

FEAR PRESSURE

Act 1 Scene 1

Three high school girls are in the back row of a movie theater, twenty minutes before the previews start rolling. JEN, 14, sits between her friends, with NANCY, 15, on her left and BRENDA, 14, on her right. Each has a soda and a bag of popcorn.

JEN. I heard this is supposed to be soooooo scary!

NANCY. As long as it's better than Number 3. That sucked!

BRENDA. You've actually seen all the other ones? *New Hampshire Hacksaw Murders 1, 2, and 3?*

NANCY. Well, duh. Haven't you?

JEN. Brenda's parents won't let her watch these kinds of movies. Her family's super religious.

NANCY. Oh. You're a church person, huh?

BRENDA. I mean, I go to church on Sundays, yeah.

NANCY. That's what church people do. You know, now that I'm really looking at you, you seem like a church person.

JEN. But she's cool. Right, Brenda?

BRENDA. Yeah, yeah. Totally. Very cool.

NANCY. You're not all goody-goody? Always doing the right thing? The *boring* thing?

JEN. She's here, isn't she?

NANCY. *(To Brenda.)* Did you even know we were gonna sneak into this theater? Or were you really expecting to see that Disney flick across the hall?

BRENDA. I mean, I thought we were seeing something else, but this is... fine.

NANCY. You're disappointed, aren't you? You wanna see that little kid's movie.

BRENDA. I read the book, so I wanted to compare. But it's okay, really.

NANCY. You read the book?

JEN. She reads lots of books.

NANCY. *(To Brenda.)* Yeah, you look like a reader.

JEN. But she's cool.

NANCY. You read the Bible, Brenda? On Sundays?

BRENDA. Sure. Excerpts. Verses.

NANCY. It say anything about not seeing horror movies?

BRENDA. It was written thousands of years ago, so, no...

NANCY. Then why do you look so nervous

JEN. She's not nervous. Are you, Brenda?

BRENDA. No. No way. *(She takes a long drink from her soda cup.)*

NANCY. *(To Jen.)* You go to school with her and know her better than I do, I guess. But she looks like she's gonna pee her pants. Or freak out.

Or snitch. Or all three

JEN. She's not gonna do any of that, alright?

NANCY. Okay, okay. It's just, ever since you moved in next door, I've wanted to hang out, is all. Don't want anyone else messing that up.

JEN. No one's messing anything up. We're gonna have fun.

NANCY. Good. *(To Brenda.)* You better pace yourself with that. The more you drink, the more you're gonna have to go. Jen says you're not gonna wet yourself, but I dunno... *(Brenda stops drinking. She self-consciously puts the beverage aside.)* You can't leave the theater 'til the movie's done, you know? Don't wanna risk you getting caught trying to sneak back in. Right, Jen?

JEN. Yeah. Maybe slow it down some, Brenda. The movie's two hours long.

NANCY. If you have to pee, either hold it in...or use your cup.

JEN. Ewww.

NANCY. Exactly. You don't leave the theater for *any* reason. Not even when the movie starts and someone gets their head get cut off, or their guts sliced open...Think you can handle that, church girl?

BRENDA. Yeah.

NANCY. We'll see. (*Taking out her phone.*) Okay, I'm gonna wanna remember this. Selfie!

JEN. Lean in, Brenda.

NANCY. Actually, I was thinking just you and me. I don't really know her...

JEN. Oh.

BRENDA. It's fine.

NANCY. But you know what? You can take the picture for us, can't you?

BRENDA. Well, if you want me to...

NANCY. We do. Here you go. (*Handing the phone to Brenda.*)

BRENDA. Okay... (*Aiming the camera just so.*) Say "cheese"!

NANCY. No, say "cheese-us"!

JEN. "Cheese-us"?

NANCY. "Cheese-us Christ"! Get it? "Cheese-us Christ"?

JEN. Oh. I don't really wanna...

NANCY. Fine. Whatever. Take the picture, Brenda.

BRENDA. Yeah. On three...1...2...

NANCY. Cheese-us Christ!

BRENDA. ...3... (*She takes a photo of the smiling girls. The camera flashes brightly in the others' faces.*)

NANCY. Ahhh! What're you doing?! Why you got the flash on?!

BRENDA. It's your phone.

NANCY. You didn't notice the flash is on?

JEN. I mean, it is kinda dark in here.

NANCY. So what! (*To Brenda.*) You can't have the flash on! You want people to notice us? Wanna get us kicked out?

JEN. No one's paying attention.

NANCY. But they'll start to, if she keeps doing stupid stuff like that! Give it back! (*She snatches the phone away from Brenda, but in doing so, Nancy knocks her own bag of popcorn over. Popcorn spills onto the floor.*) Seriously?! Thanks, Brenda!

BRENDA. I'm sorry.

JEN. It's okay.

NANCY. No, it's not!

JEN. That wasn't her fault.

NANCY. She apologized. She musta done something wrong!

JEN. She's just being nice.

NANCY. (*Holding up her empty popcorn bag.*) I bought this with my own money!

BRENDA. You can have some of mine.

JEN. You don't have to do that, Brenda.

NANCY. Well, someone better gimme some. I already said no one's leaving this theater. Not for *anything*.

BRENDA. Honestly, I don't really like popcorn that much. I'll share.

NANCY. Great! (*She reaches across Jen and snatches the bag of popcorn away from Brenda. She pours popcorn from Brenda's bag into her own.*)

JEN. You're welcome.

NANCY. For what?

JEN. I'm speaking on Brenda's behalf.

NANCY. Oh. Yeah. Whatever. Thanks, Brenda.

BRENDA. No problem

NANCY. (*Handing the bag back to Brenda, who inspects its contents.*) I took most of it. Hope you don't mind, since you said you don't really like it anyway.

BRENDA. Oh. I guess it's alright.

JEN. Brenda...

NANCY. (*Eating the popcorn.*) You seriously didn't put any butter on this?

BRENDA. No.

NANCY. (*Eating more.*) Tastes like cardboard. Does the Bible say something against eating butter, too?

BRENDA. No.

NANCY. You should probably stay away from the stuff, right? I mean, you don't need even more zits than you already have, do you?

JEN. Nancy.

NANCY. What?

JEN. *(Looking to Brenda, who has shrunk down in her seat.)* Brenda. She...she....

NANCY. Yeah?

JEN. She probably wants more popcorn than that. Right, Brenda?
(Brenda doesn't answer.)

NANCY. Is that so? Fine. Here's your cardboard. *(She begins tossing pieces of popcorn at Brenda.)*

BRENDA. Hey! Stop that! *(Nancy laughs as she throws more popcorn at Brenda, who tries to deflect the unwelcome barrage.)*

JEN. Nancy! Nancy, stop! STOP!

NANCY. *(Stopping, but taken aback.)* Wow. I was just playing around. Calm down.

JEN. It's not funny.

NANCY. It kinda is. You got something in your hair there, Brenda.

JEN. Leave her alone.

NANCY. I thought you were more fun than this. *(A monstrous figure in a black hooded robe reveals itself as it stands behind the girls. This is THE PUSHER, and it has long claws and red, piercing eyes. The girls have all had experiences with this entity before.)*

PUSHER. Yessssss, Jen, I alssssssso thought you were more fun than thissssss.

BRENDA. *(Shrieking at the sight of the creature.)* No! You again

JEN. Great...Here we go...

NANCY. *(Nodding to the Pusher.)* Hey, what's up?

PUSHER. *(Leaning in close to Brenda.)* Hello, Brenda. It'ssssss been a while. Haven't sssssseen you ssssssince the P.E. locker room incccccident. Feeling uncomfortable in thissssss ssssssocial ssssssituation, little girl? I can tassssste your fear. I can ssssssmell your sssssswat. *(From here on out, imagine the Pusher putting an emphassssssissssss on all hard "s" ssssssoundsssss.)*

JEN. Knock it off. Pick on me, not her!

PUSHER. I'm here for all of you.

NANCY. *(Pointing to Jen.)* She's acting all weird. You hear how she's been talking to me, right?

PUSHER. I do. She's trying to resist my influence. But I'm always nearby, protecting losers from themselves. And keeping others in line. (*The Pusher gives Nancy a knowing look.*)

NANCY. What're you looking at me like that for?

PUSHER. Nancy, Nancy, Nancy. Tsk-tsk-tsk. You're usually such a good listener. (*Gesturing to Jen.*) You're going to allow this *kid* to run her mouth at you like she has been? That's pretty weak, don't you think? You're older than her, cooler than she will ever be, and you have a much sharper tongue, too!

NANCY. You're... You're right.

PUSHER. Then, show her who's boss!

NANCY. (*To Jen.*) You better watch how you speak to me, alright? I thought you were cool and all, but maybe you're nothing more than a pathetic, little wannabe! Maybe you belong on the playground with all the other babies! Going down those slides, swinging on the swings! Playing in the sand with an itty-bitty shovel!

PUSHER. (*To Jen.*) Oh, no she didn't! She called you a "wannabe". How's that make you feel? Cuts deep, doesn't it? 'Cause we both know you want to be more like her than you want to be like this *church girl* over here.

BRENDA. Is that true, Jen?

PUSHER. Of course, it is. I mean, look at you, Brenda. Fourteen years old but you look like you're ten. Start acting and dressing above your age, Brenda, or you're going to lose your best friend...*forever!*

BRENDA. No!

PUSHER. Oh, yes! I can guarantee it!

JEN. Will you stop already? Stop scaring her like that!

PUSHER. The truth can be frightening, can't it? And your truth, Jen, is the most frightening one of all.

JEN. I'm not afraid of you.

PUSHER. Oh? Good. You shouldn't be. You should embrace everything I have to say. Accept it with arms wide open. I'm here to help you girls to be the absolute best you can be!

JEN. Will you just go away?

PUSHER. You know it's never that easy. Now, you have to make a choice, Jen. A hard choice. A scary choice. Because, if you choose poorly, who knows what the future will bring?

JEN. Go away, go away, GO AWAY! *(She attempts to cover her ears, but the Pusher pulls the girl's hands away.)*

PUSHER. Which path will you take, Jen? The safe route with church girl? Aren't you tired of moving at a snail's pace through a "PG-rated" life?

BRENDA. Jen, I could change. I could...be different, if you want me to be.

PUSHER. Yes! Do it! Please! Evolve already!

JEN. No, no, Brenda, don't. Don't listen to it, okay?

PUSHER. Oh, come on, Jen! You know you're ready for a faster lifestyle. One where you can feel more free. Like you actually fit in with people who are going places. Nancy's more than willing to take you under her wing...if you promise not to look back at the sad sacks of puke you've left behind! *(Brenda becomes especially crestfallen after this comment.)*

NANCY. *(Giggling.)* Dang, that's cold!

PUSHER. Jen, it'll be too hard to have these separate paths converge into one. You see that, don't you? You can't live in both of these worlds. You have to choose. Put your foot down and move forward, one way or the other.

NANCY. It's no contest. We all know what she's gonna choose.

PUSHER. Come on, Jen.

JEN. Be quiet! Stop pushing me!

PUSHER. If you choose wrong, your life will probably be ruined!

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