
 The girl I have contacted.

Police cars arrive.

 DAVE
 She okay?

 THE VOICE
 Come and find out.

Dave stares. Not taking the bait, he lets the curtain drop.

INT. POLICE STATION DAWN

Erika sits in the station's main room.

 POLICEMAN
 No answer at your house.

 ERIKA
 They're on their way back from
 Indianapolis. My brother's was in
 a BMX competition. I told the othe--

 POLICEMAN
 Sure you don't want to tell me the
 names of the people who did this to
 you?

Erika shakes her head.

 ERIKA
 Am I in trouble?

POLICEMAN

We've spoken with a general manager from the mall. He sends his apologies and says to let you go.

ERIKA

Stellar. So I can leave?

Something's not sitting right with the policeman. At last--

POLICEMAN

We've got your information. We'll follow up with your parents in a few days.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) DAY

Charlie Carpenter sits in his usual spot. He looks to Earring Island, sees only Bernadette. He crosses to the kiosk.

CHARLIE

Is the girl with the black hair working today?

BERNADETTE

Called in sick.

Charlie is distracted by a movement out in the corner of his eye.

CHARLIE

If I gave you a note, would you give it to her?

BERNADETTE

Are you a friend of Erika's?

CHARLIE

We met the other day.

Bernadette hands Charlie a pen and scrap of paper.

BERNADETTE

You know she's sixteen, right?

He nods, writing, oblivious to the implication. As he writes, he sees something again in his vision and tries to block it out with a hand.

CHARLIE

Please see that she gets it.

As he walks away, Bernadette reads the note.

When Charlie wanders down the concourse, we see what has distracted him. Charlie Jr. stands among the people on the thoroughfare. The boy walks away and into a Discount Store. His father follows...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (DISCOUNT STORE) CONTINUOUS

The store is a tight-knit assortment of chest-high racks, all overflowing -- a price-cut store. There are a DOZEN SHOPPERS and A FEW CLERKS. No one pays much attention to Charlie as he enters.

Charlie Jr. has vanished.

His father goes deeper into the store...

Unseen, he drops to his knees and peers along the floor.

ZOOM:

Under one rack of clothes -- a pair of child's feet.

Charlie navigates to the rack, parts the clothes.

Nested inside is Charlie Jr.

CHARLIE JR.

Something terrible is going to happen. You have to find two people. There is a man named Dave Ford. And a girl named --

CROSSCUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT DAY

Dave Ford, standing in front of the broken television.

THE VOICE

-- Erika Lang.

CROSSCUT TO:

INT. SHOPPING MALL (DISCOUNT STORE) -- DAY

Charlie, at the rack.

CHARLIE
What's going to happen?

CROSSCUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT DAY

Dave, staring at the TV.

THE VOICE
Something no one has ever seen.
Something that will close the mall
for seven days. We can't do
anything to stop it. It's too
late. But you can help me keep the
mall from opening again.

CROSSCUT TO:

INT. SHOPPING MALL (DISCOUNT STORE) DAY

Charlie looks down at Charlie Jr. in the rack.

CHARLIE
And what's coming when it reopens?

CHARLIE JR.
The end.

Charlie reaches to touch his son, but somehow knows this is wrong. He hovers and his chin trembles.

CHARLIE
I'm sorry. I'm sorry I left you in
the car.

Suddenly--

DISCOUNT CLERK (O.S.)
Looking for something for your
wife?

Charlie looks up, then down. A DISCOUNT CLERK is beside him. He stands in the Ladies Section. In this blink, the boy has disappeared. Charlie exits the store.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (EARRING ISLAND) DAY

At the kiosk, Bernadette is on the phone.

BERNADETTE
(reading Charlie's note)
"You said: 'secrets.' That means
more than one." And then there's a
phone number.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE DAY

Erika, on the other end of the line.

ERIKA
Let me get a pencil.

EXT. APARTMENT DAY

Outside his apartment building, Dave Ford stands on crutches. He squints like he hasn't seen the sun in months. One crutch forward, then another.

PAN TO REVEAL:
He's crossing his apartment complex's parking lot -- heading in the direction of the shopping mall.

At the main thoroughfare that cuts between the complex and the mall, he stops. Cars whizz by.

He looks down at the ground.

POV:
His legs -- the left foot intact, the right one amputated. He looks to the traffic light, so far away -- at least a hundred yards.

He walks a few steps, stops. A few more.

POV:
The mall -- hazy in the summer sun.

After a long deliberation, Dave retreats, surrendering the idea.

INT. APARTMENT DAY

Dave stands on crutches in front of the television.

DAVE
I couldn't do it. I can't. I
can't do it.

The television hums.

DAVE (CONT'D)
You shouldn't have picked me. I'm
weak, I tell ya. I woulda if I
coulda. For Christ's sake, I--

THE VOICE
You know why I chose you.

DAVE
You were wrong.

CU:
The television, unsympathetic.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Why don't you eat my shit?

THE VOICE
Please. Please. Please.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) DAY

Jenny Malone, Jennifer Kramer, Jenny Moeser, and Sara Gerbitz, look supremely pleased with themselves. In each's girl's hands are a full stopping bags, each bag branded by different store. The girls have been on a spree.

They pass the fountain and cafe. Jenny Malone slows.

JENNY
My feet hurt.

They sit at a cafe table.

SARA
I spent way too much.

MOESER
(smiling)
It's a good day.

JENNIFER
(nodding towards Earring
Island)
I haven't seen Lung in a while.

JENNY
Maybe she's still in that closet?

The girls laugh.

JENNIFER

I think we would have heard. Her brother probably rescued her.

MOESER

What happened to her brother, anyway? I used to hear his damn dirt bike all over town.

JENNY

He wasn't that cute. Not like *him*--

The girls catch sight of a HANDSOME TEEN BOY passing their table and they ogle.

Jenny takes out a curling iron she's purchased, pops the plastic. Heavy, with long black cord.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Better watch out. I grew my hair out just for this. Finally, I'll be able to do big, sexy...

Her mind drifts, she seems stumped.

JENNY (CONT'D)

Big, sexy...

SARA

Curls?

JENNY

Do you hear that?

The girls listen.

Jenny unwraps the cord of the curling iron. She stands up.

Suddenly, she wraps the cord around her hands and starts to choke Sara with the cord. Jenny's face shows complete confusion as to why she may be doing this to her friend.

Jennifer and Moeser jump up.

MOESER

Holy shit, Jenny!

JENNIFER

Stop it, stop it! Stop it, Jenny!

Jenny pulls the cord tighter; Sara's turning blue, struggling for her life.

Now, Moeser stops helping Sara. Instead, Moeser bites into Jennifer's arm, pulling away flesh and causing a geyser of blood.

SHOPPERS turn, shocked.

The four girls erupt into a violent skirmish. It's no choreographed fight. It's a chaotic melee. The girls unleash an inexplicable, animalistic fury on each other.

Blood splatters their clothes and shopping bags.

Shoppers move to intercede, but fear being swept into the storm.

Sara falls out of her chair, dead and blue. Jennifer stomps on Sara's head, exploding it like a melon.

Moeser digs Jennifer's eyes from her head and then pins her to the ground, tearing off an arm, breaking it backwards.

Moeser is killed by fists from Jenny Malone.

As the last one standing, Jenny rams her own head into the marble of the fountain. Shoppers run to pull her back. Jenny jumps into the fountain's waters and drowns herself in a twitching, epileptic frenzy.

HOLD:

The scene, the carnage, the four dead bodies and the mess of blood, clothes, body parts, and shopping bags, and the circle of onlookers.

Ed Pescero, hand over his mouth in shock, walks away...

EXT. SHOPPING MALL DUSK

A NEWSMAN appears on a fuzzy television.

NEWSMAN

Everyone has been evacuated from mall except emergency personnel. Reports are varied about the number of victims. Some say four and some five. We have confirmed they are all teenage females. With us is Mr. Frank Underwood, one of three General Managers for the Mall.

UNDERWOOD, an older man in shorts and Polo shirt enters the frame.

NEWSMAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Underwood, can you tell us what happened today?

UNDERWOOD

There was an incident and the mall will remain closed until the police allow us to reopen.

NEWSMAN

This is the sixth violent incident since the start of the summer.

UNDERWOOD

The first suicide, as you know, was a woman from a hundred miles from here. Now, now she was disturbed. The second suicide was a copycat. The others were, perhaps, just accidents. They're under investigation.

NEWSMAN

Are you saying what's happened today is an accident, too?

UNDERWOOD

It could be drugs. The girls were all out of their minds at the time. The fire department is checking the possibility of a gas leak.

Underwood is tapped by someone off camera.

NEWSMAN

What about the boy found murdered in the parking lot?

UNDERWOOD

Pardon me...

Underwood moves off camera.

INT. APARTMENT SAME MOMENT

The television report fades into snow. Dave Ford watches.

THE VOICE

I want you to start to prepare.

DAVE

For what?

THE VOICE
For visitors.

INT. CHARLIE'S HOUSE (FAMILY ROOM) NIGHT

Charlie Carpenter's house is simple, almost like a showroom. He watches the reports on the violence, the sound switched off, focused on the fuzzy pictures of people coming and going from the closed mall.

His phone rings and he rises to answer.

CHARLIE
(into phone)
You got my message.

ERIKA (O.S)
How did you know it was me?

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE INTERCUT CONVERSATION

Erika, on the phone; she is starting to crack.

CHARLIE
No one calls here.

ERIKA
I saw your son. At the mall.

CHARLIE
So did I. Today. He told me something was going to happen.

ERIKA
Are you watching?

CHARLIE
Yes.

ERIKA
Who was it?

CHARLIE
They haven't announced.

ERIKA
You were right. I do have secrets.
Lots of them.
(pause)
I don't know you.

CHARLIE

I don't know you either. I need
someone I can trust.

ERIKA

I can't do this alone anymore.

CHARLIE

Dave Ford. Do you know that name?

ERIKA

No.

CHARLIE

My son told me we have to find that
man.

ERIKA

We?

CHARLIE

I'll be at your house early
tomorrow. Give me the address.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) NIGHT

Erika hangs up the phone. She stands, looks around her empty
house.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (GARAGE) A MOMENT LATER

Erika enters the garage. She looks at the faded bloodstain,
then to the dusty '79 Buick.

She climbs in the car, lays down on the back seat, shivers,
and closes her eyes. She opens them again, leans over, and
locks all the doors.

TITLE CARD: "August"

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (GARAGE) DAY

Erika, asleep in the backseat, wakes to the sound of an car
pulling into her driveway.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) DAY

Erika answers the front door. She has an expectant smile on
her face. But -- it's not Charlie Carpenter.

Instead, it's Mrs. Nicolodi and another man, MR. TRUSDALE.

MRS. NICOLODI
Good morning, Erika. Sorry to
surprise you so early. This is Mr.
Trusdale... He's from our summer
program.

(to Trusdale)
This is Erika Lang.

TRUSDALE
Hello, Erika. It's nice to meet
you.

MRS. NICOLODI
May we come inside?

ERIKA
My mom's not here right now.

MRS. NICOLODI
Oh.

ERIKA
She's at a competition with my
brother.

MRS. NICOLODI
(to Mr. Trusdale)
Erika's brother does BMX and dirt
bike racing.

TRUSDALE
BMX?

ERIKA
Bicycle Motor Cross.

TRUSDALE
Oh, is that where they ride around
a dusty track, jump hills?

ERIKA
Yep, pretty much it.

MRS. NICOLODI
Do you have a number I can reach
her at? She hasn't returned any of
my messages.

ERIKA
She's super forgetful.

Awkward pause. Erika does not offer the number.

MRS. NICOLODI
So... Does she have a number?

ERIKA
Umm. Yeah. Sure.

Erika gives a nonchalant wave into the living room.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
Do you want to sit down while I
look? I think the number's in the
kitchen.

Mrs. Nicolodi sits; Trusdale inspects.

Erika goes to the kitchen, out of sight. She pulls the
Yellow Pages from a cupboard, flips to "H - Hotels."

ERIKA (CONT'D)
Like I said, she's super forgetful.
I thought she left it on the
fridge, but it might be in this
stack. Hold on.

TRUSDALE
Take your time.

MRS. NICOLODI
I assume you've heard about
yesterday.

ERIKA
What about yesterday?

MRS. NICOLODI
About Jenny Malone. She was a
friend of yours, wasn't she?

ERIKA
Are you kidding? She hated me.

CU:
Yellow pages -- Holiday Inn... USA switchboard, no specific
location. Erika takes a pencil and begins to jot the number
on a used envelope.

MRS. NICOLODI
I always saw you two together.

ERIKA
Here's the number...

Erika comes back into the room holding the number. Mrs.
Nicolodi moves to take it, but stops.

MRS. NICOLODI

They announced it this morning.
Jenny and three of her friends were
the ones who died.

Erika is stunned.

MRS. NICOLODI (CONT'D)

The girls had an argument.

TRUSDALE

They're saying they might have been
high on drugs.

ERIKA

Drugs. Wow. That mall is fucked.

TRUSDALE

Certainly doesn't want to make me
shop there.

MRS. NICOLODI

But where will I find my purses!

Mrs. Nicolodi pats her handbag and fakes a smile.

MRS. NICOLODI (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't joke.

(pause)

You probably want to know why I
keep trying to talk with your
mother. Mr. Trusdale is with a
program called "Lifelines." It's
for girls and boys your age -- a
group that gets together to talk,
share ideas, socialize. Mr.
Trusdale has started a chapter at
our school and it runs the summer.
At the end of the month, there's a
camping retreat in Evansville. I
wanted to see if you would come to
a meeting.

ERIKA

Like Alcoholics Anonymous?

TRUSDALE

More casual. "Lifelines" is a
community for teens who have had
violence in their lives and may
have trouble talking about it.

MRS. NICOLODI

Your father. Erika, I know it must be hard. But you're not alone. This is a wonderful opportunity for you.

ERIKA

This sounds great. It really does. Yeah... I don't think my mom would be okay with it.

TRUSDALE

I'd be happy to talk to your mother.

He turns. Charlie Carpenter knocks at the door.

Erika has a flash of panic, but wipes it away. She hops up to the door and throws it open!

ERIKA

Uncle Charlie, you know you don't have to knock. My mom sometimes has Uncle Charlie stop by and check on me when she's away. Makes sure I'm not throwing any wild parties.

CHARLIE

Hi... everybody... I'm... Uncle Charlie.

ERIKA

These people are from my school.

CHARLIE

You're look a little old for sophomores.

MRS. NICOLODI

I'm Erika's homeroom teacher.

ERIKA

They were just telling me about summer camp.

CHARLIE

But today's the first of August.

MRS. NICOLODI

Yes, well. Erika's mother is a hard person to reach. But it's not too late.

(MORE)

MRS. NICOLODI (CONT'D)

Is it all right if Mr. Trusdale and I give her a call at this number? Maybe you can start next week?

Erika nods happily.

MRS. NICOLODI (CONT'D)

Great. I think you'll find it to be a lot of fun. We should go.

At the door, Trusdale turns to Erika, holding her hand.

TRUSDALE

And we are very, very sorry about Jenny Malone. If there's anything you need... Ah...

Trusdale pulls a Lifelines brochure from his pocket.

Erika takes the brochure.

Waves all around. They leave. Erika shuts the door.

Erika steps towards the kitchen --

ERIKA

Good job, Uncle Charlie.

-- and throws the brochure in the trash.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

All right. Secrets. Secret number one you know: my dad's dead. He shot himself in our garage a few months after we moved here. Secret number two: my mom freaked out and left town and I don't know where she is. Three: my brother went to try and find her and now he's gone, too. Four: my only kinda/sorta friend was a guy named Jeremy. He was the only person I ever told my first three secrets. He tried to help me when a weird man showed up at my house. Jeremy's brother was the one they found chopped up in the parking lot of the mall. I think Jeremy's dead. And five: I knew those girls who were killed yesterday. So I suggest you stay away from me. Unless you have a death wish or something.

CHARLIE
Maybe I do.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR (MOVING) DAY

Charlie drives, Erika rides shotgun.

CHARLIE
Dave Ford. No one by that name in
the phone book. So I went to the
next best place -- the library.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR (PARKED) DAY

Charlie and Erika are parked, staring at a plain apartment
building. Charlie shows Erika a newspaper clipping:

CHARLIE
Dave Ford was a truck driver. He
delivered a load to Sears three
years ago. He backed the truck
wrong and crushed a seventeen-year-
old stock boy. This is his last
known address.

Erika turns, peers out the back window.

ERIKA
(stunned)
He lives across from the mall?

INT. CORRIDOR DAY

Charlie and Erika find Dave Ford's door. At last, Charlie
knocks. The door falls open on its own.

INT. APARTMENT DAY

For once, Dave's curtains are parted. Flooded with light,
the apartment looks alien. Seated in the center of the room,
next to his crutches, is Dave.

DAVE
Come awn in.

CHARLIE
Are you Dave Ford?

Charlie, then Erika enters. Charlie shuts the door.

DAVE

If you ask me... we look fuckin' pathetic. I'm missin' a foot.

(to Charlie)

You look like you've been to a funeral.

(to Erika)

And what are you? Fourteen?

ERIKA

Sixteen.

CHARLIE

You knew we were coming?

DAVE

I don't want to hear about your lives. I don't want to hear about your problems. I assume you've got both. It wants us to work together so fuck all that.

CHARLIE

It?

DAVE

There's a war going on at that mall. There's the thing that wants us all to die. And the thing that wants us all to live. And they don't like each other very much.

CHARLIE

Who told you this?

DAVE

The TV.

Charlie and Erika come around the front of the glowing television. They now see that it's snow, and it's silent.

ERIKA

You should get cable.

DAVE

That television hasn't worked in ten months. I just didn't have the energy to throw it away. I don't leave the house much. Last May, it turned itself on and started talking to me. Now it won't shut up.

(to TV)

Come on -- talk, you chatty fucker!

(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

(pause)
Just like when you take a car to
the goddamn mechanic and--

THE VOICE
I'm glad you're here.

DAVE
You heard that, right?

ERIKA | CHARLIE
Yes.

THE VOICE
I've tried to stop what's
happening.

ERIKA
(leaning in, amazed)
Totally weird.

CHARLIE
Definitely.

THE VOICE
There is only one way to stop
what's going to happen. You must
burn it. It knows we're speaking
about it. It will try to stop you.

DAVE
Show us your face.

CHARLIE
Show us.

CU:
The TV. In the static, something forms, grows brighter --
just at the apex, the television cuts out and goes black.

DAVE
Whoever it is talkin' to us through
this box... it knows a lot.
Sometimes before shit happens. And
he knows we're connected with that
mall.

CHARLIE
And with death.

DAVE
I don't want to know your stories,
I told you. I just want be left
alone.

ERIKA

This thing that wants us all to die. Like you said. Could it a man with this, this strange white face?

DAVE

What do you mean?

ERIKA

One night I was trapped in the mall...

DAVE

I know. It told me when you were there.

ERIKA

I saw this, well, he looked like a person, but his face was weird and... and I can't describe him. But he wasn't like the other ghosts.

CHARLIE

I see my dead son in the mall. Yesterday, before the killings, he told me the mall will close for seven days. When it reopens, it will be too late.

DAVE

We gotta burn it down when there're no people inside.

CHARLIE

It's more. When it reopens, things will be even worse. Maybe spread outside the mall.

DAVE

Burning down a building that big ain't easy. The fire department will just come and put it out 'fore it spreads.

CHARLIE

How do we even start a fire like that?

Pause.

ERIKA

In several places at once.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL DAY

Charlie, Erika, and Dave walk the empty parking lot of the Drexel Mall, surveying the size of the place. Dave lags behind on his crutches.

 DAVE
Arson's a crime, you know.

 CHARLIE
Your TV friend chose us because it knows we'll have no remorse about a fire. And it knows we're strong. Harder to turn.

 DAVE
I'm not killing myself because some mall tells me to.

 CHARLIE
I'm sure the others thought that. But maybe you're right. We're stronger. We've seen that place for what it is. Evil.

 (to Erika)
I wish we could leave you out of it. If we get arrested--

 ERIKA
I'm a minor. My record will be expunged.

 CHARLIE
You don't really want to spend two years as a state's ward, do you?

 ERIKA
Everyone I know is dead.

 CHARLIE
Come on, you don't know that.

They look the building up and down.

 ERIKA
What we need... is a fire in every store.

 DAVE
It's impossible! And once we get past the main doors, there's a hundred other locks. Alarms. Smoke detectors. Sprinklers.
(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)

There's no way a fire will spread,
it'd be out in minutes. I mean,
how do we even get inside! We'd
need a key to every door.

Erika looks to them. Then to her watch. She has an idea.

ERIKA

You guys hungry?

INT. DINER NIGHT

Ed and Bernadette flirt in the booth of a retro-style diner,
eating. Lightly, their hands touch.

Erika enters, followed by Charlie and Dave.

Bernadette sees Erika. Busted, the older woman looks
embarrassed then smiles sheepishly at Erika.

ERIKA

(smiling)

Now I see why you needed a night
off.

Bernadette shyly moves her hand from Ed's.

BERNADETTE

You brought friends, I see.

ERIKA

It's my army. Wanna enlist?

ED

I've been in the army. It sucks.

ERIKA

It's something sure to get us all
into big trouble.

ED

I'm in.

BERNADETTE

Ed!

ED

I'm terrible with peer pressure.
You should know this about me
sooner rather than later.

ERIKA

I'm serious. It's not good. But once you hear everything, you'll know it has to happen.

INT. CHARLIE'S CAR (MOVING) NIGHT

Charlie drives. Dave, Erika, Bernadette and Ed ride along.

ED

I've seen some crazy shit all right.

BERNADETTE

You have?

ED

Eighteen months you begin to think it's your imagination. I always felt something was wrong in that place. And after seeing those four girls...

Bernadette rubs Ed's hair.

ERIKA

Do you really believe us?

ED

Who would make this up?

The car hits a bump and they all go flying.

INT. APARTMENT NIGHT

Huddled in Dave's apartment, the five look down at the snowy television. It switches off, then back on again.

ED

That's fucked up.

DAVE

You haven't seen the half of it.

Dave holds up the disconnected plug.

CHARLIE

Dave's television is a messenger. It's been broadcasting information from someone or something inside the mall who's on our side.

BERNADETTE
Our side? Are ya sure?

CHARLIE
Let's hope.

BERNADETTE
Because we're talking about--

DAVE
I know what we're talking about.

Charlie looks out the window.

ED
It might be easier to make the
place go bankrupt. Who the hell's
gonna shop there now?

CHARLIE
No time for basic economics. When
the mall reopens, something
devastating is going to happen.

ED
Did the TV tell you that?

CHARLIE
No. My dead son.

ERIKA
Could be the end of the world.

DAVE
The mall's giving off some dark
power right now. Like a humming
electrical current.

ED
This is new for me, you know? I
don't like rushing into things. We
should scout it. If we can get in
and out, it's worth the risk. If
we try to start a fire without a
plan... well...

BERNADETTE
I don't want to go in.

CHARLIE
We'll need a lookout.

ED
I have a set of walkie-talkies.
We can get in through the loading
dock. If okay with you, Dave.

Dave, hesitant, nods.

Ed pulls out a large key ring.

ED (CONT'D)
Keys to the kingdom.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Bernadette nervously sits with her walkie-talkie on an
incline outside the mall.

BERNADETTE'S POV:
Ed, Charlie, Dave, and Erika enter at the dock.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) A MOMENT LATER

Ed, Charlie, Dave, and Erika are along the wall near J.C.
Penney, in the dim lighting.

DAVE
Are there cameras?

ED
Only half work. But there's no one
on duty to watch 'em -- they only
broadcast local, into the crow's
nest. Ah, all the GMs are cheap
bastards.

They pass the cafe and fountain -- the scene of the death of
Jenny Malone and her friends. It is taped off by police
tape, with markings for the bodies.

Erika passes a mark: "J. MOESER-Right Arm."

Dave stops at the turn.

DAVE
I shouldn't have come. I'm slowing
you down.

Charlie grabs Dave's arm.

CHARLIE
Stick together.

Dave's face registers with Erika.

ERIKA

It's okay. You're with us.

Dave finally starts to move again...

ED

Probably best to start the fires in clothing stores. Places that will burn.

ERIKA

You sure seem anxious to be out of a job.

ED

Look who's talking. Don't worry, I'm never coming back to this place. I gave my two weeks after those girls killed each other. And asked Bernadette out on a date the same day. Time for some changes in ol' Ed Pescero's life.

Around a corner, up a hall, and into a hidden room on the deep side of the corridor...

CHARLIE

Where are we going?

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) NIGHT

The four enter the nerve center of the mall -- a security crowd's nest outfitted with video monitors, alarm panels, safety equipment, and telephones.

Ed flips a switch, dispersing a glow from the screens.

ED

We'll cut the fire alarms. They won't know it's burning until they get a visual.

CHARLIE

What about the sprinklers?

ED

We'll kill those, too. But you can't do it from here. There are disconnects along the system. We'll have to do it locally in a few places.

(MORE)

ED (CONT'D)

We can't tonight, though, or someone will notice. But I can show you how it's done.

CHARLIE

You're quite a find, Ed Pescero.

ED

What's that old saying? Everything happens for a reason. And to think, I thought you were a child molester.

CHARLIE

I forgive you.

ED

You could have reminded me you were that boy's father from last summer. Shit. Make a guy feel bad.

Ed pulls a laminated chart from a ring along the wall.

ED (CONT'D)

(switching gears)

This is the master key chart. Sears, Key 57.

Ed points to a square on the chart. He takes out his ring of keys, finds one marked 57.

ED (CONT'D)

Sears.

Erika notices a monitor, points.

ERIKA

What's that?

In the corner of a black and white monitor image stands a TEENAGE GIRL. She's in the middle of the concourse, near some flower pots.

ED

Oh, shit. Someone's here.

A SECOND TEENAGE GIRL comes into view on the monitor. This one is bent, injured, doesn't look right at all.

The four stare at the flickering, low-res image.

ED (CONT'D)
I'll check it out. I've got my
credentials. It won't seem as
strange as one of you.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) CONTINUOUS

Ed takes to the concourse...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

Erika leans into the monitor, places her finger on the image.

ERIKA
Wait a minute, wait a minute. He
shouldn't go out there alone.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Bernadette watches the parking lot.

A car pulls up, stops. She reaches for her walkie-talkie.
The car shuts off its engine, but no one gets out.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Ed stands alone in the concourse near the flower pots.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

Erika and the others watch on the monitor. The image shows
him standing beside the two girls.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Ed makes a circle, retreats.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) CONTINUOUS

Ed returns to the others.

ED
No one was out there.

The two teenagers: still visible on the monitor.

DAVE
You were standing right in front of
them.

ED
Holy shit.

ERIKA
Ghosts.

ED
Why don't they stop us?

DAVE
Maybe they don't know all the
rules, just like we don't. And
some of them might be on our side.

ED
I hope you're right... Let's go.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) CONTINUOUS

Ed escorts the others.

ED
Three sets of heat sensors in each
of the three concourses. Nine
switches total to kill just before
we set the fire. These kick alarms
to the HVAC company off-site and I
have no control over that feed from
security. But we can stop them
with a switch-off. The sensors
look like this...

Ed indicates a wall panel; he raises to reveal a switch.

ED (CONT'D)
The second one is over by the
hardware store and the third one
next to the drinking fountain.
Let's practice disabling this
concourse. Don't pull them, just
pretend.

CHARLIE
I'll get the hardware store.

ERIKA
I'll get the fountain.

DAVE

I will just stand here.

Ed nods to Dave ("good idea.")

Erika finds the panel then the switch. She can see the others, thirty feet off.

Erika freezes!

Behind the water fountain, in a nook only Erika can see, stands the ghost of Jenny Malone, face bloated and ugly, covered in blood.

JENNY

Lung.

ERIKA

(unsure)

I'm not afraid of you. You're dead.

JENNY

Am I?

Erika jogs back to the others.

ED

Easy?

ERIKA

Sure. Yeah.

ED

Good. Let's move on. I'll show you the other sensors.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Bernadette watches the parked car.

A second car comes into the lot and parks away from the first. Engine and lights go off and, again, no one gets out.

A third car arrives.

Then, a fourth.

All the same pattern: enter, stop, lights and engine off, nothing more.

BERNADETTE

What the hell?

She lifts her walkie-talkie.

BERNADETTE (CONT'D)
(into walkie-talkie)
Ed. Ed!

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Ed lifts his walkie-talkie.

ED
Yeah, I'm here, sugar.

BERNADETTE (O.S.)
Something's going on out here.

ED
We're almost done. We'll be out in
two minutes.

Erika glances at the escalators as they pass. She sees the
Featureless Man standing on the mezzanine.

ERIKA
Look. That's him.

Charlie turns, sees the Featureless Man, as do the others.

ED
Come on, let's get out of here.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Ed, Dave, Charlie, and Erika exit onto the loading dock.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL:

The shopping mall parking lot, now with about 20 parked cars
in the lot.

Erika passes by one of the cars, glances inside. She starts
to scream, but Charlie grabs her and covers her mouth.

CHARLIE
Don't look, don't look! Keep
going.

The four hit the incline and huff it up to Bernadette.

BERNADETTE
Oh, thank God. All these cars just
started showing up.

DAVE
They'll all dead.

BERNADETTE
What?

CHARLIE
Suicides.

BERNADETTE
All of them?

They all retreat into the bushes.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL DAWN

Morning. The shopping mall parking lot now has over two dozen parked cars.

M.O.S.:
The dead inside. Young, old, couples, singles. Blood from their wrist- and throat-slitting splatters the windows and they all look in unbearable pain.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Thirty-six bodies have been discovered in the parking lot of the Drexel Mall. People of all ages and both sexes, who were residents from surrounding parts of Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio. They were found inside their cars early this morning. Officials have confirmed that all the deaths were self-inflicted. The latest in a series of shocking developments that have baffled investigators...

INT. APARTMENT DAY

Erika, Dave, Charlie, and Bernadette wait in Dave's apartment. They look across at the mall. Crews tow the cars from the lot.

CHARLIE
Recruiting.

ED
What?

CHARLIE

We were recruited. Why can't the other side? They just upped their numbers considerably.

ERIKA

It knows we're going to burn it down.

CHARLIE

We can't let it stop us.

BERNADETTE

I don't see how y'all are gonna do it? There's gonna be fifty cops around the mall tonight after this business.

CHARLIE

That's a good point.

DAVE

We should wait another coupla days. We have time.

CHARLIE

I don't think we have any fucking time at all. Something sent an assassin to Erika's house already. I say we do it tonight.

ED

I was thinking. We could use acetylene. I can set off the tanks with my sidearm.

DAVE

Too loud.

ED

Not from inside the mall.

CHARLIE

I feel better with matches and kerosene.

DAVE

I wish I had an A-Bomb. Take that place out for sure. Who's with me?

All raise hands. Ed smiles, then waves them down, knowing the idea is foolish.

ED
Let's get my truck.

INT. HOME GOODS STORE DAY

Ed and Charlie wheel a basket through an aisle of a home goods store, filling up on acetylene -- three tanks, two large, one small. Charlie throws in anything else that will burn -- lighter fluid, lighters. The two look down in the cart.

CHARLIE
This looks a little suspicious.

ED
We should split this stuff up
before we go through the checkout.

JUMP TO:

Charlie hits the aisle with a second basket. They separate the things that cause fire from the things that explode.

ED (CONT'D)
(sarcastic)
Oh, much better.

INT. APARTMENT DAY

Bernadette sits with Dave.

BERNADETTE
How'd you lose your foot?

DAVE
Good ol' diabetes.

BERNADETTE
My grandma lost a leg from that.
You have to take care of yourself.

DAVE
Until now, I didn't have much
reason to.

BERNADETTE
You killed a kid. That's what I
heard from Ed.

DAVE
I did. But now I know that mall
for what it is...
(MORE)

DAVE (CONT'D)
maybe it wasn't me after all.
Maybe that mall killed that kid.

Bernadette points at the television.

BERNADETTE
Can you make it talk?

DAVE
It has a mind of its own. It's
been pretty quiet since all of you
entered the picture.

BERNADETTE
It knows we're helping.

DAVE
Or it's abandoned us.

INT. ED'S PICKUP (MOVING) DAY

Erika is squeezed in with Ed and Charlie.

ERIKA
I smell bad.

CHARLIE
You want a shower?

ERIKA
I do. And I should pick up my
rabbit's foot.

CHARLIE
You have a lucky rabbit's foot?

ERIKA
My dad bought me one at the county
fair. I'm not even sure it works.

CHARLIE
Well, it can't hurt.
(to Ed)
Erika's is real close.

ED
Okay. But not for long. It's
getting dark.

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE DAY

The pickup pulls to the curb outside Erika's house.

INT. ED'S PICKUP (PARKED) DAY

Erika starts to get out.

CHARLIE

(to Erika)

Do you want one of us to come with you?

ED

I'll go with her. I have my sidearm. You stay with the stuff.

Ed and Erika climb out.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) DAY

Erika enters the house with Ed.

ERIKA

I'll make it fast. Y can watch TV if you want.

ED

As long as it doesn't try to start a conversation.

ERIKA

Well, mine's never done that, so... I want to say thanks. You didn't have to do this.

ED

I warned you: I'm bad with peer pressure.

ERIKA

Then I say: go! Bernadette likes you. But dead you're probably pretty boring.

ED

Don't worry, kid. I've got your back.

She smiles and leaves him alone.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (BATHROOM) DAY

Erika showers -- lots of steam.

She gets out relaxed. She dries and pulls on jeans and a T-shirt with the logo of the punk band Tubeway Army.

As she brushes her black hair, she hears a woman's voice outside the bathroom. Erika cracks the door.

ERIKA
Ed? Did you say something?

The voice is ERIKA'S MOTHER.

ERIKA'S MOTHER
Erika! I'm back. Come out and talk with me.

CU:
Erika's face. She doesn't know what to think.

ERIKA'S MOTHER (CONT'D)
I'm waiting...

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE CONTINUOUS

Erika creeps around the corner.

Erika's Mother is seated on the sofa. Ed is not around. The television is on, at a low volume.

ERIKA
Mom?

Erika's Mother stands up, crosses, and hugs her daughter.

ERIKA'S MOTHER
You smell so fresh and clean. I've missed you.

ERIKA
Where's Ed?

ERIKA'S MOTHER
That man? Outside. I asked him for a minute alone.

ERIKA
Did you just get here?

ERIKA'S MOTHER
I got into town this morning. A friend dropped me off.

ERIKA
Where have you been?

ERIKA'S MOTHER

Oh, darlin'... Everywhere! I've been trying to take care of myself. I hope you and your brother can understand. It was really hard for me to do what I did.

ERIKA

Dylan's looking for you.

ERIKA'S MOTHER

What? He's not here?

ERIKA

He didn't find you?

ERIKA'S MOTHER

You mean you've been alone all this time?

ERIKA

Yes!

ERIKA'S MOTHER

I'm the worst mom. No wonder your dad did what he did. Who could love a life with me?

Erika turns more sympathetic. Her mother starts to weep.

ERIKA

Mom...

ERIKA'S MOTHER

I've had a lot of time to think about things. I'm better. I can be good for you. I, look, I even brought you some presents. Please. Let me show them to you.

Erika's Mother starts down the hallway.

ERIKA

Where are you going?

ERIKA'S MOTHER

I put them in your room. I want you to see them.

Erika's Mother stops at Erika's bedroom door, gesturing inside. Erika looks back to the living room. At last, she acquiesces and follows to the bedroom.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (BEDROOM) CONTINUOUS

Erika passes her mother and enters her quiet bedroom.

ZOOM:

On the bed, each cut in half, are Mrs. Nicolodi and Mr. Trusdale. Their wounds have bled out all over Erika's sheets and mattress, soaking everything in red.

Erika, horrified, looks at her mother.

ERIKA

Where are the rest of them?

ERIKA'S MOTHER

In Dylan's room. I wanted him to feel special, too. But I knew you'd like the top parts better.

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE SAME MOMENT

Charlie, alone in Ed's pickup truck, hears Erika scream inside the house. He bolts out of the passenger seat.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) CONTINUOUS

Charlie heads for the screams. He sees Erika's Mother standing outside Erika's bedroom.

ERIKA'S MOTHER

I'm not gonna let you burn me! You can't burn me! I won't let you burn me!

CHARLIE

Erika!

ERIKA (O.S.)

Charlie!

Erika's mother turns on Charlie. Like a train on rails, she starts after him and he backs up, knocks the coffee table, nearly falls, hits the screen door just as--

Erika's Mother turns the corner.

ERIKA'S MOTHER

I have your son and I'm going to send him straight to hell where you'll never find him! Kill him worse if you burn me!

Charlie falls out the front door.

EXT. ERIKA'S HOUSE DAY

He rolls off the porch onto the grass, struggles up, circles the house.

 CHARLIE
 Erika! Get out of the house!

The bedroom window comes open. Erika is there, jerking the window.

Charlie drops under the window and yanks her free. They both fall onto the grass in a tumble.

The two cross the lawn towards the pickup.

SOUND: A barking dog.

Charlie spots a NEIGHBOR with his DOG on a nearby porch. The neighbor watches the two of them. Covering, Charlie waves, friendly-like.

Charlie opens the truck door and practically lifts Erika inside.

 CHARLIE (CONT'D)
 Who was that in your house?

 ERIKA
 (hysterical)
 I don't know, I don't know! My
 mother's dead, isn't she? She's
 dead.

Charlie comes around and hops in the truck.

The ignition -- no keys.

 CHARLIE
 Ed had the keys.

 ERIKA
 It killed him. Let's just run.
 Let's go, go!

 CHARLIE
 Are you sure? What if he's not
 dead!

 ERIKA
 He's dead. I know it.

He thinks.

CHARLIE
We need the acetylene.

He opens his door...

ERIKA
Where are you going?

CHARLIE
Back in.

ERIKA
You can't! It'll get you!

Charlie struggles out anyway.

He returns to the house.

INT. ERIKA'S HOUSE (LIVING ROOM) CONTINUOUS

Charlie enters. All is deathly quiet as he crosses the living room.

Charlie spots Ed in a kitchen chair, his back turned.

Charlie approaches. He taps Ed on the shoulder. Ed doesn't move. Craning, Charlie looks for wounds. Nothing.

The pickup truck keys dangle from Ed's right fingers. Delicately... Charlie draws them off.

He spots the access key ring for the shopping mall tucked in Ed's pocket. Charlie reaches for them, tugs them clear. The body shifts a bit.

In Ed's belt, Charlie sees a gun -- a .45. Surgically, he extracts the gun from the holster.

Ed's body goes off balance, weight coming forward--

Ed's head falls cleanly from his body and rolls into the kitchen. Blood fountains out of Ed, running down his uniform like an overflowing bathtub.

Charlie -- with both sets of keys and the gun -- flees the house.

EXT. ED'S PICKUP (MOVING) DUSK

Erika and Charlie ride in silence. Erika's eyes are firmly fixed out the window. The look on her face: deep damage and anger.

ERIKA
Turn!

CHARLIE
What?

ERIKA
Just do it!

Charlie takes a side street.

The Playground comes into view.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
Stop the car.

When he does, she runs out and away, towards the playground.

EXT. THE PLAYGROUND CONTINUOUS

Erika hides under playground swings, covering with her hands. She cries desperately.

Charlie exits the pickup. Taking a breath, he starts towards the swings.

CHARLIE
Erika? Erika. It's getting dark.

Slowly, he walks, until he is beside Erika.

ERIKA
It's not going to work.

CHARLIE
I have the keys. I have the acetylene and Ed's gun.

ERIKA
It's going to kill us.

Charlie slides to the ground.

CHARLIE
It might.

ERIKA

It knows everything.

CHARLIE

It does.

ERIKA

Don't you want help? Can't we call someone? I don't care if anyone finds out. I'd rather be in a foster home than go back to that house as long it's still out there. I don't want to run and hide anymore. I fucking hate being alone.

CHARLIE

I forget sometimes.

ERIKA

Forget what?

CHARLIE

That your sixteen. You're stronger and smarter than any teenager I know. But thirteen was only three years ago. Four years is nothing. You'll learn someday.

ERIKA

You and your fucking somedays.

CHARLIE

No more. Today's the day. There are no more somedays. I'm ready to hit it where it hurts. I'm ready. I don't care what happens to me. It needs to feel the pain we feel. It needs to know we hate it. And we can kill it.

ERIKA

I don't want to be alone anymore.

CHARLIE

You're not alone.

ERIKA

I will be. It'll kill you, and Bernadette, and Dave. Just like it killed Ed.

CHARLIE

I don't believe that. Ed hadn't seen death the way you and I have. Or Dave has.

ERIKA

Bernadette.

CHARLIE

She's staying outside. She won't come in.

ERIKA

You're not afraid we'll all be killed and you'll be left alone?

CHARLIE

There's something beyond death that's good -- something that lives. My son is still my son. He's still fighting, even when he's no longer here. You'd do the same. But -- you had better not die. I'll be pissed.

ERIKA

(smiles)

I forgot my lucky rabbit's foot.

CHARLIE

Who needs luck? We have firepower.

INT. APARTMENT NIGHT

Charlie enters Dave's apartment with Erika. Bernadette and Dave sit up, anxious. Charlie tosses both sets of keys onto the counter.

CHARLIE

Something was waiting for us at Erika's house. It got to Ed.

BERNADETTE

No!

She falls into Dave's shoulder, crying.

DAVE

Did you get the acetylene?

Charlie nods.

DAVE (CONT'D)

I don't like the look of those clouds. Might have an overnight rain. Won't that put out the fire?

CHARLIE

Only if it's heavy.

Erika looks to the sunset. A weak perimeter of police cars surrounds the mall, outside the main lot.

ERIKA

No, it's perfect. Rain might cover us getting inside.

Erika turns to the others.

A moment passes: a decision. Unanimous.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Let's burn it.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL -- NIGHT

Dead of night. A steady summer rain. Cops take shelter in their cars, windows fogged.

On the incline, Bernadette has the walkie-talkie.

Erika, Charlie, and Dave are at the door, using Ed's keys to switch off the door alarm.

Three tanks of acetylene weigh them down.

At the door, Charlie struggles with the acetylene. Erika tries to help, but it's sluggish, and Dave's can't surrender his crutches.

Bernadette is getting nervous -- this is taking too long. She has one eye on the group, the other on the police. She's about to speak into the walkie-talkie.

At last--

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Into the first doors, Erika raises the walkie-talkie.

ERIKA

We're inside.

BERNADETTE (O.S.)

What do you see?

POV:

The concourse. It is thick with ghosts.

DAVE

We're screwed.

The ghosts stand expressionless.

Charlie takes out the .45. Dave shoos the gun away.

DAVE (CONT'D)

Save it for the tanks.

ERIKA

(to ghosts)

I know you're frightened of us.

But it will be over soon.

(to Charlie and Dave)

Leave the tanks. We'll come back for them.

Erika leads Charlie and Dave through the crowd of ghosts.

They make it to the center of the mall...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) NIGHT

The three enter the crow's nest and switch on the lights.

The monitors: screens are filled with ghosts, standing, staring.

DAVE

What are they waiting for? They could kill us.

CHARLIE

Some of them might be on our side. Like my son.

DAVE

But they know what we're here to do.

CHARLIE

Maybe they want it.

ERIKA

That faceless one. The leader. He was the one at my house.

(MORE)

ERIKA (CONT'D)

I'm positive. I felt the same as when he pretended to be my father and my brother. Anyone but him seems to be affected by leaving the mall.

DAVE

He just has a longer fuse.

ERIKA

Yeah, he's probably been around a long time. Maybe longer than the rest of them.

Charlie reads the switches.

CHARLIE

I can't remember how Ed had everything set.

DAVE

Hit them all.

Charlie hits everything -- all the alarms and sensors he can find. He accidently hits a switch and music echoes the mall.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) NIGHT

The three work their way through the thicket of ghosts to the first set of heat sensors. Splitting up, they do as Ed instructed:

- first switch: off

- second: off

- third: off.

They move to the next concourse, take positions.

- first switch: off

- second switch: off

- third switch -- Dave's...

A force barrels towards Dave and knocks him off his feet. His crutches skitter across the floor. A ghost emerges from between two dead grandparents. Jenny Malone.

DAVE

Who the fuck are you?

Erika races to Dave, helps him up, retrieves one of the crutches. Jenny gets closer.

ERIKA
That... is Jenny.

Charlie disables the third sensor.

The three start to move to the next last concourse.

DAVE
I thought ghosts couldn't touch
you.

ERIKA
Me, too.

Hobbling, Dave moves as fast as he can. They find their places, the last sensors.

- first switch: off
- second switch: off
- third switch: off

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) NIGHT

Erika, Charlie, and Dave return to the crow's nest. Erika takes the laminated chart from the wall.

ERIKA
Okay, it's what we talked about.
The fabric store, the discount
store, and Sears' furniture
department.

DAVE
Wait a minute, wait a minute. I'm
slow as a damn turtle without my
other crutch.

CHARLIE
Stay here and watch the monitors.

Charlie hands Dave the walkie-talkie.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Talk to Bernadette. If it looks
like we're in trouble, use one of
those phones and call the police.

DAVE

I guess it's better to be arrested
than killed by a ghost.

ERIKA

We can't be the only ones in town
who want to see this place gone.

CHARLIE

They just might help us with the
matches.

Charlie and Erika are at the door.

DAVE

Good luck...

Once they're out into the corridor, Dave shuts the door,
locks it, and takes a seat in front of the panel.

DAVE (CONT'D)

What the hell, what the hell?
Where'd you go, dead people?

Dave watches as Charlie and Erika retrieve the acetylene
tanks from the entrance.

Dave lifts the walkie-talkie.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Bernadette, on the incline.

DAVE

(over walkie-talkie)

We're halfway there. Time to start
a fire.

BERNADETTE

(into walkie-talkie)

Thank God.

DAVE

Has the rain stopped?

BERNADETTE

Another ten minutes.

DAVE

Okay, good. Watch yourself. We've
had to split up.

BERNADETTE

Split up?

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE)

A MOMENT LATER

Erika and Charlie drag tanks loudly through the mall's concourse until they reach the locked, sliding glass doors of the Discount Clothing Store, where Charlie last saw Charlie Jr.

CHARLIE

This place should burn good. It's already a fire trap.

Erika checks the chart against the ring of keys, finds the right one.

Charlie looks around.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Where did everyone go?

Erika glances up and down the concourse as she undoes the lock.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

Having a meeting?

ERIKA

About what to do with us.

CHARLIE

Maybe there's a union.

The door comes open a crack and the two together slide the glass pane aside to give them enough room to enter the store. Charlie drags one of the tanks into a area crowded with clothes.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

How about here?

Erika nods.

ERIKA

Do we set it off now, or go and place the others first?

CHARLIE

Let's not take any chances. This whole thing should take just five minutes, right?

ERIKA

We are planning on making it out,
aren't we?

When they come out of the Discount store, space between them and the tank, the ghosts have returned. One path is completely blocked.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

Dave watches the monitors. He sees the standoff near the Discount Store.

DAVE

Come on, come on. Shoot it.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Charlie raises the gun, points.

CRACK! The gun fires and the bullet disappears into a stack of sweaters inside the discount store.

ERIKA

Shitty.

Erika takes the gun from him. In one shot --

CRACK! BOOM!

She nails the tank with a bullet. The tank erupts inside the store and flames lick the ceiling.

The ghosts emit a horrid sound.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

My dad used to take me shooting.

Erika and Charlie grab the other two tanks and run from the fire.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

Dave watches in black and white as the smoke plumes from the discount store and the two run off. He picks up the walkie-talkie.

DAVE

(into walkie-talkie)
It's going. We got one lit up.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Bernadette hears the news and gives a contained cheer.

Then...

She notices a FAT WOMAN coming out the door of the mall, heading towards Bernadette.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

Dave sets down the walkie-talkie.

He sees something on the screen.

The dead girls -- Jennifer, Sara, Moeser, led by Jenny Malone -- all mangled, just as they died, flicker on the monitor.

The four move forward, in Dave's direction, and disappear from the camera's view.

DAVE
(into walkie-talkie)
Um... I think I have a bit of trouble here.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL SAME MOMENT

Bernadette watches the Fat Woman approach.

BERNADETTE
(into walkie-talkie)
Me, too.

The Fat Woman stops a few feet in front of Bernadette.

FAT WOMAN
I have a message.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Erika and Charlie, dragging tanks of acetylene. They come to the Fabric Store.

A wall of ghosts blocks the glass doors.

Suddenly!

Standing beside Erika is Jeremy Atkins. Erika jumps!

EXT. SHOPPING MALL SAME MOMENT

The Fat Woman stands over Bernadette on the incline.

FAT WOMAN
Your friend is in trouble. You
have to help them. Excuse me, I'm
running out of time.

The Fat Woman walks past Bernadette, up the incline and onto the service road. As she hits the other side, an embankment of trees, the Fat Woman's arm grows long and she melts (in the same way the Tall Man did in Erika's house.)

Bernadette is in shock; she looks to the mall. Deciding, she starts down the incline...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

Dave listens at the door.

DAVE
(soft)
Who's there?

He sees a heavy flashlight on the table, picks it up, positions it as a weapon.

DAVE (CONT'D)
Go away!

JENNY (O.S.)
We can't go away.

DAVE
Leave me alone! I know why I was
chosen for this. You can't make me
do anything I don't want to do.

JENNY (O.S.)
(whisper)
Open the door.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL SAME MOMENT

Bernadette is at the bottom of the hill, about to start across the wide lot.

INT. POLICE CAR (PARKED) SAME MOMENT

A YOUNG POLICEMAN and an OLDER POLICEMAN sit in the shelter of their squad car, the rain now a drizzle.

The Young Policeman spots Bernadette.

 YOUNG POLICEMAN
 Someone's going into the mall!

The Older Policeman snaps to, revs the car and puts on flashing lights.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Jeremy stands beside Erika. His throat is cut and dried blood has soaked his T-Shirt. He is most definitely... dead.

 ERIKA
 Jeremy... Oh, God.

 JEREMY
 I'm sorry. I tried.

 ERIKA
 (tearing up)
 Thank you.

 JEREMY
 Throw it.

 ERIKA
 What?

Jeremy points to the tank.

Charlie understands, even if Erika doesn't. He picks up the tank and races towards the glass door, right at the line of ghosts. Charlie heaves the tank.

The flying tank decimates the top of a MALE GHOST's body, as if the ghost is made of cigarette ash. The tank flies through the door and lands near reams of fabric.

When Erika turns, Jeremy is gone.

Erika aims. Shoots.

BANG! She misses.

 CHARLIE
 Shitty.

Determined, she aims again, fires.

BOOM!

A plume erupts inside the store. The ghosts melt away.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL SAME MOMENT

Bernadette's almost to the door when she finds herself surrounded by police cars, flashing lights blinding.

The police fall out, guns drawn.

 OLDER POLICEMAN
Ma'am, away from the door!

 BERNADETTE
You don't understand!

 OLDER POLICEMAN
Away from the door!

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

Dave sees the second explosion on the monitor; Charlie and Erika run with the last tank.

The doorknob handle twists and the door opens, just a crack. By itself. Nothing lies beyond.

Dave stares at the open door.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Bernadette and the policemen, in standoff.

 BERNADETTE
No, no! My friends are inside.

 OLDER POLICEMAN
No one's inside, Ma'am. We've been watching all night.

 BERNADETTE
They're gonna die!

Bernadette straightens. Hands out, she moves to explain.

 YOUNG POLICEMAN
Oh, shit, it's another nut!

The Young Policeman aims his gun.

CU:
Her walkie-talkie, black in her hand.

YOUNG POLICEMAN (CONT'D)
Gun!

Bang! Bang!

The Young Policeman shoots Bernadette in the chest.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) SAME MOMENT

CU:
Security Monitor.

Erika and Charlie round the bend.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) CONTINUOUS

Charlie flags down Erika, who is ahead of him.

CHARLIE
What about Sears?

ERIKA
We need to get Dave. He'll be
trapped.

Breathless, Charlie nods agreement.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SECURITY) NIGHT

Erika and Charlie look on the room.

PAN TO REVEAL:
Bloody body parts -- Dave's. Jenny & Co. have gotten to him.

Both turn in horror.

CHARLIE
Let's go. Come on...

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) NIGHT

Erika and Charlie, running with the last tank. The fire
grows in the other wings, in the background.

ERIKA
What happened to him?

CHARLIE
Keep moving.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL SAME MOMENT

The police look down on the body of Bernadette.
One COP points to the walkie-talkie.

COP
(to Young Policeman)
It's a radio, you asshole. Get an
ambulance!

ANOTHER COP, hanging back, notices a glow from the building
behind him.

ANOTHER COP
Holy shit! The mall's on fire!

The policemen all scramble--

INT. SHOPPING MALL (CONCOURSE) SAME MOMENT

Outside Sears, Erika fires the .45 into the glass doors,
shattering them. She's done with keys and charts.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SEARS) CONTINUOUS

Inside Sears, Charlie hauls the tank and Erika looks for the
spot.

ERIKA
Where should we put it?

CHARLIE
This is place is bigger than the
others. The ceiling is higher. I
didn't realize how things are--

ERIKA
Spread out. Yeah.

Erika starts towards the Sears escalators.

CHARLIE
Where are you going?

Charlie follows to the mezzanine, struggling with the tank. When he reaches the top, just a few steps behind Erika, he looks back and sees...

Charlie Jr. stands at the bottom of the escalator.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
(to Erika)
Wait!

ERIKA
Come on!

CHARLIE
Wait!

Erika keeps moving; Charlie has no choice but to follow.

They turn a corner.

It's the Furniture Department where Erika first spoke with the Featureless Man -- here once again, on a sofa, surrounded by:

Jenny Malone, Jennifer Kramer, Jenny Moeser, and Sara Gerbitz. Like a strange, disfigured harem, the girls smile.

FEATURELESS MAN
You think we're wasps you can smoke out.

CHARLIE
We do.

FEATURELESS MAN
It will be harder than you think. We've got your friends, the dead ones. And soon we'll have you.

Charlie drops the tank of acetylene on the floor and kicks it. The tank rolls between him and the Featureless Man.

CHARLIE
Let my son go.

The four girls rise--

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Let him go!

FEATURELESS MAN
Your son started all the trouble. He wants to fight. We've been here a long time.

JENNY
We're not going anywhere!

ERIKA
You'll go to hell.

Erika fires the .45 into the tank. At this short range, she hits it and it sends a cloud through the Furniture Department.

Erika and Charlie, singed, slide down the escalator in escape. The Mezzanine burns quickly.

They lose sight of the ghosts.

Erika and Charlie running.

Charlie spots Charlie Jr. far down the floor. The boy waves. Charlie stops running.

ERIKA (CONT'D)
Come on! Charlie! Don't stop!

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Firetrucks arrive and firefighters pile out, unscrewing plugs, dragging hoses.

Flames lick the wings of the mall.

FIREMAN
We're going to need more men!

ANOTHER FIREMAN
I'll call it in.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SEARS) NIGHT

Erika waves Charlie on.

ERIKA
Run, Charlie!

He snaps out of it, runs.

Suddenly, the mezzanine floor collapses and debris blocks their way out.

CHARLIE
I saw some stairs.

INT. SHOPPING MALL (SEARS, STAIRWELL) NIGHT

Erika and Charlie open the door to the stairwell. No way down, only up.

ERIKA
Where does it go?

CHARLIE
The roof?

ERIKA
If we go up there, can we get down?

Charlie looks back to the rapidly growing fire throughout Sears.

CHARLIE
I think so.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL (ROOF) NIGHT

The door comes open and Erika with Charlie behind stumble out. The roof is tarred and dotted with HVAC units.

They hear sirens and chaos.

EXT. STREET SAME MOMENT

People from Dave Ford's apartment complex are outside, unable to avoid the noise and the sight of the shopping mall blaze.

People from passing cars and surrounding houses are drawn towards the fire.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

More firetrucks arrive. A FIRE CHIEF steps from one as it swings to a stop alongside the mall.

FIRE CHIEF
Anyone inside?

OLDER POLICEMAN
Empty.

FIRE CHIEF
Not even cleaning crews?

OLDER POLICEMAN
Not a soul.

FIRE CHIEF
Lucky break. How'd it start?

OLDER POLICEMAN
Musta been electrical.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL (ROOF) NIGHT

Erika's made her way to the end of the roof. She looks down, searching for escape. When she looks back, she sees Charlie has stopped.

ERIKA
(shouting over the noise)
What's wrong?

CHARLIE
I can't leave him.

ERIKA
It's not Charlie Jr.

CHARLIE
It is.

ERIKA
You don't know. It could be one of them.

CHARLIE
I know my own son!

Erika retreats to Charlie. She holds his hands.

ERIKA
(emotional)
Please. Please. They'll do to you what they did to Dave and Ed.

CHARLIE
My son will protect me.

Like a geyser, a hole of flame shoots from the roof, startling them both.

ERIKA
We can't stay!

Charlie sights Charlie Jr. just inside the open access door.

CHARLIE
(calm over the noise)
I can't leave him!
(MORE)

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
(meeting eyes)
You'll be okay.

He drops his hands from hers and goes towards his son. The boy runs into his father's arms, hugging.

CU:
The boy. It's him, really him.

The roof caves beneath Charlie and his son! They vanish into the flames.

Erika rushes forward.

She tries to reach them, but the fire is too intense, the roof too unstable. She surrenders, looks for a way out.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

A car pulls up and Underwood, the general manager for the mall, gets out. He passes through spectators who chant, "Burn, burn, burn!"

Underwood reaches the Fire Chief.

FIRE CHIEF
Stay close. We might need you.

UNDERWOOD
What are you guys doing? You should get in there.

FIRE CHIEF
I'm not risking any of my boys.

UNDERWOOD
They're firemen. They fight fires.

FIRE CHIEF
There's nobody inside. My orders are to contain it, draw it down. But I'm not taking chances. This place has killed enough people.

Underwood doesn't like these answers.

FIRE CHIEF (CONT'D)
(aside)
For all I care, it can burn.

EXT. SHOPPING MALL NIGHT

Erika climbs down a narrow pipe at the rear of the mall, camouflaged by shrubbery.

She slips! She falls into the bushes.

The gun spills out of her hand.

She picks herself up, forgets the gun.

Erika circles around the mall. For a moment, she stands with the crowd.

ERIKA'S POV:

The burning mall. Fire trucks with arching sprays from hoses affect no change in the intensity of the fire. The fire is all consuming.

Erika scans the incline. Bernadette is gone. She looks around, but doesn't see her. Until -- she spots Bernadette's body inside an ambulance, doors open. She approaches. Notices. Her friend is dead.

In shock, she walks from the scene back towards the street, leaving the burning mall behind her.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN ON:

INT. DINER DAY

Erika sits alone in a booth at the diner. She sips a milkshake. Hair wild, Tubeway Army shirt ripped, covered in dirt and ash.

ERIKA'S POV:

Looking through the diner window. A motorcycle parks outside. The rider, face hidden by a helmet, powers off the bike and leans it against the brick.

Erika's eyes follow...

On entering, the rider takes off his helmet. It's Dylan Lang, Erika's brother. Dylan turns, sees his sister, smiles with recognition. He joins her in the booth.

DYLAN

What's up, sis? Nice breakfast. I knew if I'd leave you'd forget to bathe and eat real food.

(MORE)

DYLAN (CONT'D)

You always made me take care of you. Can I have a sip of your shake?

She slides the shake to him. He sips, makes an appreciative face.

ERIKA

Where have you been?

DYLAN

All over. I just hit the county line. Thought I'd stop here, get a donut, then ride on over to the house.

ERIKA

Mom's dead.

DYLAN

She's in Cincinnati.

ERIKA

Cincinnati?

DYLAN

She tried to kill herself. But they got her in a hospital and she seems to be doing okay. I just found her a few days ago. She was a little surprised to see me. Apparently, she forgot to tell the hospital she had two kids. Say, did you hear about all that shit at the mall? You weren't there working, were you? Did you see people kill themselves?

ERIKA

No. I missed everything.

DYLAN

Good. It was all over the TV.

ERIKA

Here, too.

Erika sips her shake, scrutinizing her brother's every blink.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

Are you really my brother?

DYLAN

Jesus, you're as nuts as Mom. Can I have more of your shake?

She turns it over and he polishes it off.

DYLAN (CONT'D)

Good shake.

ERIKA

(smiling)

Yeah, real good. I know you always loved chocolate.

DYLAN

Well. I'm stoked to tell you all the crazy shit that happened to me. I'm sorry I didn't call. I've got a really good excuse. It's been a wild summer.

ERIKA

It sure has.

EXT. DINER DAY

The two mount Dylan's obviously new motorbike. Erika sits behind her brother and wraps her arms around his waist. He doesn't see this... but she begins to cry tears of joy.

DYLAN

We'll go to the house and pick up some stuff. Then we'll take the car back to Cincinnati. You don't have any plans, do you?

ERIKA

(happy)

No plans.

Dylan kick-starts the bike and revs the engine.

ERIKA (CONT'D)

I should warn you. There's probably some dead people at our house!

DYLAN

Oh, Erika. Always trying to creep me out.

They speed away.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SHOPPING MALL DAY

The fire is out. The damage is extensive. Smoke billows from the ruins.

Underwood doesn't look happy at all. He wanders the concourse and kicks through debris.

After a moment, he sees the face of the Featureless Man, a fragment, like a mask, charred on the ground. He bends, picks it up. He tosses it aside and keeps roaming.

He sees something else in the mess. Comes forward.

Bends...

Closer...

He can make it out. The head of Jenny Malone, eyes shut.

Her eyes open and he jumps back!

UNDERWOOD
Chief! Chief!

The Fire Chief comes running.

UNDERWOOD (CONT'D)
I thought you said this place was empty. There's a person here!

He points to Jenny Malone. The Fire Chief looks closer.

Relieved, he stands at last and walks away.

FIRE CHIEF
Don't play with me.

Confused, Underwood bends again. It's the head of a mannequin. Not Jenny Malone. Spooked, Underwood hurries off.

Hold: the mannequin. Eyes open.

BLACK OUT.