

THE GENTLEMAN DETECTIVE

(a.k.a. A COUPLE OF DETECTIVES)

A Screenplay by

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FADE IN:

EXT. DEEP WOODS - NIGHT

It's a dark and stormy night. Angry black clouds blow across a blood-red moon, obliterating it. THUNDER RUMBLES MENACINGLY.

Trees bend and CREAK in the HOWLING WIND. Branches clutch at four shadowy figures tramping through the eerie woods.

A blinding LIGHTNING FLASH reveals they're children, dressed as pirates. Two of the three boys lug big shovels. On a mission.

Their leader, KATHY, stops at the edge of a small clearing.

She flips up her eye-patch for a better look.

The ominous Grissom House looms ahead. Amber light radiates from an upstairs window, like a lighthouse. Or a cyclops.

WIND in the eaves makes it sound like the house is BREATHING. SHUTTERS BANG. Spooky shadows dance on curtains. It's enough to make the bravest pirate shiver their timbers.

Kathy screws up her courage, then steps forward.

KATHY

C'mon. Are we pirates or chickens?

Chickens.

KATHY

Well I'm going. And I have the treasure map.

She bolts across the open yard like a cat on fire. The others stand frozen, fixated on the creepy house

A MOURNFUL WAIL from the upstairs window. An old woman's ghoulis face glares down at them through distorted glass.

They SCREAM, then tear after Kathy. A little pirate stampede.

Reaching the sanctuary of the woods, they GASP FOR BREATH.

Ahead, Kathy checks an old treasure map in a FLASH OF LIGHTNING. She looks up as another FLASH reveals a huge, gnarled oak tree.

KATHY

Harr, Maties, this be the tree!

She marches off five paces from the tree, draws her wooden sword and SCRAPES an X in the dirt.

KATHY
Here it be! Captain Grissom's
buried treasure!

They all look at one another with greedy anticipation.

The two boys with shovels jump forward and DIG FEVERISHLY.

A few feet down, a shovel THUMPS into wood. Thrilled, they quickly unearth a big, rotten chest.

TALL BOY PIRATE
Hope it's gold!

SHORT BOY PIRATE
Spanish doubloons, I'll bet!

Kathy grabs a shovel and PRIES the lid open. Her expression changes from greed to horror.

A child's skeleton stares at her with dark, hollow eyes.

Its jaw falls open.

Kathy lets rip a BLOODCURDLING SCREAM.

CUT TO:

INT. DARK OFFICE - NIGHT

Hunched at a laptop, ED types like a man possessed, a green glow from the screen turning his face macabre. A dignified, English editor immersed in his one guilty pleasure -- writing pulp.

He CHORTLES with wide-eyed glee.

OPENING CREDIT SEQUENCE

EXT. APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

Snow drifts down onto an art deco apartment building whose grandeur faded long ago. The CLACKING KEYS of a manual typewriter emanates from a second-story window.

INT. APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lit by a desk lamp in the otherwise dark room, the roguishly charming DAVID KNIGHT, 30s, sits at an old Underwood. Unshaven, wearing a ratty fedora and Dick Tracy pajamas, he TYPES AWAY.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DAVID'S OFFICE - NIGHT

In a film noir world, light spills onto the gray floor through the opaque glass door, casting keystone shadows of the lettering DAVID KNIGHT - DETECTIVE. A haunting 1940s torch song plays softly on a radio somewhere in the dimly-lit office.

DAVID (V.O.)

My name's Knight. David Knight.
I'm a private eye. There's only my
name on the door, but I've got a
partner that brings in a steady
stream of business. He goes by the
name of Human Nature. Sure, it's a
lousy job, but I'm good at it.
At least I was... until a few hours
ago.

The blades of a ceiling fan slice slowly through the heavy air. Below, David is slumped at his desk. A big gun rests by his hand, next to his fedora.

DAVID (V.O.)

I never gave much thought about how
I was going to die. All I knew for
sure was, men like me don't die in
their sleep.

Harsh light from a hooded desk lamp bleeds onto the worn face of a man who witnessed the dark side of humanity far too long.

DAVID (V.O.)

Somewhere in the distance, music
was playing. It wasn't harps, so I
guess I didn't make it to heaven.
No surprise. But it wasn't
accordions either, so it couldn't
be hell. And that's when it hit me
-- maybe I wasn't dead after all.

His eyes pop open. He sits up, holding his throbbing head.

DAVID (V.O.)

But it sure felt like it. I'd had
three cases so far this week. Two
of them were scotch, the other was
gin. So I figured this was just
one doozy of a hangover. But I
couldn't shake the cobwebs loose.
I needed some air.

Finding the strength to get up, he heads across the room.

DAVID (V.O.)
My office may have been on the
shabby side, but it had a great
view of the harbour.

He stares into the distance, as if looking out an open window.
Rising over traffic noise comes the forlorn moan of a fog horn.

DAVID (V.O.)
I must've been out cold for hours.
The fog had already rolled in.

He becomes aware of a tune from a honky-tonk piano.

DAVID (V.O.)
Across the street was a joint
called Harlan's. They serve meat,
and plenty of it. You don't order
a salad at Harlan's. Not even on a
dare.

He puts a pack of Luckies to his lips and draws one out.

DAVID (V.O.)
No, Harlan's was built for the kind
of guy who'd go to a slaughterhouse
with a loaf of bread just to sop up
the floor. And I was its best
customer.

He digs for a box of matches.

DAVID (V.O.)
But tonight the fog was so thick
you couldn't even see the neon cow.
Yeah, night falls hard at this end
of town. But I'd never seen it
this dark before.
(lights a match)
Then I realized why.

Squinting, he holds the match out in front of him.

DAVID (V.O.)
I was staring into the closet.

He shakes out the match and heads back to his desk.

DAVID (V.O.)
I was in rough shape, all right.
All I knew for sure was, I needed a
drink.

He floods his glass with three fingers of scotch and takes a slug. Through the bottom of the tumbler he sees a distorted image of a woman on his couch.

DAVID (V.O.)

Twelve years in this racket had taught me one thing -- just when you least expect it, there's always another bombshell waiting around the corner.

He steps closer. A sleeping FEMME FATALE stretches across the couch, half in shadow, half in the glow from the 1940s RCA radio. She seems to have forgotten her clothes.

DAVID (V.O.)

I had no idea what a naked woman was doing on my couch on a Tuesday, and for the moment I didn't care. She looked as smooth as a fresh-peeled egg.

The woman shifts into the light. A choice morsel, all right.

DAVID (V.O.)

It was dames like her who put the hard in hard-boiled detective.

Sparkling eyes peek out from a curtain of tumbled blonde hair.

FEMME FATALE

Well, hello there.

DAVID (V.O.)

She said, in a voice so husky it could've pulled a sled.

She gives him a smoldering look.

FEMME FATALE

I could use a stiff one.

DAVID (V.O.)

By the time I realized she meant a drink, she'd already taken mine.

As she takes a swig, he grabs his trench coat off the rack.

DAVID

Here, make yourself decent.

FEMME FATALE

This isn't gonna do it.

She climbs into it anyway. He takes a seat at his desk and fills a second tumbler.

DAVID (V.O.)
It was late, and I had a wife to go home to. Not mine, of course. Still, I didn't like to keep her waiting.

The femme fatale glides slowly, seductively onto his desk.

DAVID (V.O.)
But I knew I wasn't going anywhere until I found out what this dame wanted. I already knew what I wanted.
(out loud)
Fork over the lips, Baby.
And don't be stingy.

She leans in slowly for a seductive kiss. A moment straight out of a dream. He closes his eyes and puckers in anticipation...
The lights pop on behind him, revealing he's back in --

THE APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Glaring from the door is LAURA, late 20s. Ragged coat, unkempt hair, weary, she's barely recognizable as David's Femme Fatale.

LAURA
Hey! Paws off!

She marches past their big Christmas tree and dumps her shopping bags by the desk.

LAURA
If you're bored, take the dog for a walk.

Their scruffy terrier, WATSON, pokes his head up from the couch.

DAVID
It needs to be punchier.
My biggest case ever, and you're making it sound like your other books.

He glances at two framed book jackets on the wall, each marked "A Laura Wills Mystery." Both LAURA WRITES A WRONG and DEATH HAS NO ALIBI, BUT I HAVE THREE have a colorful illustration of a beautiful Laura, hair up, holding a gold magnifying glass.

LAURA

It's a novel based on a true story,
which means I --
What's wrong with my books?

DAVID

They're fine, I guess, but you
can't glamorize a real murder.

LAURA

Sure I can. I have a license.

DAVID

Artistic license. I get that.

She rolls his chair back from the desk.

LAURA

The only mystery you should be
working on now is over there.

Reluctant, David grabs an ornately-carved cane topped with a gold lion's head, and limps to their bar. He stares down at the half-done jigsaw puzzle of a green vintage roadster.

DAVID

Can't finish a puzzle if there's
pieces missing.

She rolls her eyes and sits at the desk. David steps to the TV and selects a Robert Mitchum film from his impressive collection of detective classics. He pops it in and flops on the couch, next to Watson.

LAURA

Why don't you go outside and get
some exercise?

DAVID

Well I tried jogging yesterday, but
I kept spilling my drink.

Not amused, Laura gives his pages a quick skim. Beside her, a corkboard overflows with copies of police and autopsy reports...

...a newspaper clipping with a photo of the four children from the opening, posing with a skeleton in a rotted wood chest...

...a photo of her at age fifteen with another girl. And more.

LAURA

Naked on the couch? That is not
how we met.

DAVID

You've gotta sex it up. You're not
writing it for the spinsters
mystery of the month club.

She yanks his last page from the Underwood and tosses them all in the waste basket. She then feeds in a fresh sheet. Discouraged, David turns back to his movie.

Distracted by the blaring TV, she slowly starts typing. The sound of STRIKING KEYS becomes HIGH HEELS ECHOING SHARPLY...

DISSOLVE TO:

A HALLWAY - NIGHT

...as a woman strides down a dark hall. Ahead, rich orchestral music drifts out through a half-open door.

(Note: While David's versions are always film noir, and Ed's are 1940s pulp, Laura's versions emulate the glamorous Hollywood films of the 1950s, with rich Technicolor, soft focus, Max Factor makeup, Christian Dior fashion and a lush musical score.)

DAVID'S OFFICE

The door is pushed open, and light breaks across a fabulous vermillion gown and glittering diamonds. The woman steps in. It's Laura, looking like her alter-ego on the book jackets. A stunning combo of Grace Kelly beauty and Lauren Bacall attitude.

Drawn in by the music from a glowing 1950s radio, she wanders the room like a kid in a candy store, taking it all in -- colored pins in a city map... WANTED posters... a gun holster draped on the chair... a tumbler of ice on the desk...

...and a gleaming .38 Special resting next to a tiny oil can and a barrel brush. Entranced, she puts down her purse and reaches for the gun. A posh English voice from the door stops her.

DAVID (V.O.)

I wouldn't. It's loaded.

She turns with anticipation... but her face falls.

David watches from the door in a stained shirt, mussed hair and five o'clock shadow. As an added touch, he's also inebriated.

LAURA

...Said the kettle.

He gives a snort and heads for his desk.

LAURA

Are you a real detective?

DAVID

That's what it says on the door.

LAURA

There's a door down the hall that says "Ladies", but the woman inside wasn't.

DAVID

My secretary. She's new.

LAURA

She didn't look new.

Amused, he pulls his license from a drawer and tosses it on his desk, then pours himself a drink.

She glides over and leans across the desk to check the license, letting her diamond necklace drop into the lamp-light. The sparkling ice entrances David... until his focus moves to her cleavage. Seeing this, she quickly escapes with his drink.

DAVID

Can I help you?

LAURA

I don't know. The bartender at Harlan's seemed to think so. He said you were the best.

DAVID

Was he drunk?

LAURA

What, you're no good?

DAVID

I'm the best you can afford.

She gets in a huff.

DAVID

Don't be offended. I like the high society look. And you almost pull it off.

LAURA

Well I guess you're not much of a detective after all.

DAVID

(rising to the challenge)
Really? Your gown may be Dior,
but the fit is a little off.
True, you may have put on a few
pounds since you bought it --

Laura fires a sharp look.

DAVID

-- but I'm betting you bought it
second hand. And the purse doesn't
quite match. Shall I go on?

LAURA

Could anyone stop you?

Feigning disinterest, she scans a framed clipping on the wall.

DAVID

When you leaned closer a moment
ago, you wanted me to notice your
diamonds. I was more interested in
your, ah, "gems"...

(glances at her breasts)

Can't tell about the gems, yet, but
the diamonds look real enough.

He gives a wink, shocking her with his impertinence.

DAVID

You borrowed them just for today.
Maybe you think I'm impressed by
money. Maybe I am.

LAURA

Then this ought to buy your
services.

She digs a thick envelope out of her purse and tosses it on the
desk. Peering in at the wad of bills, he gives a slow whistle.

DAVID

Who is it you want me to kill?

LAURA

Oh, I don't want him killed.
I want him found.

DAVID

All this dough just to find
someone? What's the catch?