

Deadline

By

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FADE IN:

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

A blank computer screen. A cursor pulsating against white. A young unkempt man in his 20s staring back at it anxiously. He is CHRIS, sitting by his computer.

He types "FADE IN:" in the right margin.

CHRIS
(whispers to himself)
Fade in, interior...

He types "INT.", the cursor beating, begging for more.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Interior or exterior? Christ, I
don't even have a damn story yet.

He looks over to a stack of screenwriting books on his desk.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Fuck you Syd Field.

He pours himself a drink and starts going through trade magazines. He finds the list of production houses and ads finding an ad for "A.P. House Productions" --

CHRIS
Screenwriters wanted for television
series and commercial work...

Chris opens his email, attaching a couple of pdf files. "Insanity". "Query letter". Just as he clicks send, the screen goes dark, as does the rest of the lights.

CHRIS
Terrific.

INT. HOTEL HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Chris cautiously opens the door, a long dark hall in both ends. No one there. Chris turns around, suddenly facing --

JOEL
Chris!

Chris nearly jumps out of his skin facing JOEL, his 20-something neighbor and friend.

CHRIS
Jesus Christ Joel!

JOEL
Power's out, got worried about you.

CHRIS
Yeah, I was just sending out samples again.

JOEL
Lemme guess, Insanity? Dude, you wrote that in college. You gotta get something new out there!

CHRIS
Don't you think I've been trying? Night after night, I can't even sleep longer than an hour --

Suddenly the phone rings inside the room.

CHRIS
I have to take this.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Chris closes the door and picks up his cellphone.

VOICE/PHONE
(severely distorted)
Chris Halls? This is Lieberman of Lieberman, Finch, Gamble & Houseman. We represent the A.P. House. We took a look at your script and we like it. We're wondering if you'd be interested in writing for us. Can you do it?

CHRIS
You already -- What's the show?

VOICE/PHONE
It's an hour long episodic, true crimes, ripped from the headlines, Law & Order with a horror twist. We signed up for a sizzler three weeks from now but our staff writer bailed. We need sides by friday morning. Can you do it?

CHRIS

Uh, yeah, of course! Do you have a story in mind or...

VOICE/PHONE

Guy kills four. One is pushed down a stairwell, the next is strangled, the third stabbed and the last shot, all in an old hotel. They never caught him. Can you do it?

CHRIS

Yes! Of course! I loved The Shining, but I mean, I don't know the format you want --

VOICE/PHONE

Just the highlights in five pages, all we need is the feel of the show. I'll call back thursday.

The other end abruptly hangs up. Suddenly, power comes back on, his computer turning itself on again.

On the screen, the email is still listed as unsent. Chris looks confused, but shrugs it off. He opens up CeltX, starting to write.

CHRIS

Exterior, resort hotel, night --

EXT. HOTEL -- NIGHT

A car pulls up. A MAN (30s) inside pays off the driver, getting his bag and stepping out.

CHRIS (V.O.)

A car pulls up. A MAN inside pays off the driver, getting his bag...

The man heads inside the hotel, looking around himself, startled by something.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY -- NIGHT

The man rushes past the LOBBY CLERK.

CHRIS (V.O.)

Clerk: Welcome back, sir --

LOBBY CLERK

-- may I take your bag?

The man snorts at him and passes.

INT. HOTEL FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Some drunken people on the way to a party walk down the main stairwell. The man turns to the back stairwell instead.

The drunken people exit, the hallway turns eerily quiet --

CHRIS (V.O.)
-- then he turns around and sees
the FIGURE standing in the hallway.

A dark HOODED FIGURE is standing down the hall, quietly. The man looks at him, terrified, and bolts up the stairs, slamming his bag against every step. The hooded figure runs up the other stairwell.

INT. HOTEL SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

The man rushes up to a door, scrambling with his keys, trying desperately to fit them into the lock until he stops and sees the door number -- 201. He checks his key -- 301.

He runs back up the stairs, his bag slamming against the steps until it bursts open, spilling its contents all over the stairs -- white paper notes.

He looks back up to the last steps to the next floor, seeing -- the dark hooded figure standing above him. The figure pushes the man down, landing on the second floor, DEAD.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

A scream is heard in the hallway. Chris jumps, listening.

INT. HOTEL SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Chris opens the door slightly, the room number now visible -- 213. Two MEN run past. Chris peers out, seeing -- the MAN dead at the bottom of the stairs at the end of the hall. Some other tenants gathered around. Joel among them.

Chris looks confused, looking back into his room at the screen and back to the body. Joel runs up to him.

CHRIS
What happened?

JOEL
It's Dan, the manager. Took a fall
down the stairs, snapped his neck
like a chicken. Strange though,
his bag was filled with these --

Joel hands him one of the paper notes -- a newspaper article "WRITER KILLS FOUR". The bottom torn out, right after "The first victim, Dan Jones, was found wednesday..."

JOEL

Some Stephen King shit, right? You think someone could've planned this?

CHRIS

(shocked)

I...I dunno. Excuse me.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Chris is searching online. First for "A.P. House", finding no listings at all. He's looking scared now.

He searches for Lieberman, Finch, Gamble & Houseman and finds a ton of links. He clicks on one. The headline reads "ENTERTAINMENT LAWYERS FOUND DEAD". Dated 2002.

The article reads "Lieberman was found dead after a fall" -- "Finch was found strangled in his office" -- "Gamble was found stabbed outside his house" -- "Houseman was found shot, apparently self-inflicted".

CHRIS

Oh god...oh god...oh god...

Suddenly, a knock on the door. Chris walks over, scared.

CHRIS

Who's there?

A note is slipped under the door; "WRITE IT".

Horrified, Chris starts deleting everything he's written.

Suddenly, his phone rings. Unknown number. He picks up.

CHRIS

Hello? HELLO?

No answer. Just a heavy breathing.

The phone starts beeping, messages rolling in, one per second from the same number; "STOP IT", "STOP IT".

More pounding on the door. Note after note is slipped underneath it, all identical "WRITE IT" "WRITE IT".

More texts, Chris looks over at the screen, seeing what he wrote getting retyped again by itself. The cursor pounding against white, begging for more.

CHRIS
I'LL DO IT, JUST LEAVE ME ALONE!

He starts typing again, teary-eyed.

CHRIS (V.O.)
Interior, hotel lobby, night --

INT. HOTEL LOBBY -- NIGHT

The clerk is nearly falling asleep. Suddenly, a dark figure passes quickly behind him, waking him. He looks around, suspicious, but doesn't see anyone.

He shruggs it off, going into...

INT. HOTEL LOBBY BATHROOM -- NIGHT

The clerk stands, taking a piss. He glances over at the mirror seeing -- the dark figure standing behind him with a garrotte, wrapping it around his neck. The sound of the clerk choking to death bleeding over into...

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Chris stops typing, closing his eyes, chanting to himself --

CHRIS
Please make it quick. Please make
it quick. Please make it quick.

Suddenly a knock on the door. Chris braces himself and opens the door. Joel is standing in the door, a bit of blood on him, a look of shock on his face and an article in his hands. "WRITER KILLS FOUR". It reads: "...Robert Taft, the receptionist at the hotel was found strangled...tenant Joel Nathan was found stabbed..." Chris looks stunned.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM -- MORNING

Chris is sitting in the bare police station interrogation room. Handcuffs around his wrists. A camera directed at him. A young, aggressive 20-something police detective, JONES, enters with a file.

JONES
No murder weapon. No
fingerprints. Nothing on
surveillance tapes. Two victims,

JONES
multiple threats. Just one
low-life fucking writer confessing
to all of it. You care to explain
all of this to me like I'm five?

CHRIS
I killed two people, detective
Jones. I'm a killer. Even if I
didn't lay a hand on them, I still
killed them.

JONES
What the fuck's that supposed to
mean? I'm sick of this Poltergeist
horseshit, you're covering for
someone and I wanna know who!

Jones looks almost frightened in his rage. Chris gives him
a questioning look. Jones collects himself and takes out a
paper note and hands it to Chris.

JONES
Did you send this to me?

It's the article. The bottom now complete. Detective
Jones' name listed as a victim of a stabbing. At the very
bottom, Joel Nathan is listed as the last, dead by
gunshot. "The lead suspect still at large".

CHRIS
Wait, this isn't right...

JONES
He's under watch already. Whoever
you're working with can't come
within fifty feet of that place
without me knowing about it --

CHRIS
This isn't right, this isn't right,
I didn't write this yet... OH GOD!

Chris looks up and sees -- the DARK FIGURE standing behind
Jones. He raises a knife and slits Jones' throat, spraying
Chris with blood all over the place.

The dark figure calmly picks up Jones' gun and puts it on
the table the keys to the handcuffs and walks out, leaving
the door open.

Chris looks down, seeing a bag full of clothes. The note on
top: "FINISH IT".

EXT. HOTEL -- NIGHT

Chris, disguised as a policeman, approaches. Scared.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY -- NIGHT

Chris passes a POLICEMAN standing on guard by the taped up bathroom. Their eyes meet. The policeman nods to him. Chris, nervous, nods back.

INT. HOTEL SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

Chris enters from the stairs, past the police tape left from Dan's murder. He sees a COP down the hall, outside Joel's room.

Joel enters from the other stairwell, escorted by ANOTHER COP. He sees Chris. Joel looks absolutely ravaged, a sad resigned look on his face like he knows he's gonna die but doesn't say anything. The cop escorts him into his room.

Chris moves on to 213.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Chris locks the door, takes off the jacket and cap, sitting by his computer. The cursor still pulsating against white.

CHRIS

C'mon, c'mon, think of something...

CHRIS (V.O.)

(starts typing)

Interior, hotel room, night. The dark figure enters, knife in hand -

He suddenly stops typing, sensing the dark figure standing behind him, breathing heavily. The knife glimmers in the dark. Chris' hand inches toward the gun.

INT. HOTEL SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY -- NIGHT

GUNSHOTS. Three of them. The COP reacts, startled, calling on his radio, running toward 213.

INT. HOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Chris is standing there, gun in his hand, smoke still coming out of the barrel. Stunned. The dark figure is still standing in front of him, hand out as if he's holding a gun too. A pounding on the door. The cops trying to bust in.

Chris takes a step to the left, the figure mimics him. A step to the right, the figure steps to the right. Chris steps in closer, the figure doesn't move. He looks into the dark hood seeing --

HIMSELF.

He looks down at his own body. Gunshot wounds. Three of them. He touches the blood in disbelief and drops to his knees.

The figure approaches with the knife, ready for the coup de grace. He points the gun to his own mouth, smiling grimly.

CHRIS
Worked in Fight Club.

He pulls the trigger.

The cops burst in through the door, finding --

Chris, dead in a pool of blood. In the hooded figure costume.

ON SCREEN:

"FADE OUT" types itself.

FADE OUT

THE END