

"GHOSTWRITER" by Des Nnochiri

FADE IN:

INT. WESLEY CRANE'S DEN - NIGHT

Awards in a glazed cabinet, laptop set-up on a desk, reclining chair opposite. The walls are plastered in cover art from several thrillers with names like "Silent Kill" and "Whispering Death." All have a mid-90's feel to them.

Seated at the laptop is their author, WESLEY CRANE, early fifties. Once handsome, now grizzled, he's losing some of the luster he must have had in his heyday.

Wesley holds a cellphone to his ear.

WESLEY

Well, tell them they can keep the BMW. As collateral. Till I hand over the first draft. What? Sue? What do you mean, sue? They can't sue! Can they? Can they sue? Oh.

Wesley's shoulders slump.

WESLEY

You'll have it by Wednesday, how's that? Fine.

He ends the call. And hurls the cellphone across the room.

WESLEY

Dammit!!

He leans forward, pressing his forehead on the laptop screen.

WESLEY

God, I'd give my soul to--

The laptop whirs to life. Wesley jerks back. And his eyes go wide. On the laptop screen, the cursor blips across a page, spewing letters, words, paragraphs. Faster now. Faster still. The display a blur at hyperspeed, as the flow of literature comes to an end.

THE DEVIL (O.S.)

The end.

Wesley looks up.

Sprawled in the recliner opposite, is THE DEVIL. Right now, he looks like a young executive - CEO of a software company, perhaps.

He's reading a hardcover novel, "A Deathly Hush." The back cover has a photograph of a fit and more prosperous-looking Wesley.

THE DEVIL

Eviscerate. One S, or two?

WESLEY

One. With a C.

Who the hell are you? And how did you-- ?

The Devil points the book toward Wesley's laptop.

THE DEVIL

Look it over. You know. Proof-read. I think I've captured the essence of your... style.

WESLEY

My... What?

THE DEVIL

Go ahead. I've got time. And lots of it.

WESLEY

Time. Who the hell ar--?

The Devil taps his wristwatch. Gestures toward the laptop.

Intrigued in spite of himself, Wesley scrolls through the text. Hesitant, at first, he's soon hooked, and:

WESLEY

This... This is brilliant. Absolutely... magnificent. Best thing I've written since, since--

THE DEVIL

"Silent Kill?" I loved that one.

He's now parked on the corner of the desk.

THE DEVIL

Well? Go ahead. What are you waiting for? E-mail that puppy. And get those whiny publishers off your back.

WESLEY

I'm supposed to mail them a manuscript--

THE DEVIL

Doesn't make. E-mail's legal tender, now. You
wanna be able to prove to them that you had your
first draft. Finished. Before Wednesday. Right?

WESLEY

Well, yeah, but--

The Devil holds up his copy of "A Deathly Hush."
Wesley goggles at it, mesmerised.

THE DEVIL

The book. Is. Brilliant.
You'll. Make. Millions.
Doesn't matter where it came from.
Doesn't matter who I am.
Think of this as a... as a dream that you'll
never wake up from.

WESLEY

I--

He looks at the cover art on the den walls. The award plaques in the
cabinet. "A Deathly Hush."
And e-mails that puppy.

THE DEVIL

Thattaboy. And all I ask of you in return is what
you were prepared to give. In fact, what all good
writers give. To their art.

He rams his clawed hand deep into Wesley's chest.

THE DEVIL

Your heart. And soul.

He withdraws the hand. Clutching Wesley's still beating heart in his
fingers. A luminous vapor trail follows it, as the writer's soul
departs his body.

Wesley's corpse slumps over the laptop.

The Devil straightens up, and looks to his left.
A phantom Wesley stands there. Very unhappy. A ragged hole in his
chest.

THE DEVIL

Hey, Wesley, why so glum? It's not over for you, buddy. I have work for you. I can use a man with your skills. After all, I can't be everywhere at once, now can I?

FADE OUT

FADE IN:

INT. ISABELLE LANGDON'S APARTMENT - DAY (SIX MONTHS LATER)

ISABELLE LANGDON, late twenties, beaming smile, sits at her desk. She holds a mock-up of the cover art for her first novel. "Time to Kill." She scrawls a note on the border with a red pen. Nods.

Her face falls, as she flips through the latest pile of rejection slips on her desk.

ISABELLE

"...not what we're looking for, at this time."
Change the record! This one's old. Cliched. And,
and... stilted. Thematically unsound. Derivative.
Needs work.
Shitheads!

She slaps them down, hard. Then picks up a book by her laptop. Wesley Crane's "A Deathly Hush," the back cover now a fulsome eulogy to the great man.

Isabelle opens the book, scans the text for a while. Sighs.

ISABELLE

Urrgh!! I'd give my right arm if I could write
like this.

Her laptop flips open, by itself. A flurry of words races across the screen. And stops.

Isabelle frowns. Looks round the room. Scrolls through the text, and:

ISABELLE

Hmmm. Now, that's not bad. Extremely not bad.
Good, even.

WESLEY (O.S.)

I think I've managed to... capture your style.

Isabelle turns, and:

ISABELLE

Yaaghh!!

The months haven't been kind to phantom Wesley. Maggots in the chest wound, general decay. He looks like... well, like someone who's been dead for six months.

Fast, though. He's across the room, in an instant. Right in Isabelle's horrified face.

WESLEY

Of course, for this kind of work, there is a price.

Wesley's claw-like fingers shoot out, clamping onto Isabelle's right arm. Ripping, through flesh, muscle, and bone. Isabelle screams.

FADE TO BLACK

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