

HALLOWEEN SPIRIT

Written by

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EXT. STRIP MALL - DAY

A typical American strip mall. A Hobby Lobby anchors one end. At the other, a spooky pop-up: Spirit Halloween.

A small row of customers wait to get in. Among them, AMIE (17, female), long-sleeve dress shirt with Hobby Lobby name tag talks with another EARLY ARRIVER, female, in line.

GIANT SUPER: 6 MONDAYS TO GO

AMIE

I've got it all figured out. Jack Rowling. (off Early Arriver) A trans JK Rowling.

Amie rolls up her sleeve to reveal a tattoo: A Death Eater from Harry Potter. Early Arriver laughs, shows off her own Death Eater tattoo. She also has a Deathly Hallows ring.

EARLY ARRIVER

I'm thinking Squid Game.

Amie's smile disappears.

AMIE

You and everyone else. Come on, it's about originality--

She hears the door unlock, turns as:

INT. SPIRIT HALLOWEEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

DARNELL (18, male, awkward and eager employee) opens the doors. Amie smiles at him as she and the others rush in. Darnell welcomes them with all the flourish of Willy Wonka.

He spins to get to work and is startled by: A large animatronic skeleton that shimmies while singing Monster Mash above the spooky sounds playing on the store's PA.

RUSS (O.S.)

God, these are so lame.

RUSS (19 male, too cool for this place) pops up behind the display. Under his name, his name tag reads MANAGER.

DARNELL

Are you kidding? I love these!

RUSS

Of course you do.

Russ leaves, doing a mocking shimmy on his way to high-five BRIAN (19, male, too cool too) at the counter.

BRIAN
Got the need for speed!

RUSS
Six more weeks.

Brian mimes shooting himself in the head.

RUSS
Owner inbound. Happy face.

Russ and Brian plaster on giant fake smiles as WALTER (60s male, big mouth, bigger belly) walks up to them.

WALTER
(to Brian)
I'm paying you to work.

Brian slinks off, making a 'hang me' gesture behind Walter's back. Walter, his attention now on Russ, misses it.

WALTER
And I'm paying you to manage. Did you see last week's numbers? We're dying out here. They-- (motions to customers)--are our life-blood. Go, make them happy.

Russ chases down a customer as Walter notices Darnell standing at the register. Walter's photo hangs behind the counter, under an OWNER plaque.

WALTER
And you...Keep it up.

Amie dumps an armful of Halloween supplies on the counter.

DARNELL
You've got a real streak going.
Will we see you every day through
Halloween?

As Darnell rings Amie up, he notices her tattoo peaking from underneath her sleeve. She quickly hides it.

AMIE
I love this place. Beats the hell
out of the Hobby Lobby break room.

DARNELL

Scariest place on Earth. Did you see the new makeup selection in the back? Best fake blood in town.

AMIE

Ooh. I'll check it out tomorrow.

WALTER

That's the spirit. We're open every day, 9am to 9pm. Now until November second.

AMIE

I'd give my right arm if you'd stay open all year.

WALTER

My dear, if that would help, you'd have a deal. We just can't afford to keep going year-round.

He grabs a plastic skull, slides it toward her.

WALTER

But with your help...

Amie nods to Darnell, who rings up the skull. Walter drops it in her bag, hands it to her with a car salesman's smile. She smiles back, reserving a genuine one for Darnell.

DARNELL

See you tomorrow.

Amie heads for the door as Darnell watches her leave. Walter watches too, then smacks Darnell in the back of the head.

WALTER

You don't win Employee of the Year staring at girls.

INT. SPIRIT HALLOWEEN - DAY

Darnell exits the bathroom, walks along the back hallway. He passes a row of EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR portraits: 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020. The last three are Darnell.

He stops to straighten 2021, sees his reflection staring back from the empty frame.

AMIE (O.S.)

Hey!

Amie peers at Darnell from the end of the hall. She holds up a tube with dripping blood printed on it.

AMIE
Got any more?

DARNELL
We just put out a whole--

He sees Amie's basket full of fake blood and makeup. He sighs, holds out his arm veins up. Amie laughs.

AMIE
I'll tap you if I need more.

It's creepy flirting. But it's definitely flirting.

WALTER (O.S.)
(store intercom)
Employees to the front please.

Darnell motions: GOTTA GO.

Walter's already talking to the rest when Darnell arrives.

WALTER
Talk about a blood bath. The first month is the worst we've seen.

RUSS
What do you want us to do? Firebomb Amazon?

WALTER
No, smartass, but you got one thing right: online is the key! Put photos of our costumes on Facebook and Twitter. Videos on the Twitch.

DARNELL
Sell the experience.

Everyone looks at Darnell.

DARNELL
People don't just come here for wigs. They love the whole vibe.

He's looking at Amie, a kid in a candy store, as she shops.

WALTER
Yes! Sell the vibe! Because if the best we can do is break even, this year will be the last.

The meeting breaks up. As Brian passes Darnell:

BRIAN

You've got something on your nose there, creep boy. Oh wait, it's on your mouth.

Russ and Brian walk away, high five.

RUSS

Need for speed!

They pass Amie. She glances at Darnell. She heard it all.

INSERT: A WOLF HOWLS AS FOG ROLLS OVER A GRAVEYARD.

INT. SPIRIT HALLOWEEN - DAY

GIANT SUPER: 4 MONDAYS TO GO

Darnell fights through a large crowd.

CUSTOMER #1

This is WAY cooler than that twelve foot skeleton.

CUSTOMER #2

It's so realistic.

Darnell reaches the front of the group, where everyone gawks at a new animatronic display:

A fresh grave. SPOOKY SOUNDS. A super-realistic but heavily-lacquered body, skull for a head, bears the name tag BRIAN. It floats by the grave to the sound of a man WHISTLING. An arm shoots up from the grave, pulls him under as he SCREAMS.

Brian pops back up and the sequence repeats. Russ stands nearby, laughing as he streams on Twitch from his phone.

RUSS

I don't know how he pulled it off.

Darnell leans in, looks at the arm. No one else notices, but it has a familiar tattoo: a Death Eater. He sees Walter ringing up sales as fast as he can, heads that way.

DARNELL

Has anyone seen Amie?

WALTER

Who? Take the other register, will you? Brian's late.

Customer #1 runs over.

CUSTOMER #1
I'll give you three hundred dollars
for that display.

CUSTOMER #2
I'll give you six.

CUSTOMER #3
Hell, I'll give you a thousand!

Walter's eyes light up.

WALTER
How about a silent auction?

He holds up a clipboard.

WALTER
Just write your name and your bid
here, and on Halloween morning--

A Customer rips the board away. The bidding war starts.

LATER

The store has calmed, though there's still a sizable crowd
around the display. Darnell, subdued by concern, stocks
shrunken heads. A tap on his shoulder. He turns, jumps--

DARNELL
Oh, thank God.

He pulls Amie into a relieved hug. She's stunned.

AMIE
Okay, only a little weird.

DARNELL
Have you seen the display?

AMIE
Yes. It's awesome! Did you--?

He grabs her by the arm, pulls her along. At the display Amie
leans in, examines the arm/tattoo.

DARNELL
When I saw that, I thought--

Amie also sees the Deathly Hallows ring on one finger.

AMIE

I know her. We were in line together last week.

DARNELL

So you agree, this isn't fake.

RUSS (O.S.)

What do you mean?

Darnell and Amie look up at Russ who stands behind them, gawking at the Brian body with growing fear.

RUSS

You're saying that Brian didn't make this? That it's really--?

Walter walks by. One big, happy guy.

WALTER

Real money is what it is. The bid is over three thousand. This is going to be our best year yet.

He pokes Darnell in the chest.

WALTER

And you, my friend, have some real competition for Employee of the Year. Unless you made it. Wait, don't tell me. We'll do a reveal when we close the auction--

RUSS

We need to call the police!

WALTER

(beat)

You spend too much time in here.

He taps the severed arm, which bobbles. Russ looks sick.

WALTER

They're just mannequins. (to Amie) Don't forget to get your bid in. (to Darnell) If Brian doesn't show you'll have to close. And get some shots of this for your Finsta.

Walter walks away. Russ watches the Brian body snatched again, and vomits.

INSERT: AN OWL TURNS SUDDENLY, ITS BIG EYES FILL THE SCREEN.

INT. SPIRIT HALLOWEEN - DAY

GIANT SUPER: 2 MONDAYS TO GO

Amie shops the store. Nearby, Darnell, Walter and Russ (hair mussed, clothes wrinkled, bloodshot eyes) hang out at the register. Walter checks the auction sheet.

WALTER

Topped out at 4300. Whoever made the display, now would be a good time for a new one.

RUSS

It was just a mannequin, right? Brian's okay, right?

Walter observes Russ' condition with disgust.

WALTER

Am I going to have to start random drug testing? People walk off the job every day. So what, I've got half a dozen lined up to replace him. Speaking of, if you don't pick things up...

He makes a motion: OFF WITH YOUR HEAD.

RUSS

Seriously, we should call the police.

DARNELL

You can't, they'll shut down the--

Russ whirls on him.

RUSS

Look kiss-ass, you think anyone else cares about your face up on the wall? (to Walter) You call the police, or tomorrow I will.

Darnell, Walter, and Amy watch Russ head for the exit.

RUSS

I'm going to apply at Arby's.

The door closes, cutting him off with a WITCH'S CACKLE.

INSERT: WITCH'S CACKLE CONTINUES OVER BLACK.

INT. SPIRIT HALLOWEEN - DAY

Darnell walks in to see another huge crowd. Walter dances around the fringes, gobs of money in each hand.

WALTER

Remember, auction ends Halloween morning. Opening bid on the new one is four thousand! (off Darnell) Ohhh, it's a dandy.

DARNELL

Enough to open again next year?

WALTER

Who cares about next year? Another display or two and Walter's in the Bahamas, baby. (off Darnell) Cheer up. Russ is a no-show four days running, so he's out. I'll send Brian's replacement over to meet the new manager.

Walter hands Darnell a piece of masking tape with MANAGER scrawled on it. Darnell puts it on his name tag and pushes through the crowd to see the display. He hears it first:

THA-THUNK...THA-THUNK...THA-THUNK...

A shrunken head's wiry hair flies in the breeze of a floor fan. Its body is an American Girl-style doll. A shrunken head wearing a bonnet hangs by a noose down its back.

The doll rides a tricycle that rolls continuously on a treadmill, periodically running over another doll's body tied to the treadmill belt. THA-THUNK...THA-THUNK...

Amie slides next to Darnell as he stares at the display.

SHRUNKEN HEAD

(high-pitched)

We've got the need for speed!

AMIE

Oh yeah, it does that, too. This store's going to get a reputation.

CUSTOMER #4

It already has. (holds his phone up) You guys are blowing up online.

NEW BRIAN appears beside Darnell.

NEW BRIAN
Hi, I'm the new--

THA-THUNK. New Brian looks at the new display, blanches.

SHRUNKEN HEAD
We've got the need for speed!

NEW BRIAN
Nope, I'm out.

New Brian nopes out. Darnell eyes the display, smiles--

WALTER (O.S.)
Darnell!

Darnell's smile dies. Amie looks on in sympathy.

INSERT: A SKELETON SITS UP SUDDENLY.

INT./EXT. SPIRIT HALLOWEEN - DAY

GIANT SUPER: HALLOWEEN

Darnell helps Customer #3 ease the shrunken head display out the front door. They set it down just outside.

DARNELL
This'll give the neighborhood kids
a scare.

Customer #3 pays Darnell.

CUSTOMER #3
Hell, the soccer moms are gonna
lose their wine. Tell your boss
this was an awesome idea, I hope
you all do it next year.

Customer #3 loads up as Darnell returns inside. He looks sadly at the gaping void where the two displays were. Then he remembers the money and starts counting it.

AMIE (O.S.)
Sold them both?

Darnell turns; Amie stands at the door. He waves the cash.

DARNELL
Enough for rent next season. But
Walter's got other plans.

Amie looks past Darnell into the quiet store.

AMIE
Where is he, anyway?

Darnell follows her gaze. Shrugs.

AMIE
It's just you?

DARNELL
Halloween's usually slow anyway.
Everyone's already got what they
want.

AMIE
Well, I took the day off. (off
Darnell) Halloween's practically a
federal holiday in my book. If you
needed a hand...?

Darnell smiles, happy for the company.

DARNELL
I could use some help with signage
for the fire sale.

Darnell leads the way to the counter, Amie close behind.

INT. HALLOWEEN SPIRIT - NIGHT

The light of a full moon spills through the windows onto:

Darnell and Amie, dressed as Beetlejuice and a bride, lie
side-by-side on a fake graveyard display.

DARNELL
Thanks for all your help.

AMIE
I wish this could last forever.

Their eyes meet, an awkward but tender beat that might lead
to--there's a CRASH. They jump up to investigate.

They find TINA (60s, female), drunk, in a one-sided argument
with Walter's Owner photo hung behind the counter.

TINA
Should've kept your passwords in a
better place, you bastard.

AMIE
Are you his wife?

TINA

Until he ran off to the Bahamas. It was all over his search history. Never said a word about it BECAUSE HE WAS NEVER GOING TO TAKE ME!

She sees the 'manager' tape on Darnell's name tag.

TINA

Daddy's little superstar. He told me how much you love this dump.

AMIE

You don't like it?

Tina points to Walter, but her angry retort falters as she considers the silver lining.

TINA

It was nice having him out of the house every fall. But this stupid little pet project was all his.

DARNELL

How much?

Tina and Amie both look at him, stunned.

TINA

You wanna buy it?

Darnell shrugs as if to say: WELL, YEAH. He reaches for the wad of cash in his back pocket. Amie discreetly stops him.

TINA

Hell, you can have it.

Tina turns to leave, then stops. She grabs the cash register from the counter, motions to Walter's picture.

TINA

Asshole tax.

Tina stumbles out of the store. Darnell and Amie look at each other: holy crap! Amie kisses Darnell.

DARNELL

Next year is going to be epic.

AMIE

We're going to blow it up.

Darnell eyes Amie. We?

AMIE

It's Halloween for a few more hours, and I've got some serious haunting to do. (beat) Want to come?

DARNELL

I have a few things to take care of here.

AMIE

See you Monday, first thing.

Amie exits. Darnell looks around, standing a little taller.

DARNELL

I own the store. I own Halloween.

He peels the manager tape from his name tag. He takes Walter's frame from the wall and exits. A few beats later he returns and hangs his own portrait in its place.

As he locks the front door he notices something on the floor. He picks up a doll's bonnet, the same one from the shrunken head display. He regards it, amused, then stops.

From the bonnet he plucks a Hobby Lobby price tag. His mind races, trying to put pieces together. He looks out the front door, to the orange HOBBY LOBBY sign across the parking lot.

EXT. HOBBY LOBBY - NIGHT

Darnell creeps along the backside of the building. He finds a door propped open with craft foam. He hears HAMMERING inside. Cautiously, he enters.

INT. HOBBY LOBBY BREAK ROOM - NIGHT

Darnell eases into the break room. Aside from a fridge and a large picture of Jesus on the wall, he finds a pile of craft supplies and mechanical parts. The start of something big.

In the middle of it all stands Amie. She smiles.

AMIE

Sorry, sir. We're closed on Sunday. (impish) But I'm still working.

DARNELL

It was--? You made--? Here?

AMIE

Ta-da.

DARNELL

Brian. Russ. (beat) Walter?

Amie holds up a finger, turns to open a cabinet with gusto. Walter's stuffed inside, gagged and bound, but alive.

AMIE

They didn't love the store. Not like we do.

Walter wriggles out of the cubby. Amie giggles.

AMIE

At first I was like--let's finish the year strong.

Darnell, shocked, looks around the room. Among other items, a large knife sits on a nearby table.

AMIE

But, then I thought--why does it have to end at all?

Walter struggles to his feet, mumbling something through his gag to Darnell. Amie casually picks up a jigsaw.

AMIE

This is the one, Darnell, I can feel it. It'll change everything.

At the sound of the power tool Walter spins to face Amie. His eyes wide with fear, he tries to scream through the gag. The scream cuts off as his body jerks upright.

Walter slumps to the floor, revealing Darnell. The knife, covered with Walter's blood, is in Darnell's hand.

Darnell's eyes meet Amie's. An understanding. A commitment.

DARNELL

It should never close.

They smile at each other. Then they get to work.

Blood splatters on Jesus' face, falling like crimson tears.

INT. SPIRIT HALLOWEEN - DAY

HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS plays on the PA. A large sign reads: KEEP THE SPIRIT ALL YEAR LONG. It's decorated with holiday icons: skulls, turkeys, snowmen, hearts, fireworks.

Darnell and Amie work to hang the sign in the window as CUSTOMER #5 enters the store.

AMIE

Welcome!

DARNELL

Be with you in a minute.

They finish hanging the sign and turn to take in the new store arrangement. Halloween blends with Christmas, from spooky Christmas trees to skeleton reindeer.

CUSTOMER #5

Oh man, there's a new one!

Darnell and Amie watch expectantly as Customer #5 takes in the new display that dominates one corner:

It's a giant plastic snow globe. Inside, Walter sits in a too-small sleigh, wearing a Santa outfit and an inhuman grin. His outstretched hand spits out money which swirls around him. The music swells.

CUSTOMER #5

This is nuts! What'll it be next?

A man, CUSTOMER #6 walks past.

CUSTOMER #6

No way they keep this going all year. Place is fucking lame.

Darnell and Amie look at each other, then at Customer #6. They smile wickedly. They follow him.

CUT TO BLACK

THE END