

Queen of the Crawlies

written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. BACKWOODS ROAD - NIGHT

An SUV rumbles on uneven ground, high beams trembling. A tilt-a-whirl of forestry spins by. Trees, trees, more trees.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

The hopelessly lost couple: JUSTIN and CORRA, both 20s. He drives with sullen dejection. She slumps with car sickness.

JUSTIN  
I don't understand.

No sense of north or south out there. Mist and shadows. Woods. A soggy, dark, back-country labyrinth.

JUSTIN  
We took some wrong turns, possibly.

Cora gulps for air. For her, the walls are closing in.

The ice in the backseat cooler sloshes and clinks against the bottles. Justin's beers will be lukewarm soon. Extra bitter.

He checks the gas gauge: almost empty.

JUSTIN  
Are you gonna help me?

CORA  
Can we just go back?

JUSTIN  
You're not even looking.

CORA  
My stomach.

He powers down the windows all the way to give her air.

JUSTIN  
Stick you head out.

The incoming gust blows her hair in every direction. With hopeless, watery eyes she scans the passing woods.

She almost misses it: A small clearing in the trees.

CORA  
There!

Justin cuts the wheel hard. A wild skid.

He accelerates through a rough accessway and hits the brakes inches from an old cottage.

JUSTIN  
We found it!

They gawk at the structure for several moments. The engine idylls hotly. The headlights glare on the ancient wood.

Disbelief sinks in. This is barely a cottage at all. An eyesore is more like it.

The structure leans to the right, half overtaken with moss, ferns, creepers.

The paint: stripped. The boards: gray, eaten away by the elements. One could simply push through them.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

When Justin gets out, he has to cover his nose from the stench. He grabs his gear: a fishing pole and hunting rifle.

He leaves Cora's bags behind. She can get them herself.

Justin mutters all the way to the front door.

JUSTIN  
This can't be right. The pictures  
on the website weren't like this.

Cora looks at her shoes. No eye contact with Justin at all.

JUSTIN  
They said the key would be...

Justin kicks aside an absurd welcome mat. Welcome to what? A key skitters at his feet.

JUSTIN  
There it is.

He unlocks the door and steps inside.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Dark. No light switch. Justin flips on his cellphone. He steps forward. Crunch. Squelch. He staggers back in shock.

The walls are moving--full of skittering, writhing bugs.

Roaches. Stink bugs. Thousand-leggers.

Their legs make small ticking sounds as they walk on the walls and crawl over each other.

A few creepy-crawlies drop upon his head and he rushes out of the cottage, screaming, shaking, brushing his arms and hair.

JUSTIN

We can't stay here!

Cora needs to see for herself. She moves to the door and gets a glimpse along with a whiff of the stench.

Gag. She stumbles. Her prior car sickness has just been compounded. Lightheadedness takes over. She slumps down.

It takes Justin a moment to take notice her woozy state.

He tries to revive her and then lumbers to the SUV to get some water.

While he rummages, Cora regains a bit of awareness and stares in glassy-eyed wonder at the doorway.

Standing in the entrance with a flickering candle is the dark-cloaked NIGHT MAN. His skin has a cadaverous blue glaze and is ridged like the cockroaches that skitter around him.

A centipede scurries out of his nostril and disappears into his ear.

Cora's mouth drops open, but she cannot bring herself to scream. She stares into the Night Man's entrancing dark eyes.

Justin's hunting rifle is on the ground, only a few feet away from Cora. She could snatch it and defend herself.

But she doesn't. She stares deeply, wondrously,

Justin returns with ice and water from the cooler, but Cora doesn't acknowledge him at all.

She peers directly at the Night Man until he blows out his candle and fades into the cottage's darkness.

JUSTIN

We have to go, Cora. We aren't staying here another minute.

She doesn't even look at him, focusing instead on the dark void where the Night Man stood.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Justin hits the accelerator, and the SUV bounces through the ruts.

JUSTIN  
I'm gonna get back every penny of  
my rental fee.

He grips the steering wheel like he's strangling it.

JUSTIN  
I'll sue the shit out of them if I  
have to.

Cora isn't listening to him. She stares out the window, weirdly entranced. She pokes her thumb into her cheek.

Out there in the woods, she catches occasional blurry glimpses of the Night Man.

Sometimes his head peeks from behind a tree. In other moments, his full figure looms amid the branches and leaves.

Quick, random sightings.

He is everywhere--alongside of them, ahead of them, lurking in the shadows of the forest.

Inescapable.

Only Cora can see him. Justin remains blind with anger.

JUSTIN  
I'm not staying in cockroach hell,  
that's for sure.

The blue-green light from the dashboard casts a grim, alien glow over his face.

JUSTIN  
We were ripped off. You know what  
this is? It's...

Snapping out of her stupor, Cora finishes Justin's sentence.

CORA  
Fraud.

They both seem a little shocked that she spoke up.

JUSTIN  
That's just what I was gonna say.  
Fraud.

She presses her thumb more forcefully into her cheek.

CORA  
Like our marriage.

His jaw bulges with anger.

JUSTIN  
You wanna run that by me again?  
You've got a problem our marriage?

She nods. Yes.

JUSTIN  
Is this about the cottage? You  
agreed to come on this trip.

CORA  
Did I?

He nods defiantly.

CORA  
Here's what happened. You packed  
your beer. You grabbed your hunting  
rifle. You brought your fishing  
pole. Anything else? Oh, yeah, your  
wife. Almost forgot. Pack her up,  
too.

JUSTIN  
Would it be better if I left you at  
home to sit on your ass?

CORA  
This trip was never about spending  
time with me.

JUSTIN  
No? Then why did I bring you? Spit  
it out.

CORA  
Control.

He squeezes the steering wheel more tightly.

CORA  
You feed off it.

JUSTIN  
That's bullshit, Cora. That makes  
no sense.

CORA  
Control, control, control! Drive me  
out to butt-fuck nowhere!

She giggles.

JUSTIN  
Jesus, what's gotten into you?

CORA  
Roaches. Bugs. Do you see them?

She opens her mouth wide. Sticks out her tongue.

CORA  
They crawled in.

JUSTIN  
Maybe that'll teach you a lesson:  
Keep your mouth shut.

CORA  
That's all I ever do, haven't you  
noticed?

Her gaze turns to the forest.

CORA  
You don't see him, do you?

JUSTIN  
Who?

Alarm spreads over his face. He takes a deep breath.

JUSTIN  
Okay, we're both exhausted and  
pissed off. Let's just get home. If  
you're unhappy with me, we can  
address that tomorrow, but right  
now is probably not the right time.

He shifts in his seat. His voice assumes some tenderness.

JUSTIN  
I love you, Cora. Don't forget  
that. I mean it.

Justin lets that hang in the air for a moment.

Flash. The headlights fall upon a figure on the side of the  
road--the Night Man. Justin zooms past, but Cora sees him.

CORA

It's him!

Confusion from Justin.

CORA

Pull over! Pull over!

JUSTIN

You're not going to throw up, are you?

With reluctance, he pulls to the side of the road.

Cora flings open the door and dashes straight into the woods, leaving dumbfounded Justin behind.

JUSTIN

Cora! Cora, what the hell?

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Cora sprints through the woods. The branches slap her cheeks and torso and snag her hair, but she pushes through.

Back on the road Justin calls to her, but that only makes her run faster.

Cora falls down into the mud, but that makes no difference. Her face and hair are gobbed with muck, but she laughs.

She runs and runs and runs through the night. Wild as can be.

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT (LATER)

Cora trudges back to the cottage. Her face is scratched and bleeding and dirty. Not like the old Cora at all.

The cottage door is open. Somewhere in there a candle flickers.

No hesitation whatsoever from Cora. Into the awful structure she goes.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Bugs crunch underfoot and fall from the ceiling into hair, but that makes no difference at all. She welcomes it.

She rushes straight to the candle.



He, of course, is there. The Night Man. Waiting for her.

He chews cockroaches. Dark drool snakes down his chin.

Cora doesn't care. She pushes toward him and kisses him deeply, passionately on the lips.

How she's longed for this. She will never let him go. She could stay like this forever.

She is the queen of the roaches from this moment on.

When they end their kiss, her lips are caked with the residue of mashed bugs from the Night Man's mouth.

She licks with delight.

Headlight. The SUV. Justin has come back for her.

The vehicle slides to a stop. Justin's voice calls out:

JUSTIN (O.S.)  
Cora? Are you in there?

The Night Man steps aside. At his feet is a long shard of glass from one of the broken windows.

Cora scoops it up and surveys the sharp edge.

When she responds to Justin, her voice sounds much different: not like Cora at all. It's like a voice out of a nightmare.

CORA  
I'm in here!

JUSTIN (O.S.)  
Cora, please. Let's work this out.

She hides the glass shard behind her back.

Slowly, reluctantly, Justin steps inside the cottage.

JUSTIN  
Cora? Please talk to me.

She moves toward him, the shard concealed, but not for long.

A thousand skittering, foul cockroach eyes gaze upon her, bearing witness to what happens next.

FADE OUT: