

# Crystal

WALTER  
DEAN  
MYERS

Winner of  
the Printz Award  
for *Monster*



# crystal

WALTER  
DEAN  
MYERS



HarperCollins e-books

TO SPENCER SHAW,  
who has been a friend to me  
and, more important,  
to children's literature

# Contents

1	Crystal Brown rocked with the beat as she stood in...	v
2	The Caliper was the DuBois High School magazine. It had...	16
3	Crystal had finished a breakfast of tea and fresh fruit...	28
4	Loretta said that she would be working all day for...	45
5	“Now you can tell me the truth,” Pat said, pushing...	67
6	“Everby’s paying Jerry for the shooting session,” Loretta said as...	86
7	The midtown-Manhattan studio looked a lot better than Jerry’s. There...	100
8	The rocking and jerking of the “A” train made Crystal...	113
9	“There’s something different about your act, ya know what I...	122
10	Crystal had been studying geometry since early Tuesday morning. Mrs...	132
11	“The Roger Hallen Show?” Daniel Brown was in his shirtsleeves...	152

12		
“She’s at St. John’s Hospital in Queens,” Loretta said. “She...	158	
13		
The next day, Loretta called early and said she had...	171	
14		
It wasn’t so much what Joe Sidney had done as...	180	
15		
It was something that Crystal had to do. She wasn’t...	191	

[About the Author](#)

[Other Books by Walter Dean Myers](#)

[Credits](#)

[Cover](#)

[Copyright](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

# 1

**Jee-sus called my na-ame  
Early in the morning**

Crystal Brown rocked with the beat as she stood in the front row of the gospel choir. Her best friend, Pat, was leading what had to be the last song of the morning. Victory Tabernacle's air-conditioning, which had never worked that well, was down again, and droplets of sweat ran down Crystal's body under the gray-and-gold robes.

**I heard him call my na-ame  
Early in the morning**

Crystal watched as Sister Mason lifted a large brown hand to chase a fly buzzing around her newly straightened hair, the tambourine in her other hand never missing a beat as it slapped against her thigh.

**Jee-sus called my na-ame  
Early in the morning**

Reverend Curry was already on his feet and making his

way to the pulpit as the congregation ended the song in joyful unison.

And I-I will fol-ol-low Him

“Praise His holy name.” Reverend Curry’s deep voice filled the church.

There was a chorus of amens as the congregation responded.

“Before we leave this morning”—Reverend Curry patted the perspiration from his forehead—“let us thank the Lord one more time for the blessings He has bestowed on us. Let us bow our heads in prayer one more time, even though we know that we cannot thank Him enough. . . .”

More amens followed and Sister Jenkins raised her hands to the heavens, the nearly white palms contrasting sharply with the rich darkness of her face.

“Lord, walk with us today wherever we may go. . . .” Reverend Curry’s eyes were closed. “Keep our feet from straying and our minds on higher ground. . . .”

Crystal glanced at the big clock in the back of the church. It was twelve-thirty, she would have a good hour to get to the studio.

“Let men walk in love with their wives and let parents walk in love with their children. . . . Let us feel Your presence no matter how high we stand or how low. . . .”

Crystal glanced over at Loretta and saw the only White woman in the church sitting with her head bowed.

“Let us understand that there is no greater gift in the world than Your sweet mercy . . . and no greater words in all the world than these we offer today.”

There was a shuffling about as the entire congregation

stood.

“Our Father, Who art in heaven . . . Hallowed be Thy name . . . Thy kingdom come . . . Thy will be done . . .”

“You going to do some modeling today?” LuWanda Feelings combed her hair out in front of the mirror in the dressing room as she talked. “I saw that lady out there.”

“I’m going to meet a photographer,” Crystal said.

“Reverend Curry say anything about you working on Sunday?”

“I told you I wasn’t working,” Crystal said. She hung up her robe and put it on the rack. “I’m just going to meet a photographer.”

“How come you can’t meet him during the week?” LuWanda asked.

“Why you got to ask Crystal so many questions about what she’s doing?” Carrie Smith stood with her hands on her hips. “What she does is between her and the Lord. And she don’t need you looking out for her, and I know the Lord don’t.”

“I was just asking!” LuWanda gave Carrie a look, then thought better of challenging the older girl. “I was just wondering what a model be doing, that’s all.”

Crystal watched LuWanda walk off and catch up with some of the women in the senior choir.

“That girl ain’t gonna die no natural death,” Carrie said. “She gonna *nosey* on out the world!”

“She’s okay,” Crystal said.

“What’s okay about her?” Carrie was straightening her dress in the mirror. “Her sister told me that when they

came to shoot that commercial, she stayed up half the night putting relaxer in her hair.”

“She did?”

“Yeah, she did,” Carrie said. “And if she thought she could have been picked to go downtown as a model like you, she would have stayed up the other half, too.”

“I’ve got to get out of here!” Crystal looked at her watch.

“Crystal, if you meet Denzel Washington or somebody like that, you be sure to let me be the first to know about it. You hear me, girl?”

“I hear you, Carrie.”

“And don’t forget that Sister Curry wanted to see you.”

Loretta Barrett met Crystal at the front door of the church and walked with her to her car. Carol Brown, Crystal’s mother, was already there, talking with Mother Glover and nervously glancing toward the front entrance of the church.

“How did you like the services?” Crystal asked Loretta as they neared the agent’s car.

“They were lovely and too long,” Loretta said. “It’s the same in every church. They’re like football games, you can never tell when one of them ends and the next one begins.”

“Child, you sure are growing.” Mother Glover put her hand on Crystal’s shoulder. “How you get to be so big so soon?”

“I don’t know.” Crystal shrugged. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Loretta open the car door.

“How you doing in school?” Mother Glover tilted her head sideways and looked at Crystal. “You still getting them A’s and B’s?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Crystal said, knowing that her grades were mostly C’s.

“Well, you just keep on getting them,” Mother Glover said.

“Honey, I’m not going down to the studio with you today,” Carol Brown said to her daughter. “I’ve got a terrible headache. Why don’t you just go on with Loretta.”

“Mama, I didn’t know you had a headache,” Crystal said. “You take anything for it?”

“I’m going up and lie down until your father gets home,” Mrs. Brown said. “You’d better be getting along now.”

There was something in her mother’s eyes that bothered Crystal. If there had been more time, a few minutes even, she would have asked about it. Instead, she found herself smiling, kissing her mother quickly on the cheek, and sliding into the car next to Loretta.

Loretta pulled the steel-gray Chrysler away from the curb and slowly through the crowd coming from Crystal’s church, Victory Tabernacle, toward Marcy Avenue. There was a stickball game on Marcy, and Loretta had to wait until a skinny brown-skinned boy, his hair braided tightly against his head, went around the bases before she could continue.

“Did I tell you we almost didn’t do the commercial here because of Jim Aronson?”

“No.” Crystal looked at the dark-haired woman next to her. “I thought he was the one—”

“Who first wanted to do the commercial in a Black church.” Loretta started the car up again as the stickball play ended.

“Yo, lady!” A husky young man put his head near

Loretta's. "Who that fine-lookin' mama you got riding with you?"

"Crystal Brown. Remember the name," Loretta said as they eased along, "she's going to be a star!"

"She already a star!"

Loretta glanced at Crystal and smiled. "We were on our way over here, and there was a fight on the avenue to our right." Loretta pointed without turning her head from the teeming street before her.

"Nostrand," Crystal said. "There's always a fight on Nostrand."

"Jim took a look and wanted to leave," Loretta said. "He's paranoid about Black people. Don't tell him I said so, but he is."

"Hey, I'm Black," Crystal said.

"Honey, you're so beautiful and fresh that he doesn't see you as Black. Also your eyes are a little Asian. I think he sees you as more exotic than anything else," Loretta said.

"When we were shooting the fried chicken commercial, he told the photographer to stay away from you. You know, he wanted more ethnic types. But afterwards he came over to me and asked me to find out who you were."

Two young men in baggy jeans crossed in front of the car when they reached Fulton Street. They looked from Loretta to Crystal and back again before going on their way.

"Mama has a headache," Crystal said. "I guess she told you."

"Nope." Loretta patted Crystal on the leg. "I told her."

"Come again?"

"You've been working with me for almost six months," Loretta said. "And your mother has been coming to every

session. The problem with that is that it typecasts you as a child model. ‘Mamas’ always mean *children*. Pure and simple. I think it’s okay for your mother to come along some of the time, but not when you’re going to meet somebody like Jerry Goodwin.”

“What’s he like?”

“He’s good,” Loretta said. “He makes things happen. He can create. You take your average photographer—like the one we dealt with last week when you did the tank tops, remember him?”

“Right.” Crystal remembered the two hours of posing she did for a newspaper layout.

“All right, that photographer took good clean shots. They’ll be in focus, they’ll be bright, and you’ll look bright and good. But that’s all. Jerry’ll see other things.”

“Like what?” They were stopped at a light.

“What you really are, sensational,” Loretta said. “It’s that simple. He’ll look at you and say you’re sensational, and he’ll be able to do great things for you. You’ve got wonderful bones in your face and he’ll see that. But he doesn’t like any hassle. He’s enough in demand that if he even *thinks* there might be a hassle, he’ll walk away.”

“Mama wouldn’t hassle anybody,” Crystal said.

“I know that, and you know it,” Loretta said. “But Jerry doesn’t know it. There are mothers who do nothing but hassle.”

The ride across Brooklyn to Jerry Goodwin’s studio was like a tour to a different world for Crystal. From the all-Black section of Bedford-Stuyvesant to the mostly White area of Brooklyn Heights seemed more than the half hour it took Loretta to negotiate the distance.

The brownstone was unassuming in a row of other brownstones. The streets were a lot cleaner than they were in Crystal's neighborhood and the block less crowded.

"We're not being paid for today," Loretta said as they walked up the stairs. "Jerry wants to shoot some pictures with you and another girl. He's going on just what I've said. I haven't even let him see your portfolio, because I think it's too ordinary."

Loretta parked the car and they went to the basement entrance.

"Hi, Jerry." Loretta kissed the dark-haired man who opened the door. "I thought you gave up cigarettes."

"I can't give them up." Jerry Goodwin looked at the half-smoked cigarette in his hand, then ground it out in an ashtray. "I give up thinking about them, but I keep looking in my hands and there they are. It's all subconscious."

"Jerry, this is Crystal Brown." Loretta helped Crystal off with her coat. "Didn't I tell you she was sensational?"

"How old are you?" Jerry asked.

"Sixteen."

"Not bad." Jerry picked up a light meter and held it near Crystal's face. "One of your parents White?"

"Both of her parents are Black," Loretta said. "And very good-looking. Her father looks a little like a tan Will Smith. You know who I'm talking about?"

"Loretta, I haven't lived in the Stone Age all of my life," Jerry said. "I do know about Will Smith. I don't like the way he looks, but I know who he is."

"You put your own makeup on, honey?"

"Sometimes," Crystal said.

"Not usually," Loretta added.

“Just as well,” Jerry said, nodding his head. “You want to take off your clothes so I can take a look at you?” he asked.

Crystal looked at Loretta.

“You have something she can put on, Jerry?” Loretta said. “Crystal’s not comfortable nude.”

“Look, Rowena’s up in the studio,” Jerry said.

“Rowena?” Crystal felt suddenly awkward, ill at ease.

“She was the girl Kendall used to launch the *I Dare* cosmetics,” Loretta said. “She also did some work for Lanvin, didn’t she?”

“Among other things,” Jerry said. “I think she’s yesterday’s news, but I’m using her for some shots for the *Risa* account. Go up there and put one of the swimsuits on, and let’s see what you look like.”

“Jerry, she doesn’t have a swimsuit body yet,” Loretta said.

“She might for these shots,” Jerry said. “Is that your real name, Crystal?”

Crystal answered that it was.

Crystal was surprised at how large Jerry’s studio was. One side had two background rolls, one white and one black, suspended from the ceiling. On the other side there was a small jungle scene set up. She couldn’t tell if the trees were real or not, but it looked real enough.

“Hello?”

Crystal jumped as the voice startled her. She turned to see a young girl standing in a doorway leading out of the studio. She was wearing a bathrobe.

“Hello,” Crystal answered. “The photographer—Mr.

Goodwin—told me to come up here.”

“He gonna shoot you for *Risa*?”

“He just told me to put on a bathing suit,” Crystal said.

“He’s gonna shoot you for *Risa*,” the girl said. “What are you, a five?”

“Yes.”

“You Black or Chinese or something?”

“Black,” Crystal said.

“You’re really beautiful,” the girl said. “What’s your name?”

“Crystal Brown, and yours?”

“Rowena. I just use that one name. You work a lot? How old are you?”

“I’ve just been in modeling nine months,” Crystal said.

“All print work. And I’m sixteen.”

“Try this suit,” Rowena said, holding up a gold suit with black leopardlike markings. “It’s really sharp. I used to be sixteen; I mean fresh and everything. You have a nice face.”

“Thank you, so do you.”

“Jerry’s real good. He’s the best. Some guys are real creepy and they don’t make you look good, you know what I mean?”

“Yes,” Crystal said, not really sure what Rowena meant.

“Is there a dressing room?”

“You can dress here,” Rowena said. “Jerry wants me in this tiger-skin pattern, but I hate it because it makes my lines go the wrong way. You know what I mean?”

“I think so,” Crystal said. She was undressing as quickly as she could to change into the swimsuit before Jerry Goodwin came into the studio.

“I’ve got a real nice body,” Rowena said. “See?”

Crystal looked at Rowena, who stood with the bathrobe open. She was naked underneath, and she did have a nice body.

“You know how I got to be a model?” Rowena asked. “I was in the park with my kid brother, and Jerry came along and started taking pictures of me. I thought he was just trying to come on to me, you know what I mean? But he was kind of cute, so when he asked me my name and address I gave them to him.”

“And he called you for a job?”

“Almost four months later,” Rowena said. “A client came in and saw my picture on his wall. He said I was ‘different,’ and wanted to know if Jerry could get me. Jerry called up and was all cool and everything, but he really wanted me bad. He was flat-out broke. How’d you break in?”

“They were doing this commercial for fried chicken at my church,” Crystal said. “They just shot the choir singing, and then cut to a family eating chicken at home. Anyway, this guy saw me and he mentioned me to Loretta, she’s my agent.”

“You take any classes or anything?” Rowena asked, stepping into the swimsuit.

“No. Loretta contacted me through the pastor of the church. She had a photographer she knows take some pictures to see how I looked. The pictures were okay and she started finding jobs for me.”

“You’ve got a good face. You can probably look cool or hot or anything,” Rowena said. “I’ve only got one look. You know, real sexy, like this . . .”

Rowena closed her eyes halfway and parted her lips slightly.

“Verrry sexy!” Crystal said.

“Yeah, that’s cool,” Rowena said. “But it’s only one look. I can’t look like a girl scout or anything like that. My eyes are wrong. I’ve got thick eyelids and that makes my eyes look too small. When I first started, I was really hot. Everyone liked my eyes, and then some other girls came along with my look. But I was still hot. Now I’m not so hot, but Jerry thinks my look will come back. I’m only eighteen, so I got time.”

“I think you’re pretty,” Crystal said.

“I am,” Rowena said. “But your look has to be in or you’re dead. Jerry thinks I could go to Rome, where I’d be different and do a whole step number.”

“Step number?”

“The fashion shows.” Rowena smiled. She stepped backward three steps, then forward two steps and turned. “I did it once for a lady in Chicago. She kept giving me these steps to do, the kind they teach you in modeling school. You walk down this runway showing off the clothes. It’s okay, but Chicago was so hot it was unbelievable. Maybe I can go back to doing that again.”

“Jerry liked you,” Crystal said, adjusting the strap that came from the waist of the swimsuit. “Loretta, that’s my agent, says he’s really good.”

“That’s why I do anything he asks me,” Rowena said. She seemed, for a moment, as if she were going to smile, and then she glanced quickly away. “I mean, just anything he asks me.”

“Okay, girls, this is what I want.” Jerry Goodwin finished adjusting the lights. “I want you to look sexy in these swim-

suits. And sexy isn't wiggling your hips, Rowena. Sexy is what you feel and what you send out to the camera. I want you both to get into the set and crawl around like tigers—I guess it's tigresses.”

Crystal watched as Rowena slipped out of the bathrobe and went on to the set. She thought Rowena looked great in the tiger-print suit. Rowena went down on her knees and started walking on all fours as if she were an animal.

“That's it!” Jerry said. “You got it, Rowena!”

The camera clicked and whirred as Jerry started taking pictures of Rowena. He had a camera on a tripod, which he looked down into. There was another camera on the wall, and he had a long cable release for that one.

“You want me to get in, too?” Crystal asked.

“Well, you're not here to paint the studio,” Jerry said gruffly, without looking up.

Crystal got down on the floor of the set and started crawling around as she saw Rowena doing. Rowena was making noises, low noises, like an animal growling, and Crystal wondered if she had done this before.

“Get your rear end up, Crystal!” Jerry called. “Arch your back!”

She knew what Jerry meant, and how to do it. She had seen pictures of models doing that kind of thing, making themselves look as if their proportions were all wrong. Boys in school would look at magazines with the girls doing that and make comments. Crystal tried not to think about what she was doing so much. She imagined that she was an animal, slinking about in the jungle. The lights were hot, but not as hot as the photographer's lights when she modeled the tops.

“That’s it.” Jerry spoke as the cameras clicked. “Keep those backs arched.”

Rowena was going crazy. Her face looked angry. She got down really low, so that her chest was on the ground and her rear end high. She started toward Crystal as if she were going to attack her, and Crystal backed away. Then Crystal moved toward Rowena, and Rowena moved back but not much.

“Look toward me and freeze, Crystal,” Jerry said.

Crystal looked at him and smiled.

“Don’t smile! Tigers don’t smile!”

Crystal stopped smiling.

“Wake up, Rowena!”

Rowena put her hands on Crystal’s back and then her head. It was hard for Crystal to imagine just what Rowena was doing. She tried to imagine what the pictures would be like, how they would look on the proof sheets. Images of herself crawling around in the small set combined with images of herself in church that morning.

“Okay, Crystal, come out of the set and let me get some shots of Rowena.”

Crystal stood up and walked out of the set. She pulled the bathing suit down in front where it was binding into her hip. There was a wooden chair by the wall, and she sat on it and watched as Jerry kept photographing Rowena. Rowena rolled and slid across the plastic grass of the set. She growled at the camera and used her hands as if they were claws to swing at it. Crystal wondered if Jerry really wanted Rowena to do that. She wondered what he really thought of her.

When the session was over, Jerry turned off the lights that were on the jungle set. Crystal watched him go from

light to light, putting his hand in front of each bulb to see how warm it was after he had turned it off. He went back to the camera.

“Hold it!” Jerry held up his hand.

Crystal looked to where the camera was pointing and saw Rowena. She was in a robe and wiping the perspiration from her legs with the bathing suit she had been wearing.

Jerry didn’t say much to Crystal afterward, just that he would be in touch with Loretta.

By the time Crystal got home, she was exhausted. There was a note on the refrigerator from her mother, saying that she was going to the store for milk and would be right back. Crystal took a shower and put on a robe. Her mother was home when she came out.

“How did it go?” Carol Brown leaned against the kitchen sink as she talked to her daughter.

“Okay,” Crystal said. “Did Loretta tell you about the new foundation she wanted me to try?”

“I wanted to ask you about the session today.” Crystal’s mother had a cup of tea cradled in her hands. “I didn’t tell your father that you were going to a photographer’s studio by yourself.”

“I don’t think it was that big a deal,” Crystal said.

“Then why did Loretta ask me not to come?”

“She said that some mothers are—you know—”

“I don’t know,” Mrs. Brown said. “Some mothers are what?”

“I guess they want to tell people what to do or something,” Crystal said. “She also said that if your mother comes along, they think about you as if you’re still a kid or something.”