

HOTEL DETECTIVE

Written by

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EXT. THE FOX & GRAPES - DAY

A group of college kids linger near a bar. MARY, a stunning, conservatively dressed girl eyes VICTOR, one of the boys.

They try to encourage her to come to the bar with them. She shakes her head demurely and shuffles away.

EXT. STREET - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Mary walks down the street, a stack of books in her arms. She does her best to avoid eye contact with people around her.

A voice over starts up from inside the Fox & Grapes.

VICTOR (V.O.)  
Nah, man, Mary's alright.

COLLEGE GIRL (V.O.)  
Are you kidding? Are we talking  
about the same Mary?

VICTOR (V.O.)  
She's a little lonely, that's all.  
And shy.

Mary turns the corner.

EXT. MATINEE IDOL THEATER - DAY

Mary approaches a run down theater. The marquee is unlit. The worn poster reads "Hotel Detective" through smeared glass.

It's an old DETECTIVE MOVIE that Humphrey Bogart might have starred in. The poster is all shadows and harsh angles.

COLLEGE GIRL (V.O.)  
You just like her.

VICTOR (V.O.)  
Yeah I do! She's like some kind of  
movie genius.

Mary buys a ticket from ERROL, the half-asleep ticket taker.

COLLEGE GIRL (V.O.)  
You think so? Didn't she say she's  
going to see "Hotel Detective"?  
That's a real lousy piece of work,  
isn't it? The worst kind of pulp.

The sound of the Fox & Grapes fades as Mary enters the theater. Errol closes his eyes.

INT. MATINEE IDOL THEATER - MIDDLE ROW - DAY

The theater is quiet. Mary slips into her seat. There are a few people scattered around her, shaded in darkness.

CLICK. A beam of light bursts from the projector. Mary gets a good look at her fellow patrons.

ORSON, a handsome man, hunches low in his seat. When Mary looks at him he pulls up his hood.

OTTO, stares straight at the screen while he plays with a zippo lighter.

WARNER, a carefree man, props his feet on the seat in front of him and flips through his phone.

They all make Mary a little nervous. CLICK. HUM. The projector starts up. A black & white image flickers to life.

Mary relaxes into her seat and exhales a deep, calming breath. Her face is intent on -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- where the credits role as a pair of well dressed legs move down an empty hall past doors with pebbled glass.

The legs head for one door in particular. The high polished men's shoes CLICK on the tile floor.

As the legs get closer a name becomes legible, painted on the door in chipped paint - ZELDA BURGE, PRIVATE EYE.

The legs stop in front of it.

INT. PRIVATE EYE'S OFFICE - BLACK & WHITE - NIGHT

Someone sits in a huge leather chair, facing the window in a cramped, PI's office. Files, scotch, revolvers - the works.

A woman's voice starts to talk. In the theater Mary perks up. There's something familiar about the voice.

## WOMAN'S VOICE (V.O.)

It started out as my favorite kind of day - almost over, and the only slugs I had in me came out of a bottle of gin. Then this real doll walked into my office.

The office door opens. The MAN who belongs to the well dressed legs walks in, face obscured by a white fedora.

## MAN

You've got to help me. You've just got to. I'm in a real pickle, see.

CLICK. HISS. The person in the chair lights a cigarette. After a dramatic pause the chair spins around.

ZELDA BURGE, dressed like a 1940's gumshoe, stares up at the man in the white suit. Back in -

## THE THEATER - COLOR

- Mary GASPS. Zelda looks exactly like her. No. That's an understatement. Zelda IS her. Mary is up there on the screen.

She looks around in shock. No one else notices. She stands. She sits. She looks back up at the screen.

Zelda brings her feet up on the desk.

## ZELDA

Settle down, slick. I'm a detective. If you want help with pickles you should head down to Greene's deli.

## ZELDA (V.O.)

He was a cool drink of water, alright. And he didn't look too shabby in an expensive suit. Not too shabby at all.

## ZELDA

Take a seat, handsome. Let me get a good look at those baby browns.

The Man removes his hat. In -

## THE THEATER - COLOR

Mary GASPS again. The Man in White is VICTOR, all dolled up like a matinee idol of old. She leaps to her feet.

Orson shushes her. Otto scowls. Warner looks over his shoulder with a real nasty look on his face.

WARNER

Sit down, will you? I've never seen this before.

Mary looks from the screen to the audience members and back. She wants to leave but she can't - she's compelled to sit.

Back on -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- Zelda and Victor talk. Victor fidgets nervously.

VICTOR

The house dick down at The Long Day Motel gave me your card.

ZELDA

How is old Carol these days? She still get her nylons from the soda shoppe?

VICTOR

I - I don't know what you mean.

Zelda gets up and moves to a small bar in the corner.

ZELDA

Drink? Let me guess - Campari with a twist, right?

VICTOR

That's - yes. That will do.

ZELDA (V.O.)

He was hiding something, but it wasn't his shoe size. Old Carol never sent business my way. Not since that night at the Opera.

She fixes his drink and pours herself a gin. His hand shakes whens she hands him the glass.

ZELDA

Pony up, kiddo. I haven't seen someone with the shakes this bad since the war.

He sips his drink. His hand still shakes.

VICTOR

Oh. You were in the war?

ZELDA

Sure, I was a candy striper. Don't  
I look like a candy striper?

VICTOR

I never made it over.

He looks sadly at the ground. She lifts his chin.

ZELDA

Time to spill the beans, sweetie.  
I'm a gumshoe, you're a client. We  
don't need an encyclopedia to  
figure out what comes next.

Victor grips his glass and forces his hand to stop shaking.  
He tries to look confident. It almost works.

VICTOR

Have you ever heard of The Eve of  
Saint Venus? The painting?

Zelda freezes. She has. Before they can discuss it a GUNSHOT  
rings out. She quickly jumps in front of Victor.

A LOOMING SHADOW grows on her office door. She whips a  
revolver out of her shoulder holster. The SHADOW grows.

Zelda keeps the gun low as the door swings open. A limp body  
drops into the office. It's not what cast the shadow.

DIXON is. A sharp, handsome man in a suit, he pushes his way  
into the office. Zelda holsters her weapon.

DIXON

This rat tired to plug me, boss.

A GASP sounds from -

THE THEATER - COLOR

- and Mary quickly looks behind her. Orson is on his feet. He  
is Dixon, Dixon is him. He locks eyes with Mary.

Back on -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- Dixon close the door behind him. Zelda stares down at the unconscious THUG on the floor. So does Victor.

VICTOR

I know him! He works the bar at the Long Day Motel.

Zelda looks up at Dixon.

ZELDA

What did I tell you about playing well with others?

DIXON

That I wasn't good at it.

The screen FLICKERS as the scene FADES out.

TIME CUT TO:

THE THEATER - COLOR - LATER

Orson sits next to Mary. Their eyes are glued to the screen. He offers her some popcorn. She takes it.

They're completely engrossed in the movie. Up on -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- Zelda and Victor run down an alleyway. A GUNSHOT cracks the brick in front of them. She tosses Victor behind a dumpster.

A MENACING VOICE yells after them.

MENACING VOICE

You mugs are done for. You shouldn't ought to have made a play for The Big Man.

BANG BANG. Two more shots ring out. Victor PANICS.

VICTOR

I wish I'd never told anyone the painting was a fake. I wish I'd never come to this crummy town. I wish I'd never -

SLAP. Zelda slaps him across the face. He looks shocked.

ZELDA (V.O.)  
 The kid got a bum rap. It wasn't  
 his fault all his spoons were  
 silver.

Victor looks about ready to cry. She grabs his face and  
 plants a huge movie kiss on him. It calms him down.

BANG.

MENACING VOICE  
 The Big Man has your number, Burge.  
 You're not walking away from this  
 one, see? Not this time.

BANG.

ZELDA  
 (Under her breath)  
 That's six.

She peeks out from behind the dumpster. GRIDLOCK, a seedy  
 young hooligan, frantically reloads a pistol.

Down in -

THE THEATER - COLOR

Warner jumps to his feet.

WARNER  
 Holy shit!

He is Gridlock, Gridlock is him. Mary and Orson shush him.

WARNER  
 You shush! That's me up there. It's  
 Mental! I'm - turn around!

He waves frantically at -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- as Dixon comes up behind Gridlock. He gets him in a  
 headlock before the pistol is reloaded.

Zelda and Victor approach.

ZELDA (V.O.)  
 Gridlock wasn't a bad man. In fact,  
 he wasn't a man at all. Just a kid  
 stuck on a dead end street.

Zelda gets close to Gridlock's face.

ZELDA

All right, toots. Me and you are about to have a little chat about The Big Man.

DIXON

You want I should break his arms, boss? All they do is get him in trouble.

ZELDA (V.O.)

Dixon never liked Gridlock. Not since he stood him up on prom night.

ZELDA

Naw, it's his mouth that does that. Like it's about to now. Where's The Big Man holed up?

She belts him in the gut. He GRUNTS.

ZELDA

Come on, Gridlock. Pony up.

She belts him again. OOF.

GRIDLOCK

Alright, OK, take a break why don't you? I ate at a fancy restaurant tonight. Be a shame to waste all that dough.

Zelda motions at Dixon to let him go.

GRIDLOCK

You want The Big Man's number? I'll give you The Big Man's number.

He reaches into his pocket. Victor pushes himself between Gridlock and Zelda. Gridlock MOANS.

Back in -

THE THEATER - COLOR

- Warner YELPS as Gridlock slides off the end of a switchblade. He sits next to Mary and Orson.

He looks distraught. Mary pats his shoulder.

MARY

Sorry. I really thought you were going to make it.

ORSON

Yeah. Rough one, man.

WARNER

How is that fair? I only just popped up on screen.

Otto leans forward and talks in a harsh whisper.

OTTO

Will you three please be quiet? I'm trying to watch the film.

The three of them exchange sheepish glances and pipe down. Otto shoots them a glare then looks back up at -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- where Zelda slaps the knife out of Victor's hand.

ZELDA (V.O.)

It was the wrong move, and I couldn't figure why Victor made it.

ZELDA

Wrong move, Victor. Why'd you make it?

VICTOR

He was reaching for a weapon!

Gridlock groans on the floor. Victor cut him good.

GRIDLOCK

(Coughs)

Yeah, the only kind that counts. In... infor... information.

His fingers uncurl as he dies. Down in -

THE THEATER - COLOR

Mary and Orson applaud Warner.

ORSON

Great death scene, man.

MARY

Yeah, that was brilliant.

Otto SHUSHES them. Aggressively. They look back up at -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- where a bloody piece of paper is balled up in the palm of Gridlock's hand.

Dixon stoops down for it. It's an address.

DIXON

It's down by the docks, boss. You know. Where they keep all the boats.

ZELDA

Cute. Do I pay you to be cute? I don't think I pay you to be cute.

DIXON

You don't pay me at all. Do you?

ZELDA

You're a real laugh riot. Isn't he a real laugh riot?

Zelda looks over her shoulder for Victor. He's gone. The screen FLICKERS on Zelda's face as the scene changes.

The image FREEZES as the projector winds down. In -

THE THEATER - COLOR

- Mary, Orson, Warner, and Otto look back at the projection booth. The cone of light disappears. The theater goes dark.

ORSON

I think it's him, Victor. I think the whole thing's a set up.

WARNER

How would that make sense? He hired her, remember?

MARY

I think it started as a set up but he really fell for her. I think he went to the docks himself so she wouldn't be in danger.

WARNER  
That's insane.

ORSON  
These movies always have a double  
cross.

MARY  
Sometimes a triple cross.

WARNER  
In. Sane.

Mary smiles at her new friends. She's relaxed. Far different  
than the shy girl that avoided people on the street.

Otto clears his throat.

OTTO  
If any of you had read the book  
you'd know that Victor Marquee has  
never known love before. It's why  
he does everything he does. For  
love. You should always read the  
book, don't you know that? Before  
seeing any movie based on -

The PROJECTOR hums back to life. The image on the screen  
shuts Otto up.

It's him. His whole face FILLS -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- as THE BIG MAN sneers at someone in front of him. Otto is  
The Big Man, The Big Man is him.

The image moves.

THE BIG MAN  
You should always read the fine  
print, my boy. Don't you know that?

The camera angle changes. Victor stands with a revolver on  
The Big Man, who stands in front of a huge window.

Boats rock on the shore behind him. LIGHTENING FLASHES.

VICTOR  
Just give me the painting.

THE BIG MAN  
And why would I do that?

VICTOR  
Because I'll shoot.

Victor's not so sure. The gun shakes.

THE BIG MAN  
You wouldn't shoot the feathers off  
a duck, my dear boy.

Zelda and Dixon make a dramatic entrance from behind a  
curtain. She holds her gun on The Big Man.

ZELDA  
No. But I would.

ZELDA (V.O.)  
I always hated ducks.

THE BIG MAN  
Ah yes. The stunning hero with her  
dramatic rescue. I think not, my  
dear. I think not. Dixon. If you  
would be so kind.

Dixon smacks the gun out of Zelda's hand and bends her arm  
behind her back.

ZELDA (V.O.)  
And back stabbing S.O.B's.

Boo's and jeers sound from -

THE THEATER - COLOR

- as Mary, Orson, and Warner throw popcorn at the screen.  
Otto sits with them. He smiles. They whisper to each other.

OTTO  
I live for a good cinematic  
betrayal.

ORSON  
But he's such a good guy.

MARY  
He's got a good reason. Remember  
his wife?

WARNER  
Oh yeah. She's in the nut house.

MARY  
But she's not really crazy.

OTTO

Watch.

He points up at -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

ZELDA

You back stabbing S.O.B.

DIXON

Sorry, boss. The Big Man does pay me to be cute.

ZELDA

I told you I'd help out with Daisy.

Dixon looks sadly at the ground.

DIXON

Boss, you haven't had a case in months. This is how it has to be.

THE BIG MAN

Tut tut tut. I love it when old friends betray one another. Now, what say we put this matter to rest.

CLICK CLACK. Victor cocks the hammer of the gun.

VICTOR

Give me that painting!

He takes a step forward. Dixon relaxes his grip on Zelda's arm. She flips him to the ground.

Victor moves. The Big Man moves. Zelda moves. There's a scuffle. BANG. The Big Man staggers back.

BANG. Victor staggers back. BANG. A small pistol drops from The Big Man's hand as he stumbles toward the window.

CRASH. He goes through it. LIGHTENING FLASHES. THUD. Victor drops to the floor, bleeding from a gunshot wound.

Zelda drops to his side. There's a dead silence in -

THE THEATER - COLOR

- as Mary tears up.

MARY

It can't end like this. Victor,  
her...

Dixon takes her hand reassuringly. Warner shakes his head.  
Only Otto grins.

OTTO

Wait.

The image on -

THE SCREEN - BLACK & WHITE

- brightens as the scene changes. Victor stands at the end of  
a pier in the bright Black & White sun.

Zelda approaches with two ice cream cones. She's got on a  
pretty dress and a wide brimmed hat.

She hands one of the cones to Victor.

ZELDA (V.O.)

He told me his favorite flavor was  
vanilla. I wasn't surprised.

VICTOR

Thanks. How's Dixon?

ZELDA

Feeling pretty glum. It will take a  
while to spring Daisy from the  
sanitarium. This judge has to cross  
out what that judge signed. It will  
be fine in the end.

Victor stares out over the water.

VICTOR

It's a shame about the painting,  
though. A real damn shame.

ZELDA

Watch your mouth, kiddo, or I'll  
have to wash it out with soap.

He turns to face her.

VICTOR

Miss Burge - Zelda. I can't thank  
you enough.

(MORE)

I know things didn't go exactly as planned, but I put my life in your hands and you -

She grabs him.

ZELDA

You talk too damn much.

She bends him over in a real Nurse & Sailor times square kiss. It lasts a while until down in -

THE THEATER - COLOR

- the screen goes black. The words "The End" appear on screen. Mary, Orson, Warner, and Otto applaud.

EXT. MATINEE IDOL THEATER - DAY

Our movie fans file out into the light of a gorgeous sunny day. They blink until their eyes adjust.

Otto and Warner wave as they walk off, caught up in an excited, friendly argument about Hotel Detective.

MARY

It feels weird that it's still light out. Like nothing's changed.

ORSON

It has though, hasn't it?

She smiles and nods. They hug.

MARY

For the better, I hope.

He pulls away.

ORSON

See you next week?

She nods. They go their separate ways.

INT. THE FOX & GRAPES - BOOTH - LATER

Victor stands with his group of friends.

VICTOR

I'll get a round in. Any takers?

There are a few nods and "Same agains." He moves through the crowd to the -

BAR

- and leans in. Mary appears next to him.

MARY (V.O.)  
I think Orson was right. Things had  
changed for the better.

VICTOR  
(Surprised)  
Mary. You came.

MARY  
Hi. Can I buy you a drink?

He smiles. She smiles right back.

CUT TO BLACK: