

THE OATH

A Short Script  
Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CHAMPION COMICS - EVENING

We move in on the store, tucked away inside the downtown area of a large, metropolitan city.

INT. CHAMPION COMICS - CONTINUOUS

Behind the counter, the shlubbish owner MARCEL (36), prepares to close up the shop.

He looks up at the clock -- 8:02

Marcel takes the proceeds out of the register. Puts them in a bank deposit bag. Opens the safe under the counter. Puts the deposit bag inside. Closes the safe. Spins the dial.

Marcel pops his head up, just as a woman, ROSE CHANCE (60), enters the store, carrying a small cardboard box.

ROSE

Excuse me, but I was wondering if you might be able to take a look at these for me?

MARCEL

Oh! I'm sorry, I must have forgot to lock the door. You see, I'm already closed.

ROSE

(dismayed, but polite)  
I understand.

Rose turns, and walks toward the exit.

Marcel eyes the box. Curiosity takes over.

MARCEL

I suppose I could take a quick look.

Rose turns, smiles.

ROSE

Would you?

MARCEL

Sure. No problem.

She places the box on the counter.

ROSE

Thank you. I've just been so overwhelmed recently. You see, my father just passed --

MARCEL

I'm sorry.

ROSE

It was expected. He was doing poorly for so long. Still, getting his affairs in order has been something else altogether.

Rose opens the lid to the box.

ROSE

You see, my father thought of himself as quite the collector. Most people would have called him a hoarder, but he preferred the title of collector.

Marcel looks inside the box. It contains about sixty books. All piled in a stack. They're worn, tattered, and judging by Marcel's first appraisal, nothing to write home about.

Rose notices Marcel's immediate dissatisfaction; sighs, and walks away from the counter to peruse the rest of the store.

ROSE

Although passionate, I'm afraid he didn't have a clue what he was doing. Just yesterday, I found a fifty dollar "Royal Albert" Christmas plate sandwiched between some old Tupperware. Can you imagine?

Marcel lifts the stack of comics out of the box onto the counter. Begins examining them. They're mostly western and crime books from the fifties; all in fairly rotten condition.

MARCEL

I'm afraid I don't see much here. For golden age, these are in terrible shape. Only a few books in this kind of condition are worth very much, and not in this genre.

ROSE

I expected that. I've inherited a house full of clutter, but it all still needs to be sorted. I feel confident with most of it, but I'm afraid that kiddie books are little out of my purview.

Marcel stops his rifling; mutters.

MARCEL  
Kiddie books.

Rose continues to wander about the shop.

ROSE  
I'm having a big yard sale on  
Sunday. Hopefully, I'll be able to  
get rid of the majority of it then.

Rose looks up at the wall of comics. Bagged and tacked.

She spots one priced at two hundred dollars.

ROSE  
My, my, I've heard some of these  
books can fetch quite a price.

Marcel, discouraged, nears the bottom of the stack.

MARCEL  
Those are few and far between.

And then it happens. Marcel lifts up an old western comic,  
and there, tucked in between the pages, lies a treasure. It  
falls from its hiding place, and lands on the counter. An  
original 1939 copy of "Detective Comics" #27.

Marcel freezes, not believing his own eyes.

England's Crown Jewels. The Mona Lisa. A Guttenberg bible.  
The necklace the old lady from Titanic wore. This beats them  
all hands down. The very first appearance of the Caped  
Crusader, the Dark Knight, the one and only... BATMAN.

And Marcel is holding the book in his very hands.

ACROSS THE STORE

Rose admires a heroic statuette. Inquires...

WOMAN  
So, see anything of value yet?

WE FREEZE ON MARCEL

CUT TO:

AN OVERHEAD SHOT OF THE COUNTER

A STACK OF COMICS, (not Rose's pile)

A current comic rests on the top -- WE SPEED CUT THROUGH THE  
STACK - Going back in time. One by one, each top comic  
disappears, replaced by an older one. Eventually ending with  
a comic book circa mid-nineties.

TWO HANDS

Push the comic across the counter to an awaiting CHILD (10).

BEHIND THE COUNTER

MARCEL (16). Twenty years earlier. Still chubby and nerdy, but filled with a wide-eyed optimism.

INT. CHAMPION COMICS - DAY - (**FLASHBACK**)

MARCEL

Here you go. Don't flip to the end, there's a twist.

The child nods, and exits the store.

From behind a curtain, the store owner NATHAN GOODMAN (55), white hair and cane, appears from the back area.

NATHAN

You're doing very good, Marcel. I see a lot of potential in you.

MARCEL

Thanks, Mr. Goodman.

NATHAN

If we're going to be working together, you should call me, Nathan. Now, come with me.

Nathan pulls Marcel into the

BACK AREA

Looks at Marcel with purpose.

NATHAN

You know, when I put that sign up, a lot of kids came in to ask if they could work here.

MARCEL

Yes, sir. Nathan.

NATHAN

I picked you for a reason. Do you know what that was?

Marcel shakes his head.

NATHAN

It's because I can see character in people. Young, old, it doesn't matter.

(MORE)

I believe it's something you're born with. And I think you have that quality.

MARCEL

You do?

NATHAN

Yes, I do. Who knows, one day you might even take over this place.

The young Marcel's eyes light up.

NATHAN

But if you want to succeed here, it's important you understand the values we embody. And for that, you have to take the oath.

MARCEL

The oath.

NATHAN

Uh huh. Now, lift up your hand.

Marcel lifts up his left hand.

NATHAN

The other one.

Marcel switches hands.

NATHAN

Repeat after me. I, your name, as a trusted representative of Champion Comics.

Marcel recites the oath back with reverence, like the Pledge of Allegiance on the fourth of July.

MARCEL

I, Marcel Stewart, as a trusted representative of Champion Comics.

NATHAN

Do solemnly vow to uphold the dignity and integrity in which our customers expect.

MARCEL

Do solemnly vow to uphold the dignity and integrity in which our customers expect.

NATHAN

So help me god.

MARCEL  
So help me god.

SMASH CUT TO:

**PRESENT**

Marcel stares at the prized issue. Rose's question echoes in his head "...*anything of value, ...value, ...value?*" A sliver of time, and Marcel's entire value system is put to the test.

Marcel makes his choice. Places the stack of books on top of the rare comic. Turns to Rose, shakes his head.

MARCEL  
I'm, sorry, but I'm afraid I don't.

Marcel puts the stack of comics back inside the box.

Rose approaches the counter. Puts the lid back on.

ROSE  
Well, can't blame me for trying.  
(picks up the box)  
Thanks so much for your time.

Rose steps away. Walks toward the exit.

MARCEL  
Wait. I suppose I could take it off  
your hands for you.

Rose stops, and turns.

ROSE  
You would, really?

MARCEL  
What would you say to... forty  
dollars?

ROSE  
(delighted)  
Deal.

Rose puts the box back on the counter.

Marcel remembers the empty register. Reaches inside his wallet. Thumbs through his bills.

MARCEL  
Thirty-five, thirty-six, thirty-  
seven...  
(empties his wallet)  
Ummm...

ROSE  
That will be fine. After all,  
you're the one doing me the favor.

Marcel smiles thanks. Sheepishly hands the cash to Rose.

MARCEL  
Here you go.

Rose takes the money, and exits.

Marcel races to the door. Turns the lock. Braces himself  
against the door. Breathes a sigh of relief.

INT. BACK AREA - MOMENTS LATER

Marcel turns on a desk lamp. Places the comic under it, and  
examines the book like a surgeon would an x-ray.

FLASH CUT TO:

A JAPANESE GIRL (19)

Ebullient. Surrounded by a white, digital space. Dressed in  
chic white leather. She addresses the camera.

JAPANESE GIRL  
*Yaho!* In 1970, Jerry Bails and Bob  
Overstreet created the first  
official system of grading comics.  
Over the years the process has been  
refined to a ten-point scale,  
breaking down into sub-categories.

A color coded digital readout of the scale appears next to  
her. She turns to the readout --

JAPANESE GIRL  
These include --  
(rapid succession)  
Gem, near mint, mint, very fine,  
fine, very good, good, fair-good,  
fair, and poor.

As she speaks, each category pops in vibrant colors.

JAPANESE GIRL  
The grade is determined by the  
amount of flaws or blemishes each  
copy is accorded.

A large, digital image of the same issue Marcel has just  
acquired appears next to her.

JAPANESE GIRL  
These can include --  
(rapid)

Bends, tears, creases, dents,  
 folding, foxing, scuffing, soiling,  
 spine breaks, spine rolls, spine  
 splits, rusted staples, printing  
 errors or defects, and absolutely,  
 under no circumstances restoration.

As she speaks, every blemish pops up on the comic book.

JAPANESE GIRL

Using this format. I give this copy  
 of Detective Comics #27.

(a wink, and a thumbs up)

A 4.5 grade.

FLASH CUT TO:

THE BACK AREA

Where Marcel holds the sacred text.

He hops up from his seat. Grabs a current copy of the dense  
 Overstreet Price Guide. Flips to the correct page. Scans the  
 entries with the tip of his finger.

CLOSE ON THE GUIDE

Where a graded 4.5 copy of "Detective Comics, 27" is  
 currently valued at approximately - 300,000.

MARCEL

Lifts his head. His eyes glazed over with future riches.

MOMENTS LATER

Marcel puts on a pair of surgical gloves. Finds a brand new  
 acid free backing board. The best mylar bag on the market.  
 Gently. Delicately, he places the comic inside the protective  
 casing. Then he puts the mylar bag inside a cardboard box,  
 custom fitted for a comic book. Satisfied it's safe, Marcel  
 smiles.

He flips off the main light switch for the store.

EXT. CHAMPION COMICS - NIGHT

Marcel locks the back door to the store.

He gets inside his aged, beat-up Honda. Places the box with  
 the comic onto the passenger seat.

The car starts up with a loud squeal, then a muffled groan.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Marcel drives down the street. A Cheshire grin on his face.

MARCEL  
Marcel, Marcel, you're day has  
finally come.

He turns his car onto a darkened street.

MARCEL  
Anything of value? Ha! Uh, no...  
not really, just the very first  
appearance of the most popular hero  
in the whole world. Can a man get  
any luckier than --

Suddenly: The engine dies. The car comes to an abrupt halt.

MARCEL  
What the..

Karl turns the ignition, but nothing. He tries again, and then again, but the engine won't turn over.

MARCEL  
No, no, no.

He tries once more. The battery goes dead.

Marcel tries his phone, but strangely, there is no signal.

MARCEL  
What's happening?

Marcel picks up the box. Tucks it in his jacket.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT - LATER

Marcel walks down the street. It's eerie. Faint moonlight cuts through the cracks of the ominous dark clouds.

Marcel looks about. There is not a soul to be seen.

And then, ahead of Marcel, at the end of the block, two hoodlums teenagers round the corner.

TYLER and NATHAN.

Marcel tucks the comic tightly inside his coat.

As the two approach, the hoodlums smirk at each other.

Nathan steps in Marcel's way.

NATHAN  
Where you goin' old man?

MARCEL  
Nowhere. Just walking.

Tyler can't help but notice Marcel is protecting something.

TYLER  
What you got in there?

MARCEL  
It's nothing.

TYLER  
No, then why you hiding it?

Tyler pulls Marcel's arm away. The box drops to the ground.  
Nathan scoops it up. Pops it open. Excited, then confused...

NATHAN  
What's this, a comic book? What kind of man goes around in the middle of the night, clutching some comic book?

TYLER  
Probably a retard.

Nathan examines the book.

NATHAN  
What's this plastic case for?

MARCEL  
Please, just give it back. It doesn't mean anything to you.

NATHAN  
Yeah, but it means something to you. You want it back so bad, then offer me a price.

MARCEL  
A price, for my --

TYLER  
It's ours now, fool.

MARCEL  
I know you're not going to believe this, but I don't have any money.

TYLER  
Bullshit.

Marcel pulls out his wallet. Spreads it apart.

MARCEL

Look. I'm not lying. I had to spend  
all my money. My car broke down,  
and I was forced to --

TYLER

I didn't ask for your life story.

MARCEL

I'd give it to you if I had it.  
Please, please...

Tyler takes pity on him. Slaps Nathan's shoulder.

TYLER

Come on, Nathan. Let's bolt. He  
ain't worth our time.

The sound of rolling thunder echoes in the distance.

Marcel's eye's pop at the mention of his old boss's name.

MARCEL

Your name is Nathan?

Nathan grabs Marcel by the collar.

NATHAN

What about it?

MARCEL

Nothing. I had a friend named  
Nathan once.

NATHAN

You think I care?

Nathan smacks Marcel on the top of his head with the comic.

NATHAN

You're lucky I let you live. Giving  
me nothing, but some dumbass comic.

They walk away from Marcel, still holding the comic.

Marcel grabs Nathan's arm.

MARCEL

Wait, you can't!

Nathan punches Marcel hard across the face. The blow knocks  
his glasses off, sending them flying into the gutter.

NATHAN

You crazy, puttin' your hands on me  
like that?

Tyler pushes Marcel onto the pavement. Kicks him the stomach.

TYLER

You want some more, dummy?

Marcel keeps his head down. Doesn't say a word.

Nathan and Tyler, satisfied, leave him be.

Marcel crawls along the ground, searching for his glasses. He finds them in the gutter. Puts them on. Watches the two hoodlums, and his prized find, walking away.

Marcel looks up to the dark, cloudy sky. Tears running down his cheeks, he pleads...

MARCEL

I'm so sorry. If you can hear me,  
Nathan, I'm sorry!

And in response: Another booming sound of thunder.

DOWN THE STREET

Nathan and Tyler look up to the sky. Tyler sticks out his flattened palm. Feels a drop. Turns to Nathan.

TYLER

Storm coming.

More thunder. Nathan feels a certain unease.

NATHAN

C'mon, man, let's go. I'm gettin' a  
chill.

They take a few steps, and then --

-- The street lamp above them shatters, blanketing the area

IN DARKNESS

TYLER

What happened to the lights?

NATHAN

I dunno...  
(looks up to the damaged  
bulb)  
I think something hit it.

And then, from everywhere, and nowhere

A CAPED FIGURE

Swoops down from the darkness. In furious motion the figure takes down the two thieves. With a flurry of Socks!, Pows! & Thwacks! The fight, if you can call it that, is over quickly.

DOWN THE BLOCK

Marcel, collapsed in the gutter, watches with awe.

THE CAPED FIGURE

Leaves the duo laid out. Moaning in pain.

The figure stands over Nathan. Extends his gloved hand out.

CAPED FIGURE

Hand it over.

Nathan hands over the comic book.

CAPED FIGURE

Get out of here.

Nathan and Tyler scramble onto their feet, and run down the street.

And then at once: The sky rips open. The rain pours down.

WE TRACK THE LEGS

Of the figure, as he walks over to Marcel. Hovers over him.

Marcel, beaten and humbled, looks up at his savior.

The figure hands Marcel the comic book.

CAPED FIGURE

I think we both know who this belongs to.

MARCEL

Yes, sir. I do.

In the blink of an eye, the figure seemingly takes flight, disappearing back into the shadows.

Marcel stands under the street lamp. He looks up as the rain washes over him, like a baptism.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOME - FRONT LAWN - DAY

A giant yard sale. Filled with every sort of antique, knick knack, and piece of junk you can possibly imagine.

Rose hands an ugly lamp to a nice couple. They hand her back a crisp fiver.

Rose pockets the money. Turns to see

MARCEL

Walking toward her, holding the box of old comics.

ROSE

Well, hello there. Did you come to  
check out the sale?

MARCEL

No. Ummm, actually after you left  
the store, I found something.  
Something very rare. Something  
quite...

WOMAN

Valuable.

MARCEL

Yes.  
(smiles)  
More than you can know.

FADE OUT.