

Holy Hell (a screenplay)

(v.1)

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INT. — ATTIC — NIGHT

BERNICE is holding a candle, bottom-up, as though she is familiar with it and being careful even within the motions she makes with it. She's in a slip; the door is recently opened, still swinging open. Building on this, before it stops, she goes

BERNICE

Who's . . . *there*?

cocking her head and waiting, as though the sound will better dribble into her ear physically. Waiting enough to know she's got nothing, she purses her lips in a "Not *again!*" move, waits still some more, sighs, and treads her first foot onto the stairs to go back down.

She blows out the light, suddenly, but premeditatively:

"HOLY HELL!"

is all over the screen, yellow-and-red kind dripping blood-but-more-like-wax movie titles.

No explanation.

EXT. — BARN — DAYLIGHT

TITLE (BOTTOM OF SCREEN, WHITE WITH BLACK BORDERS, NOTHING BEYOND THE FUNCTIONAL ABOUT IT): "Four days earlier"

INT. — SCHOOL — DAYTIME

BERNICE is in class, thrumming her pencil eraser-end against her red notebook ... *thrrrum ... thrrrum ... thrrru—*

(and the teacher's voice, which we realize has just faded in at a drone:)

“BZZZZZT” — the school bell

SCHOOL TEACHER

(trying to maintain a semblance of order over the chaos:)

. . . and don't forget, read Nathaniel Hawthorne's “Young Goodman Brown” before class — before *bed* tonight.

(she smiles)

BERNICE sticks out her tongue. The teacher is mock-aghast.

EXT. — SCHOOL PARKING LOT, NEAR STEPS LEADING OUTSIDE FROM DOORS — TWILIGHT

BERNICE

(reading)

“ . . . for his dying hour was gloom.”

OFF-SCREEN: “Why do you always read to them.”

Scattered *groans* — may be 4,5,6, in number. Apparently — camera pulls back — BERNICE has been reading the story to other students. She's still SHIELDING HER EYES to see who it is she's talking to, standing in the sunlight as she is.

BERNICE

"If it's less than *twenty pages*—"

OFFSCREEN: "You're theater people. Aren't you."

Silence. They feel they've been caught out, it seems — all have goth/Smiths/Cure/Rocky Horror-esque garb and emblems, pink/green hair, etc.

OFFSCREEN: "You can't just keep *squeaking over the finish line* and then — "

BERNICE

(mouthing it aloud, as it comes to her)

"Marjorie . . . "

OFFSCREEN: "Yeah. Well."

BERNICE

(quietly, gathering her books)

"Go make your short films."

She turns, pivots, and doesn't look back.

Frame is empty.

"*MAR-JOR/IEEE . . .* "

EXT. — GARAGE OF HOUSE W/DOORS OPEN — EARLY EVENING

OFFSCREEN: "Margie! Margie! Margie!" (staccato; annoying)
She enters, holding hose which spills water at average pace of flow onto garage floor, as though to say: "*See what you asked for?*"

MARJORIE

What?

No difference.

SING-SONG VOICE:

Mom says if *you* don't tape
her *show* tonight then—

(MARJORIE claps her hand to forehead — causing water to go everywhere including on her — she's hoisted the hose with her hand, which doesn't work, so, realizing this, she drops it)

MARJORIE

She *all-ways* . . .

SING-SONG VOICE:

—you won't *get* to use the
station wagon *or* the video—

MARJORIE

(*taken aback*)

What?

SING-SONG VOICE:

—*camera* even if it's for
school—

MARJORIE

(*hands on hips, hose missing her*)

I *know*, it's for graduation . . .

(*as though she slipped, and treated
her younger sister as her understanding
confidante*)

SING-SONG VOICE

. . . because it isn't *that* much to ask.

MARJORIE

(*staining pants with hose, then, catching herself, chucking it back out onto lawn:*)

Fine!

(*using now-free hand like a stopsign*)

OUT-OF-FRAME: "Why a *video* camera?"

MARJORIE puts both hands on hips. Waits, then hears screen door slam — end of interview.

OUT-OF-FRAME (MARJORIE): "They get *spooked* by film, I don't *know*? Okay? Video seems to *work* . . . "

EXT. — GRAVEYARD — NIGHT

DANIEL

(*kicking at stones, hands in pockets:*)

Ghosts get spooked? Isn't it supposed to be the oth—

MARJORIE

(*impatient*)

Ghosts aren't *ghosts*; they're Qlippoth...

DANIEL

(*is silent, taking this in*)

MARJORIE

Shells of ghosts . . . err, people . . .
ahh, *souls*—

DANIEL

(picking up the fidgeting, again)
Right. The 21 grams
that goes—

MARJORIE

(waving her hand, like an
air-traffic controller; “you’ve
got it, you’ve got it — ”)
Yeahwaithowdid — *you* know that?
(hand suspended in air)

DANIEL

(like, “obviously”:)
Movie. Called *21 Grams*.
(smirking)
Heard of it?

MARJORIE

(missing the irony)
No, no — I don't follow
movies — really? *(processing*
this for a minute) That's
awesome! People should
know . . .

She drifts off.

Waves her hand a couple circumlocutions.

EXT. — MOON — NIGHT-ISH

Clouds pass by the moon, like smoke rising but going sideways, at about that pace.

OFF-SCREEN: "BERR-NICE!"

INT. — ATTIC BEDROOM — CUSP OF NIGHT

She turns a card over, with all the deliberation and anticipation of accumulated effort . . .

. . . it's THE TOWER

BERNICE

(can't help but say:)

Ohh . . . *shiiit*.

(as soon as it becomes visible, as soon as she's breathing out —)

"—NEICE!" *(This has been going on for some time.)*

BERNICE locks eyes with the camera, breaking the fourth wall, and holds it.

Then . . . "*COME — iiing.*" and starts to shuffle the card back into some picked-up order.

EXT. — BACK LAWN/BERNICE'S HOUSE — NIGHT

BERNICE, in a dress and barefoot, is looking up.

Looking up, looking up, looking up.

BERNICE

(pointing finger)

Youuu . . .

She drops finger. Pulls dress away from her chest and lets it drop.
Sighs.

Breathes.

Grabs with both hands — *nothing*.

Breathes.

Grabs with both hands and shakes — *nothing*.

“BER — *NICE!*”

She wipes her forehead with her forearm.

BERNICE

(right on cue:)

Coming!

She sighs, starts, hitches up her skirt over her feet, tromps back indoors.

INT. — BERNICE'S FAMILY'S KITCHEN — LATE EVENING

Bernice is chewing ice. No explanation.

INT. — CLASSROOM — DAY

Much milling about. They're early

BERNICE

(hand on head, holding it up, listening to a conversation that
FADES IN:)

“Do you think we’ll have a prom if all this gets out? Do you think—”

TEACHER

(breaking silence,
wave-of-hand rotate
accompanies this:)
Hell-LO, class!

She's busy, and situates herself at her desk at front of the class, and expects students to follow along.

TEACHER

*(after a bit.)
O-kay. Now.*

SHOT of BERNICE, slinking into something she has to endure, despite herself . . . she dutifully opens her MATHEMATICS-12 book and leaves through the pages — THERE! She holds her hand on it, and watches the teacher, as though steadying herself . . .

EXT. — TREE-LADEN BACKYARD O' MARJORIE'S FAMILY — DUSK

She rakes.

Rake, rake, rake . . . rake, rake, *rake* . . . *rake*, rake, *rake* . . .

She stops, perspiring.

She wipes her forehead.

Rake, *rake*, rake . . . *rake, rake*, rake . . .

She's out of breath.

She looks around.

She breathes into her shirt, lets it drop.

Then: *raaake* . . . rake, rake, *raaake* —

CUT TO:

INT. — MARJORIE AT KITCHEN SINK — NIGHT

SOUND: Veruca Salt's "Eyes on You": "WAIT! Don't grow up yet—" (tinny, through an AM radio-sounding)

Bare-breasted, in her adolescent youth, MARJORIE is rubbing lemon juice over her self — nipples, aureoles, sides of breast — and not getting anywhere.

CELLPHONE:

MARJORIE

(boobs bobbing, glistening,
dripping as she talks:)

Why was I supposed to —
(*she listens intently*)

Veruca Salt: "I'm WIRED and UNDERSLEPT—"

MARJORIE

(*interrupting:*)

Yeah yeah yeah — *what* movie?

(she listens)
Susan Sarandon *says* . . . ?
(she listens)
Susan Sarandon . . . *movie?*
(she waits, then:)
Atlantic . . . *City?* But — why . . . ?

CUT TO:

OUTSIDE

EXT. — MARJORIE'S BACKYARD — NIGHT

Rustling sounds. Marjorie is topless in window. Purpose of rustling is unclear, sounds hesitant and stop-and-start.

Then, plaintive pebbles-on-window thing happens, as though *limp*, as though *you said to* . . .

INT. — MARJORIE'S BEDROOM — NIGHT, BUT BRIGHTLY LIT WITH THOSE HALOGEN LIGHTS

MARJORIE
(wearing a grey SAN FRANCISCO 49'ERS t-shirt, no bra)
So!
(hands on hips)
The sound came *through* . . .
(hands in the air, twirling in expectation, like to produce something)

JOSEPH
(*subdued.*)

Yeah. It *came* through,
yeah.

MARJORIE
(puzzled, on face,
right down to her shoes)
Well, *why* . . .

JOSEPH
(*point at corner.*)
Your stereo?

MARJORIE
(waving at it, in that direction)
Yeah, it's discombobulated,
I just gotta . . .

JOSEPH
(sniffing)
Why does it smell like
lemons in here . . . ?

MARJORIE
(moving already)
Just let me recon—
nect the red and white
wires . . .over *here* . . .

JOSEPH
(skeptical, but then
going with it —)
Oh — *oh* kay . . .

