

Steam

By

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Written for the Little Hollywood Screenplay Contest

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INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

A clean but quite spartan turn-of-the-century police office.

SHERIFF CONNOLLY, 35, tough-looking with a smart brow, wearing his sheriff's badge, gazes out the window.

Deputy FRED MARSH, 30, with an eye patch and a quick smile, sits back in a chair, his feet propped up on a table.

FRED

Nice day out. There ain't - *isn't*
- a cloud in the sky.

CONNOLLY

Just that one.

In the distance, plumes of steam rise from a mountain peak.

CONNOLLY (CONT'D)

Volcano's letting off steam again.

FRED

That's a bad omen. All that fire
inside there, waiting to explode
out. Trouble's coming.

An engine ROARS outside, and Connolly moves to the door. Fred tries to stand, but tips over backward with a crash. Connolly laughs as a car goes by on the gravel road outside.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY

A SMALL CROWD gathers around the 1912 Model T Delivery Car. Connolly and Fred approach, passing the town's dry fountain.

DR. LINDSEY HYMAN, 30, beautiful, with bright blue eyes and sandy hair, wearing a motoring coat and driving goggles, steps down from the drivers' seat.

Hyman smiles confidently as she removes her goggles.

CONNOLLY

Welcome home, Doctor! Replaced the
old mare and buggy?

HYMAN

Isn't it something? All brass.

She opens the hood.

(CONTINUED)

HYMAN (CONT'D)

Bought it with my last dime. It's fast, but it does have a problem...

Wisps of steam escape the radiator. With a handkerchief, Hyman loosens the cap. Steam shoots up - like the volcano.

HYMAN (CONT'D)

It drinks more water than a fish.

Connolly has a canteen, which he hands her.

HYMAN (CONT'D)

Thanks - I had to stop at every town on the way to fill it up.

CONNOLLY

That's an awfully big car to haul a batch of cough syrup.

HYMAN

It's full of new medical supplies - modern medicine takes up space!

She turns to the crowd.

HYMAN (CONT'D)

I got a wire before I left about a demonstration of an X-Ray machine. It takes a picture of what's inside you - imagine, a picture of the problems under the surface...

The crowd is awestruck, including a TEENAGER, 16.

INT. UPSTAIRS BEDROOM - NIGHT

The Teenager and his BROTHER, 12, sit in bed. The light bulb next to them flickers, and then turns off.

TEENAGER

She sure was pretty.

BROTHER

You're in love with Dr. Hyman!

The light comes back on.

TEENAGER

No, you nitwit - I meant the car!

He goes to the window, but the light in the room reflects in the glass, and he can't see the road below the home.

(CONTINUED)

TEENAGER (CONT'D)

Someday I'm going to drive a car.

The light flickers off, making the road visible. A FIGURE, in tatters, lies in the middle of the road.

The Boy jumps. The light flickers on and off. When it's off, he can see the figure dragging itself on the gravel road, trailing blood.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

The Teenager SCREAMS from inside his home.

The figure is our VICTIM, 25, a mess of blood and mud. She uses her finger to write, in blood, something on the ledge of the dry fountain. Then she collapses, dead.

LATER

Connolly, Fred, and a FEW MEN squat, examining the corpse.

MAN

Who is she? Not from Bedrock.

She has written "BLACK." A bloody hand print is next to it. Connolly strokes the back of his neck, thinking.

FRED

"Black." The hell does that mean?

CONNOLLY

Trying to tell us who killed her.

FRED

A negro? Jackson's farm is up the road - but he wouldn't harm a fly.

CONNOLLY

And she came from the other way.

They think for a moment.

CONNOLLY (CONT'D)

Better get this body to Dr. Hyman.
I'll go over to the Jackson place.

Fred nods and he and one of the men lift the corpse.

INT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

HYMAN

I pronounce her dead, 10:30 PM.

The body lies on a stretcher on a small table. Fred paces. Hyman looks distressed.

The office is connected to Hyman's home - the kitchen is through an open door to one side. The room contains a large desk and a wall lined with bookshelves.

HYMAN

Cause of death... struck with a blunt object around her head.

FRED

That ain't - *isn't* - all. Look.

He moves her hair aside, revealing burn marks on her wounds.

FRED (CONT'D)

What's all that burning? And look.

He rolls the corpse, showing a stab wound in her lower back.

Connolly walks in without knocking, startling Hyman.

CONNOLLY

Just came from Jackson's place. Whole family was asleep. They don't have electricity wired in - been asleep since sundown.

HYMAN

You can't trust his kind, Sheriff.

FRED

We got wounds and burns on the head, and shallow stab in the back.

Connolly rubs the back of his neck.

CONNOLLY

Carriage is around back - let's get this body to the undertaker.

They take the body through the kitchen, where Hyman's steak dinner is sitting half-eaten on the table.

FRED

You'll have a cold supper tonigh-

(CONTINUED)

In the middle of the sentence, Fred slips and falls to the ground, awkwardly dropping the stretcher.

CONNOLLY
Dammit, Fred!

Fred pulls a face, gets up, and they continue.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

The men drive a two-horse carriage along the moonlit road.

FRED
Girl appears out of thin air,
bleeds all over town, dies...

CONNOLLY
Remember this town's last killing?

FRED
I wasn't going to bring that up.

CONNOLLY
I know I made a mistake on that
one. But I *do* have a suspect.

Fred's jaw drops.

INT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

The men carry the body through the kitchen. Fred falls.

CONNOLLY (V.O.)
Why did you slip in the kitchen?

FRED (V.O.)
I don't know, I'm always falling.

We look more closely and notice mud on the floor under Fred.

CONNOLLY (V.O.)
But this time you slipped on fresh
mud. It came from the Doc's shoes.

Dr. Hyman's shoes are caked with mud.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

FRED
No rain for weeks.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOLLY

But it *is* muddy in the woods, by
the river.

FRED

And that *is* the direction that girl
come from. But that ain't - *isn't*
- enough, Blain. Just like before.

Connolly is quiet for a beat.

INT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

The men carry the corpse through the kitchen.

CONNOLLY (V.O.)

Did you notice her supper?

FRED (V.O.)

Yes, I said it'd be cold.

We see the steak dinner, half-eaten.

CONNOLLY (V.O.)

Right. She had carved a bite or
two out of the steak.

FRED (V.O.)

So?

CONNOLLY (V.O.)

There was no knife at that table.

He's right.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - NIGHT

For a moment, we hear only the horseshoes on the road.

FRED

That stab wound in the body...

CONNOLLY

It's no proof without the knife.

FRED

We gotta go arrest her. Tonight.

CONNOLLY

Can't do it, Fred.

(CONTINUED)

FRED

Blain, she's got a car. She can be to Mexico tomorrow.

CONNOLLY

Yes - but I can't do that again.

Fred stops the horses.

FRED

You're much smarter'n me, Blain. I didn't see none of them clues.

A beat.

FRED (CONT'D)

But I know something that you don't know: You *ain't* your mistakes. That don't define who you are. And you *ought* to let that go. If you think it's her, let's go get her.

Silence.

FRED (CONT'D)

But it's your choice... Sheriff.

The carriage starts, and Connolly rubs the back of his neck.

INT. COURT HOUSE - DAY

Connolly watches TWO OFFICERS walk Hyman to a door.

HYMAN

You're making a big mistake, Sheriff! I didn't do it!

As she leaves, the JUDGE, 50, heavy and sneering, comes in.

CONNOLLY

I know, Judge, but she's got a car.

The Judge tries not to raise his voice at Connolly.

JUDGE

Enough, Blain. I *can't believe* you did this again, you damned fool.

The Judge turns away.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

You've got 24 hours. But you remember that from the last time

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JUDGE (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 you arrested someone too early,
 without proof, don't you? Surely
 you remember when you let a killer
 walk away because...

The Judge bites his tongue. Connolly is respectful.

JUDGE (CONT'D)
 24 hours. If she did it, you
 better prove it, and fast.

EXT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Connolly and Fred silently search the wooded area next to the river, with Hyman's home and office in the background.

INT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Fred, in the kitchen, opens cabinets and empties drawers.

Connolly, in the office, looks at the contents of Hyman's desk: pencils, medical charts. He opens a drawer at the bottom of the desk and pulls out a small diary. He reads:

CONNOLLY
*...treated a young child for
 influenza... exterminated leaf-nose
 bats under eaves and Serbian rats
 under barn...*

Connolly perks up and reads louder so Fred can hear.

CONNOLLY (CONT'D)
 Here we are! *...back from Los
 Angeles. Stopped several times for
 water. Sheriff inquired about
 cargo but did not check the car...*

FRED
 The car!

INT./EXT. CAR - DAY

They walk toward the car, which is parked next to the barn.

FRED
 Boy, if I had a car, I wouldn't
 keep it outside - I'd put 'er in...

Connolly gives Fred a look.

(CONTINUED)

FRED (CONT'D)
Hey... did I just deduce
somethin'? I'll look in that barn.

Fred enters the barn as Connolly looks in the car. It is completely empty. Connolly sighs and shakes his head.

INT. BARN - DAY

Connolly enters and Fred stands in the middle of a completely clean, empty barn.

FRED
Awfully strange - I don't know,
there ain't - mercy, why can't I
remember to say it right? There
isn't nothing to look at in here.

CONNOLLY
Car's empty, too. Makes me think,
though... how did that dead girl
get out to Bedrock? She must have
been hidden in the back of the car.

FRED
Unless they sent her parcel post!

Connolly chuckles, then reflects on the idea.

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

The POST MASTER, 35, balding, speaks with an Irish accent.

CONNOLLY
Did she receive any strange parcels
or letters you can remember?

POST MASTER
Don't think so. Oh! One thing...

A hopeful look crosses Connolly's face.

POST MASTER (CONT'D)
She used to get quite a lot of
messages through the telegraph.
They stopped coming, maybe six
months ago. That was a bit queer.

CONNOLLY
Telegrams? What did they say?

(CONTINUED)

POST MASTER
Medical stuff, mostly. I didn't
understand any of it, honestly.

CONNOLLY
And they just stopped coming...

Connolly rubs the back of his neck.

EXT. MAIN STREET - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Hyman speaks to the crowd around her car.

CONNOLLY (V.O.)
She said she got a telegram...

HYMAN
I got a wire before I left about a
demonstration ...

INT. POST OFFICE - DAY

CONNOLLY
Can you show me the telegraph wire?

The Post Master nods and takes him outside.

EXT. POST OFFICE - DAY

They examine the wires coming into the building.

POST MASTER
This one is electricity. This one
is the telegraph...

The cable has been spliced and heads off into the woods.

EXT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Connolly walks under the wires going to the house. In the distance, Fred is searching the woods again. Connolly finds the spot where the wires enter the attic. He goes inside.

INT. ATTIC - DAY

Connolly has an excited look on his face.

CONNOLLY
Fred! Come and see this!

The attic is bare, except for a small electric telegraph.

LATER

(CONTINUED)

Sunset. The men sit on the floor next to the telegraph set.

FRED

What are we gonna do, just wait?

Connolly rubs the back of his neck.

CONNOLLY

Can't wait too long. But if a message does come, we can't miss it. I'll stay here tonight. You head on home, get some rest.

Fred nods, and leaves.

Connolly looks out a small attic window. Fred, carrying a kerosene lamp, starts back toward town, but stops. Then he heads out toward the woods and starts searching again. He slips and falls, and then gets up and continues.

CONNOLLY

I've got the best damned deputy.

LATER

The telegraph bell rings. Connolly jumps awake - he had been sleeping on the floor in the attic.

The telegraph ticks out morse code. Connolly scrambles to turn on the kerosene lamp. He has a pencil and paper ready, but as he starts to write, the lead breaks.

CONNOLLY

Damn!

The Morse code continues as he whips out a pocket knife and sharpens the pencil. Then he scribes the letters coming in:

"AUSROTTUNG_DER_SERBEN"

The telegraph stops. Connolly checks his watch. Midnight.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Connolly stands by the window. Fred is at the table, feet up, looking at the paper with the telegraph message on it.

CONNOLLY

Maybe I got it wrong. It was late.

Fred reads it aloud, the best he can.

(CONTINUED)

FRED
A US rotten deer serbien.

CONNOLLY
Deer serbien... serben.
Serbian? Where did we hear that
word?

FRED
What word?

INT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

Connolly reads Hyman's diary.

CONNOLLY (CONT'D)
*...exterminated leaf-nose bats
under eaves and Serbian rats under
barn...*

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

CONNOLLY
Serbian rats?

FRED
No such thing. What is "Serbian?"

CONNOLLY
People from Serbia are Serbian.

They head toward the door.

FRED
What in the hell's Serbians got to
do with our dead girl?

CONNOLLY
Don't know. But I bet we'll find
out if we look under that barn.

INT. BARN - DAY

Connolly checks his watch.

CONNOLLY
She's loose any time now.

FRED
Look here!

Fred has found a wire, painted to blend in with the post it
is attached to. The wire leads down through the barn floor.

(CONTINUED)

CONNOLLY

She's got a chamber down
there. Must be a hidden door.

Connolly searches a dark corner of the barn for the door.

A loud WHACK makes him jump. He whips around to see... Fred taking an axe to the floor. He's relieved. Fred axes the floor again, and it busts open easily.

FRED (CONT'D)

I wouldn't keep my car in here
neither - false floor!

They drop down through the hole.

INT. LAIR - DAY

The lair is a mess of wires and electrodes. Most of them attach to a blood-stained chair, which is equipped with restraints. A stack of papers sits on a small table.

FRED

Looks like she's using electric
wires to torture people!

Connolly picks up the papers and reads.

CONNOLLY

Electric shock experiment.

He shudders and looks at the next page.

CONNOLLY (CONT'D)

*Breaking the mind through electric
pulses. Study by Brunhilde Meier
under the name Lindsey Hyman.*

The men exchange an incredulous look.

CONNOLLY (CONT'D)

*Information taken from the minds of
Serbian Black Hand Terrorists:
Assassination targets are Oskar
Potiorek or Franz Ferdinand.*

FRED

What the hell's it mean?

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT - (FLASHBACK)

The word in blood, "Black," and the handprint.

CONNOLLY (V.O.)
 Fred... Black Hand. The girl
 wasn't telling us who the killer
 was, she was telling us who *she*
 was! Serbian Black Hand Terrorist!

INT. LAIR - DAY

FRED
 How much time we got?

Above, the ROAR of the car starting.

CONNOLLY
 Sounds like none. Let's go.

EXT. HYMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

Hyman flees the scene in her car. Connolly mounts his horse and follows. Fred slips and falls coming out of the barn.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

The car is too fast. It speeds farther away until it's out of sight... then out of earshot. Connolly rides on.

LATER

Connolly comes down the road, his horse slowly trotting. Ahead of him, off the road, is the car - broken down.

CONNOLLY
 What's wrong, Doc? *Run out of
 steam?*

A gunshot rings out, and Connolly jumps from his horse, which runs off. He takes out his gun.

CONNOLLY
 Come on out!

Hyman blindly points her gun around the side of the car, and fires. Connolly flinches but walks forward, determined.

CONNOLLY
 I've got some new charges to arrest
 you on, *Brunhilde*.

(CONTINUED)

HYMAN

I did nothing wrong! They were
terrorists! Assassins! The shocks
worked! I got their plans!

Hyman's gun pokes out again. Connolly fires a warning shot,
and she pulls back. She begins to scream her words.

HYMAN (CONT'D)

I am a German citizen! I demand
passage into Mexico!

Connolly deftly circles the car, coming out behind her, and
puts his gun to her head.

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Connolly stands by the window, alone. Eventually, Fred
enters, carrying a paper bag. Connolly turns to him.

FRED

I know it don't do no good now...

He opens the bag and takes out a knife.

FRED (CONT'D)

I couldn't let it go! A month
she's been in prison, and I been
searchin' them woods every night.

Connolly laughs. Fred sits, sighs, and puts his feet up.

FRED (CONT'D)

What's the world comin' to,
Blain? Germany sendin' spies to
our little town? Who are we
fighting next - Mexico? Serbia?
Austria? I can't keep it straight!

Connolly shakes his head and turns back to the window.

CONNOLLY

That volcano's letting off
steam. I guess she's gonna blow
one of these days.

EXT. VOLCANO - DAY

The volcano steams.

THE END.